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A Novella

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20th August 1999

We pulled up outside of a bar, in some kind of ‘one man and his dog’ town a couple of miles off the main highway. As soon as the motor switched off, Brian, Abi and Steve were jumping out of the rented Jeep. I looked about this tiny town in the middle of the Alaska Range, and therefore in the middle of nowhere; and I wasn’t as eager.

“C’mon, Jess.” Steve threw me a tired look. “It’s just a rest stop, it’s still a four hour drive to Anchorage.”

“You said we’d be staying in a hotel tonight, in Anchorage.” I whined as I reluctantly climbed out.

“Gees Steve, you weren’t kidding when you said Jess was a city-dweller.” Brian laughed, as he took Abi’s hand to lead her into the Bar.

Steve was embarrassed about having me as a girlfriend, I could tell. He didn’t take hold of my hand, nor did he hold the door open for me. Inwardly, I fumed as I went inside. I toyed with the idea of an immediate break-up once I was safely back in Seattle.

He was the outdoorsy type, who typically played more than one sport but I never pretended to be. I met him at a party and when we were introduced, I told him straight up how I’m a manager at a PR company, and I have a pretty impressive resume of events. I own my own apartment and a cat and a fridge, stocked full of frozen TV dinners.

So what if I can’t cook over an open fire? So what if I don’t know how to pitch a tent? So call me civilized, for having difficulty using the behind of a tree, as a bathroom!

We walked into the bar, to find a typical scene for an establishment in the middle of nowhere. Wooden floors which looked like they had never seen a can of polish; and a couple of chairs and tables as well as booths on one side of the room, with a long counter on the other. In the middle, sat burly types who could have been truckers or lumberjacks, for all I knew.

However, there was a pool table at the far end of the bar which was being used by four Native Alaskan guys. They caught my eye as I tried not to obviously stare at their long, black hair, broad shoulders, or their bodies which nicely filled out their jeans and flannel shirts. All four of them had a pool stick in their hands, which implied that they were all playing. Three of them had long hair whereas the fourth, had cut his dark hair short.

One of them was taller than the others as well as stronger looking. His hair was also the longest, all the way down to his lower back. Maybe I had never grown out of my

rock band phase, but I thought he was the handsomest although he did look older than me. I was 29 years old and this guy looked like he was 39 years old. I bet he was probably married at his age, oh well.

Just then, the handsome one looked right my way, as if he noticed my gaze. I tried to keep from blushing, as I joined my group in a booth along the wall. When we sat down, Steve immediately picked up a menu so he wouldn't have to look at me.

"Hey, you wanna chip-in for a jug of beer?" Brian asked Steve.

"Sure," he said congenially, to my horror.

"A JUG?!" I exclaimed. "You can't just have one glass of beer each? Why does it have to be a jug? We're driving!"

The men looked on in annoyance and even Brian's girlfriend Abi, looked unimpressed. So I tried to put my complaints in another light.

"I'm sorry, but the last time you two shared a jug of beer, it turned into two jugs and then three and even four. We ended up staying in a seedy, local motel for the night. Now you guys said we'd be sleeping in a nice hotel in Anchorage this evening. Our flights back to Seattle are 10 AM tomorrow morning! If I miss that flight, my work will kill me. I have an important meeting with some clients the day after next!"

"I don't think this town has a motel." Brian mused, whilst looking around the mediocre bar.

"We'll just put up the tent," Steve shrugged.

"Good idea. Why pay, when we have our own accommodations?" He laughed back then the two gave each other a 'high five'.

"You're kidding, right?" I laughed nervously.

They must be... you know, this is just a stunt to scare the 'city gal'.

Just then a middle-aged woman who must have been the waitress, came over with a notepad and pen, to take our orders.

"Yeah, can we have a jug of Bud?" Steve ordered, before he looked at Abi.

"Yeah, I'll go for the jug idea." She shrugged.

"Any meals with those drinks?" Our waitress asked.

Just as I opened my mouth to order a cola and burger, Steve jumped in.

"Not yet, we'll have the beer first and then see what we feel like later."

The waitress shrugged and walked away to procure our order.

"Don't I get to order, just like I don't get a say on the trip?" I muttered quietly, but I knew Steve overheard.

He proceeded to ignore me as he perused the menu again.

My legs jiggled nervously as I tried to come up with a contingency plan.

The three of them, the two guys as Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dumb, with Abi as the 'Little Miss I'll-go-along-with-whatever-my-boyfriend-decides'; all started laughing over funny stories of the camping trip we were coming back from. My eyes scanned the bar, especially the burly men I hoped were truckers and not lumberjacks. Maybe I could get a ride back to Anchorage with one of them?

I'd pay him cash of course, so he wouldn't expect payment of some other kind. Then I'd make Abi write down the number plate of the truck I climbed into, for safety. If I didn't make it to Anchorage and my body went missing somewhere in the Alaska Range, at least the police would have a starting point to find my murderer aka driver.

The waitress returned with a tray carrying four huge glasses, and the jug of beer. She put down the glasses first then the jug second and quickly walked off before I could stop her. Damn it! I don't want to drink beer, I want a cola! And I need to eat something...

My legs jiggled harder as I noticed even my hands were trembling! I don't think it was just from nerves, either. Drat it! I really need to eat something, plus I have to go into the bathroom to check my sugar level. I started counting backwards in my head, from the last time I ate, in conjunction with my insulin shot this morning.

"C'mon Jess," my boyfriend poured some beer into my glass. "Have a drink! You're a lot more fun when you've got a couple under your belt."

"Under her belt, or under something else?" Brian guffawed, with Steve laughing loudly along.

To stop myself going into a diabetes-induced rant at the losers, quickly I stood up and crossed the bar. My eyes scanned for the Ladies, as I struggled to keep my composure. I tried not to make eye-contact with the flannel-clad truckers or lumberjacks who watched me leave my friends behind.

"Over there."

What? I looked around for the person who just spoke. It was the tall, long-haired, strong-looking, Native Alaskan man. He was leaning on his pool stick whilst watching me.

"Excuse me?" I blinked.

"Over there," he pointed.

I turned to see where he was indicating, towards a door in the corner with a 'Ladies' symbol on it.

"Thanks," I said in surprise at his perceptiveness.

Then I veered off in that direction as my shaking got a hell of a lot worse.

The bathrooms weren't as dirty as I had imagined, nor were they that clean. I placed my handbag on top of the sink and took out the small pack, I always had on me as per doctors orders. I pricked my finger, before eying the readouts of my sugar level with dissatisfaction.

I really needed a hot meal. I really needed to shower and climb into a comfortable bed. I really couldn't miss that flight tomorrow, at 10 AM. I really couldn't miss my Monday morning meeting.

The more worried I felt, the worse my shaking grew... I felt like bursting into tears at the lousy time I was having! Back in Seattle, Steve had been a nice guy but with this camping trip, we both had seen a new side in each other. He had turned into a cold, obnoxious male and I had turned into a nagging, nervous wreck!

I'm NEVER going camping again! I hate Alaska! I want to go home to Washington State!

I packed away the diabetics kit into my handbag, before I walked back out. Instead of returning to the booth, I went and sat on a stool at the bar. I tried to sit patiently as I waited to be served, but my trembling went from bad to worse.

When I raised my hand to attract the attention of the bartender who was chatting to another patron, my hand shook uncontrollably!

"Charlie!" Suddenly, a loud voice boomed. I jumped in surprise, just as the bartender did. We both saw it was the handsome, older, Native Alaskan man, now standing beside me. "The lady needs a drink."

The middle-aged, male bartender immediately came over, “what can I get for you today, Miss?”

“Um, can I please have an orange juice?” I managed out.

I had to hug my hands between my legs, to try to stop the shaking.

“And she needs to eat,” the handsome man added, whilst looking on my hands.

“What would you like?” The bartender pulled out a pen and pad.

“Um...” I tried to think, but I couldn’t clearly.

“Make it a burger with the lot,” the man spoke for me again, before he looked my way.

“Is that OK? It practically has all of the five food groups, in one meal.”

“Hey, Harry? We need a burger with the lot!” The bartender called over his shoulder to an open doorway where the kitchen must be.

To my further surprise, next the handsome stranger handed over a twenty dollar bill, to pay for me!

“No!” I cried out, a little loudly by accident. I scrambled for my purse, but the bartender took the man’s money and moved away. I tried to hold my purse steady as I pulled out another twenty dollar note. “Here, take it.”

“You come from a city, don’t you?” The stranger smiled in amusement.

“What has that to do with it?”

“Here, when a person is shouted a meal and a drink, they simply say ‘thanks’.” He said evenly.

“But I don’t come from around here, so I won’t be able to pay you back.” I tried to point out.

He openly looked over my hiking boots, cargo shorts and water-proof jacket, all of which I had bought recently for this camping trip from hell.

“Yeah, I guessed you weren’t from around here,” the man joked.

Self-consciously, I looked down at my appearance, before I looked back.

“Yeah, I do look like I’m trying too hard to belong in the Alaskan wilderness, don’t I?” I laughed nervously.

“Why try?” The man leaned on the bar. “Most people here all come from somewhere else. Except my people of course, as we’ve always been here.”

“Yeah, I guess from your appearance I can see that too.” I laughed as did he.

“I’m Lokoti,” he said.

“Oh, hi Lokoti.” I offered him my hand to shake. “I’m Jessica Tandy.”

“No, my name’s not Lokoti, it’s the name of my people.” He chuckled as we shook on it. “MY name is Flint Riverclaw.”

“Oh!” I blushed at my stupidity. “Sorry.”

The bartender put a tall glass of OJ before me, before he moved away to continue his conversation with the other patron.

I tried to keep my hands steady as I took hold of the glass and raised it to my mouth. But my hands shook so badly, the man kindly put out his hand to help hold it. I felt my face burn in embarrassment as I drank half the glass, before he lowered it.

“I’m sorry, I’m – I’m diabetic...” I continued to blush, “...my sugar levels are a little low at the moment.”

“Hmm, I smelled that.” Flint Riverclaw frowned in concern.

“You smelled that?” I echoed, thinking that it was an odd thing to say.

Then I watched him flash an angry look at the booth where Steve was sitting. However, my boyfriend's back was to us, as he was laughing away with Brian and Abi. The three didn't appear to be feeling my absence.

"Your mate should be looking after you." Flint said in disapproval, whilst glaring at Steve's back.

"My who? My boyfriend? Well, I don't think he's going to be my boyfriend for much longer." I glared into my glass.

"You are unmarried?" He looked on in partial surprise. "I thought you were with the male who was over there, with his friends."

"You mean my soon-to-be 'ex'? No, we were never married. We only started dating two months ago. When he invited me up here, to go camping with he and his friends? I thought to myself, 'well he knows I'm not the outdoors type, but he must be serious about this relationship if he wants me to go away with him'. But this has been the week from hell! He and his friends have done nothing but laugh at me, because I couldn't put up a tent, I couldn't start a fire, I couldn't cook over the flames and I hate using trees as bathrooms!"

All of a sudden, all of my grievances came out in one rant!

"He didn't help or provide for you?" Flint further frowned.

"Only when I burned the baked beans," I said darkly then I started to rub my face from stress. "Now he's drinking and when he starts, it's hard to get him to stop. We're supposed to overnight in Anchorage, for our flight back to Seattle tomorrow morning, but I'm scared we won't make it."

I wasn't sure if I imagined it, but I thought I heard a growl! When I looked up sharply, I found Flint looking dangerously on Steve, for some reason.

"Er, so Flint, are you married?" I tried to move the conversation along.

"I have no mate," he answered as he pushed my orange juice closer, to hint that I should have more. I smiled at his concern as I picked it up and downed the last. Then he even ordered another for me. "Charlie, can I get two more orange juices?"

"Two OJ's Flint?" The bartender acknowledged. "Coming right up!"

"Two more?" I echoed. "I'll probably only drink one!"

"One of them is for me," he chuckled again.

"You're not going to have a beer?"

"I don't drink alcohol," he said simply. Then he pulled another note from his wallet.

"No, let me!" I scrambled for my purse. But he ignored the note in my hand and so did the bartender, as he took Flint's money instead. "What, is this a conspiracy? Don't women pay for drinks in Alaska?"

Flint smiled at my humour, "so Jessica Tandy, what do you do in Seattle?"

He picked up one of the new drinks which were set down as he waited to hear what I had to say.

"I'm a manager at a large PR firm, called 'Wildenstein Dreams'." I said proudly. "I was promoted at the beginning of the year. I've won a couple of awards for my event designs and now I earn 50k a year. What do you do, Flint?"

"I work in construction," he advised.

"Really and how's that going for you? Do you own your own construction company? How much do you pull in per annum?" I asked congenially.

"In my culture, it's rude to ask how much a person earns." He said casually.

“Oh.” I sat up straighter in surprise. Don’t tell me I just offended this nice man?
“Sorry.”

“The only time you ask a Lokoti that question, is if you are the father of the woman you want to mate with.” He grinned in good humour.

“No shit,” my face fell, “erm, sorry Flint.”

“The father may not ask that question specifically, instead he’ll ask how the man can provide for the woman? Especially when the woman gives the man children. In that respect Jessica, I can tell you that I can provide for a mate should I take one.”

“Oh er, good for you.” I patted him on the arm, as I wondered what to say to that? But it made Flint laugh again.

“I like your blue eyes.” He openly stared at my face. “They stand out the most, with your white skin and blonde hair.”

“Do they?”

“Tell me about your life in Seattle, Jessica.” He sat down on the stool beside mine.

I laughed at the intense look on the handsome man’s face, as he came across as very mature. Flint may look like he’s 39 years old, but he reminded me of someone in their fifties or older from his wizened look. He gave the impression of someone who’s ‘been there and done that’.

“Um, there’s not much to tell.” I tried not to blush again at the interest he showed. “I wake up at 6 AM, buy a cappuccino on my way into the office, where I work from 8 – 6, Monday to Friday. Then I go home to my apartment which I’m paying off the mortgage, and to my cat named Fritz. He’s a Persian Blue and usually he’s the man of my life. I don’t like sport, I HATE camping...” here the two of us laughed, “...and I like to spend weekends with friends, by going to restaurants and seeing movies or shows.”

“Alma has a small cinema,” he offered.

“Alma?” I gave a funny look. “Where’s Alma?”

“This is Alma,” he chuckled at my vagueness.

“This town we’re in right now, this is Alma?”

“Uh huh,” he said patiently. “Alma has a cinema, this bar as well as a milk bar. It also has a school, which Lokoti kids attend and a supermarket. On our tribal lands, we have a Meeting Hall where we put on dances, bingo, or family celebrations.”

“It sounds like you enjoy the quiet life, Flint.” I remarked.

“It sounds like you enjoy the fast life, Jessica.” He smiled back.

Just then we were interrupted when Steve carried over the empty beer jug to order another.

“Can I get another jug of Bud?” He asked the bartender. Simultaneously as I blanched at the idea they were drinking more; he looked over and noticed I wasn’t sitting alone. He fired up, “there you are! We were wondering where you got to.”

“I had to get an orange juice.” I spoke crisply. “My blood sugar was low.”

Flint’s eyes narrowed, “Jessica has been sitting here for the past ten minutes, she wouldn’t have been hard to spot from where you’re sitting.”

Steve’s eyes narrowed back as he came over to put a possessive hand on my back.

“So you’re drinking orange juice with her?” He asked snidely. “Or is there vodka in yours and hers drinks?”

“I don’t drink alcohol.” Flint said warily. “And with Jessica being a diabetic, it wouldn’t be wise for her to drink either, until her blood sugar level has returned to normal.”

“Well thank you for baby-sitting her,” Steve said sarcastically. “But she’ll be coming back to sit with her friends again.”

“No,” I shrugged off his hand, “not unless.”

“Huh?” He uttered, as his breath reeked of beer.

“Not unless you stop drinking right now, and we all hop into the rental and drive to Anchorage!” I snapped.

“Jess, we have the tents! We can camp on the side of the road and get up at dawn, to finish the drive. Brian and I talked about it. You’re not gonna miss your flight.” Steve rolled his eyes like I was the one being difficult.

My heart pounded as my eyes widened with fear that I could be stranded...

“I’ll drive you to Anchorage.” Flint said simply.

“What?” Both our heads snapped around in surprise.

“I’ll drive you to Anchorage, when you’ve eaten your burger.” He said calmly as he held my gaze.

“What burger?” Steve tipsily looked around.

Perfectly timed, a hamburger with the lot and a side of fries, was carried out by a younger Native Alaskan man wearing an apron.

He placed it on the counter before Flint, who slid the plate before me.

“Thanks Harry,” he patted the younger man, on the arm.

“No problem, Flint.” The youth smiled back, before he returned to the kitchen.

“Mmm yum!” Steve picked up a couple of fries to jam into his mouth. “Good idea, Jess. I’m hungry!”

Flint didn’t like this and he stood up to tower over his opposition. With his height and width, he easily dwarfed Steve. He looked dangerously upon the male who was interfering.

“I bought the burger for Jessica, I didn’t buy it for you.” He almost growled out.

“Fine,” Steve drunkenly laughed, “if that’s the way it is, Jess is getting strange men to buy her burgers in bars? Then it’s fine with me! You can make your own way to Anchorage.”

“Wait!” I stood up frightened as this situation went from bad to worse. “Steve, please just take me to Anchorage? Tonight? I’ll even get a separate hotel room, if you like. You can break up with me in Anchorage and we’ll never have to see each other again. Just take me to Anchorage?”

“Oh, now you want to be with me, huh? Burger boy doesn’t cut it?” He raised his voice. “Sure this guy is as big as a lumberjack, but I bet he’s not a Partner in one of Seattle’s top law firms! What’s his salary per year? One dollar per tree he cuts down?”

I thought I heard another growl come from Flint, as I tried to calm the situation down.

“C’mon Steve, it’s not like that! Flint was just being nice.” I said desperately. “He saw me shaking because of my low sugar level, and he bought me some food and drink. Please just take me to Anchorage tonight? Please?”

“Jess, I told you what our plans are tonight! Stop your nagging! Man, we’ve only dated for two months and you’re already trying to tell me what to do?” He turned away, to pay for his jug of beer.

“The lady is frightened, especially when she’s unwell and she’s far from home. A real man would see to the woman’s safety first, particularly the woman he supposedly has feelings for.” Flint spoke coldly.

“Oh is THAT what a real man would do?” Steve taunted. “I bet that you know a lot of ‘real’ men all the way up north, cold and alone, huh burger boy?”

“Steve!” My face burned bright red. “Don’t be such an asshole!”

Now the bartender got involved when he put down the new jug. However he moved it away again, after he heard the arguing. Indeed, the whole bar was watching.

“I think you’ve drunk enough, friend.” The bartender looked on warily.

“Excuse me?” Steve turned on him. “What kind of customer service do you call this?”

The older man looked from Flint to back to him, before he said calmly; “maybe you and your friends should leave.”

“I could sue you for this!” Steve said sulkily. “But you wouldn’t be worth the paper work.”

As he returned to the table to talk to Brian and Abi, I grabbed my handbag and prepared to go with him in case they were driving to Anchorage now.

Flint calmly looked down into my face with his great height; “I’ll drive you to Anchorage Jessica, after you’ve eaten.”

That gave me pause as I looked on his face which seemed open and kind.

“Why?” I wondered. “Are you going to Anchorage yourself?”

“I’ll drive you there and make sure you don’t miss your plane,” he said seriously.

“You’re just going to hop in your vehicle and drive me, a complete stranger, all the way to Anchorage?” I asked in disbelief.

“I think it’d be safer than if you remained with your friends, who’ve been drinking.”

He said then he leaned in closer and when he did, I got a whiff of whatever aftershave he was wearing. Man, did this guy smell good! He spoke softly, “you have nothing to fear from me, Jessica Tandy. I will make sure you don’t come to harm.”

I don’t know if it was from how deep and gravely his voice sounded then, or his addictive aftershave, or even if it was just his handsome face? Maybe it was all of the above, but my strong attraction made me believe him.

In the corner of my eye, I noticed Abi and Brian get up from the booth and she looked uncertain. Whereas Brian and Steven went over to the door, she walked over to where I was standing at the bar to speak to me direct.

“Um, Jess? We’re leaving for Anchorage now. Are you coming?”

“Jessica has a ride to Anchorage,” Flint answered for me.

She looked over the tall stranger warily before she leaned in to speak quietly; “look, I know Steve can be a bit loud when he’s drinking. But we are driving back to Anchorage tonight, for our flights tomorrow. I don’t think it’s a bright idea, to get a ride with a stranger you only just met in a bar, Jess.”

“You’re only driving to Anchorage now because you’ve been kicked out of the bar, Abi.” I replied curtly, offended at how she just made me sound!

“Jessica can call her parents in Seattle and give them my name, address and my number plate. If anything happens to her in Anchorage then they’ll know how to contact me.” Flint organized.

Abi looked on in distrust, “we’re out of range for our mobile phones.”

Instantly, he called on the bartender; “Charlie, can we use your phone?”

“Here we go Flint,” the bartender who I now knew as Charlie, immediately lifted it up from behind the bar.

Flint told him, “Jessica needs to call her parents in Seattle, to tell them I’ll be driving her to Anchorage.”

“It’s the safe thing to do, Miss.” Charlie gave a nod. “I mean, I can speak for Flint, since he’s a good man? But if anything happens to you in Anchorage, at least your parents will know where you are.”

“Er, my parents are actually in Michigan, I live in Washington State.” My face flushed at their attention. “But I have a best friend I can call in Seattle.”

“Go right ahead,” Charlie pushed the phone closer.

“Jess!” Abi looked guilty. “Just come with us, we’re leaving now.”

“I’ll get Jessica’s things from your RV while she makes the calls.” Flint told her.

“Then she’s going to eat her burger and afterwards, I’ll drive her to Anchorage.”

“I’ll speak to the guys and see if they can wait, while you eat.” She said annoyed.

Now SHE was getting annoyed at ME? That’s it, I’ve had it up to here!

“Oh, I’m so sorry for having low blood sugar that I need to eat instead of just drink beer. I’m sorry I couldn’t cook over an open fire, so I’ve practically been starving all week! Especially since everybody who’s been camping before, didn’t offer to help! I’m sorry my college education didn’t include putting up tents! I’m sorry I made such a fuss about using a tree for a fucking bathroom, or I can’t bathe in a freezing cold river! I’m sorry I’ve been looking forward to a hotel room in Anchorage all week, where I can shower, sleep in a proper bed and order room service!” I vented.

“Fine!” She said indignantly. “But I’ve never met anyone that has complained as much as you do, Jess!”

“Of course I’ve complained!” I shouted back. “Diabetics get shitty when we’re cold, hungry and tired!”

Suddenly the whole Bar erupted into laughter, which included Flint and Charlie.

Abi’s face turned bright red, whereas Steve and Brian turned and left angry.

“I’d get shitty if I was cold, hungry and tired all week too,” one of the men at the counter, chuckled.

“And the showers! Don’t forget the showers,” one of the Native Alaskan men Flint had been playing pool with, laughed along.

“When our pulsating, massage, shower head broke, my wife was shitty for two weeks!” The Native Alaskan man with the short hair, guffawed.

Flint put his hand over mine, which felt warm and strong and even soothed somehow.

“You sit and eat whilst I get your things,” he ordered gently.

Unconsciously, I found myself doing what he said as I returned to the stool. I watched him leave the bar with her, when I saw one of his friends walk out after him. It was as if they were worried that MY friends were the dangerous ones!

Charlie nodded to the phone, “don’t forget to call your parents and your friend.”

I fished out my purse again, “that’s two long-distance calls, what do I owe you?”

“Don’t you worry about that now, Jessica.” He said seriously. “You just call your family and friends, so they know you’re alright.”

My heart warmed as my face did, at the old-fashioned manners of the people here. I was the one who was sceptical of THEM when I first walked into this bar? So far, the city folk left a lot to be desired when compared to the country.

I dialled my friend's number first however, she was out so I left a brief message on her answering machine.

"Hey Chris, it's me. Um, something's happened in Alaska and I won't be coming back with Steve and his friends. I guess you could say that we broke up. I'm still out of range on my mobile, but I've got a lift with a local to Anchorage. I'll call you tonight from the hotel. Bye."

I put down the receiver and was about to pick up my burger, when Charlie passed me a piece of paper with a name and some particulars.

"What's this?" I queried.

"Flint's name, address and his number plate," he said. "You can give those to your parents."

I think he'd overheard my first call, which I guess was pretty vague. I gave him an appreciative smile as I made the second call. This time my Mom was home, which I wished she hadn't been from the fuss she kicked up!

"Mom, calm down!" I rolled my eyes. "You've got the name and you've got the address. Hell, you've even got the number plate! What? No! No, you don't have to call Uncle Ben in Vancouver. No, I'm NOT stranded in Alaska. Look, I have a ride to Anchorage. Tomorrow morning I'm flying back to Seattle. Uh huh. Uh huh. Well, I'm glad you never liked Steve because now, neither do I!"

When I put the phone down, I also put my head down on the bar as I felt physically and emotionally exhausted.

"You want me to warm that up for you?" Charlie offered as he returned it behind the counter.

"Huh?" I looked up and saw he meant the burger. "Um, no thanks. It'll be fine."

"Your mother's a real pistol, eh?" He chuckled.

"Let me put it this way; when I found out that my Dad has high blood pressure, I wasn't surprised." I sighed.

"Eat up, Jessica." He nodded towards the food. "It'll make you feel better."

"Thanks Charlie... for everything."

He gave me a wink as he moved away to serve someone else. I felt like I was being watched and when I looked behind, I saw that I was right. Flint's two friends were just standing there instead of playing pool. I got the impression they were looking after me, while he had gone to get my stuff.

I picked up the burger and finally began to eat, bemused by this whole situation. I felt like I was in a time warp, with all of this 'aw-shucks-lets-look-after-the-lady' attitude. But I must admit, it was a nice change.

Flint returned with his friend carrying my large backpack, sleeping bag and the rolled up, inflatable mattress.

"Jessica, this is my best friend John Wisetail." He implied the Native Alaskan man who had the short, dark hair.

"Hi." I offered my hand.

"Pleased to meet you, ma'am." He shook on it. "Is this all the stuff you brought, on your camping trip?"

"Yeah, the tent and the other stuff were Steve's, Brian's and Abi's." I answered. "I'd never been camping before and I never will again."

“Camping isn’t so bad ma’am, it just depends on who you go camping with.” John Wisetail gave a wink before he turned away to rejoin their friends.

Flint sat back down on the stool next to mine and proceeded to watch me eat.

“Oh um, did you want to eat something before the drive?” I asked.

“No, I’m still full from hunting last night.” He shook his head

But before I could ask what he meant by that, I had to pay attention on my burger which was falling apart. As I ate, I noticed I still had an audience.

“What?” I wondered if I was making a pig of myself?

“I like the way you eat,” he said. “I’ve never seen anybody eat like that before.”

“Like what?”

“You not only look dainty, you eat dainty.” He smirked. “Do you want some ketchup with your fries?”

“Yeah, OK.” I started to reach for the bottle, when he picked it up and handed it to me instead. “Thanks.”

“Take your time,” he stood up again. “I’m going to put some gas in the truck then I’ll come back and get you.”

“Oh,” I wiped my hands on the serviette to grab my purse again, “how much would you like for gas? Is fifty bucks OK?”

Flint smiled patiently, “you like to pay your own way, don’t you Jessica Tandy?”

“Well, it is the nineties.”

“If you lived in Alaska, I would take you home because it’s the right thing to do.” He stated. “But since you don’t, I’ll take you to the airport instead.”

Then Flint Riverclaw departed the bar a second time, ignoring my money once again.

As I watched him walk off, I wondered if I had offended him? I felt tongue-tied, as I didn’t know what to say since in his culture, I kept doing the wrong thing. Maybe I should just shut up and not say anything.

Twenty minutes later, I found myself sitting on the front seat of a blue pick-up truck and riding shot gun down the highway.

The vehicle was old, so the suspension wasn’t the best but hey, beggars can’t be choosers. Every time there was a bump in the road, I practically went ‘boing boing boing’ on the seat. The leather seat was so springy, it almost served as the truck’s suspension in itself.

Our seatbelts were fastened and the tiny township of Alma was a couple of miles behind. A comfortable silence filled the cab, as I didn’t feel obliged to talk and neither did he. Besides, I was enjoying the scenery of the dark green pines, contrasted against the majestic, snowy peaks.

“Oh,” he spoke after a while, “I got some snacks and drinks, in case you get hungry.”

His hand moved over my lap to the glove compartment, to show the goods.

I saw two cans of cola and a packet of plain potato chips, “er, thanks.”

My heart pounded, as his hand closed the compartment again and moved back over my lap, to return to the wheel.

“How about some music?” He turned on the radio. Country music filled the cabin and I held my tongue. However, Flint Riverclaw was a remarkably perceptive person, as I was starting to see. “You don’t like country?”

“Um, if you want to listen, I don’t mind.” I tried to be polite.

Instead, he moved the dial around to find something else but we didn’t have a huge range of stations, to choose from. There was more country music, old rock songs from the 1950’s, or classical.

“Well?” He asked. “Which station?”

“Er, you don’t have any tapes or CD’s to listen to?” I thought I’d try.

“Not in the truck, sorry.”

“No problem.” I tried to be amiable. But I felt bad when he turned the radio off. “Hey, didn’t you want to listen to music?”

“I like silence just as much,” he said simply.

“It’s a four hour drive to Anchorage,” I said guiltily. “If you want to listen to country music then go ahead.”

“You don’t like silence?” He flashed a grin my way.

“OK...” I managed back nervously, “...I can be quiet.”

“I don’t mind conversation, either.” He chuckled. “I like silence, I like talking and I like country music.”

Just then I laughed at how he put that, as he made me realize that I was the one who was making me nervous, not him.

So I’m attracted to the guy, so what? I may as well as enjoy his company for the four hours I have it. After tonight, I may never see him again.

“Flint, I feel like I’m always saying the wrong thing around you!” I cried out with a pink face.

“That’s a pity, because I like your voice.” He smilingly looked out at the road ahead.

“I like your voice too, it’s very deep.” I decided to give honesty a shot. “Why are you unmarried, Flint?”

“Why are you?” He returned. “I’ve never met the woman I wanted to marry.”

“And I’ve never met the right man.”

“Tell me Jessica Tandy, who is this ‘right man’?” He smirked.

“You mean what do I look for?” I guessed and when he gave a nod, I continued, “well somebody tall, somebody polite, somebody whose company is easy going. I’d like someone smart or intelligent, so I can talk about world news, instead of just sport... what kind of woman are you looking for?”

“I’m not,” he said simply.

“Huh?”

“If I fall in love with a woman, I simply will. I can’t tell myself who I must fall in love with as it doesn’t work like that. The person I end up with will simply be the person I fell in love with.”

I frowned, “then why are you unmarried? If you haven’t found the woman yet, whose qualities you weren’t looking for anyway, you could have fallen for any old person.”

“I haven’t fallen in love.” He shrugged. “I haven’t met the woman whom I wanted to be with, for the rest of my life.”

“Oh, so you’re looking for the thunderbolt?”

Now he passed me the peculiar look. “Huh?”

“You’re waiting for love at first sight?”

“No, I don’t believe in love at first sight.” He shook his head. “I believe in attraction at first sight, but I don’t believe in love at first sight.”

“OK Flint, you’ve confused me.” I sounded cross but I was smiling which he saw. “Tell me how you see it then.”

“This ‘woman’ we keep talking about, I assumed I’d be attracted to her in the beginning. After I spend some time with her then I might fall in love. I’ve been attracted to a couple of women over the years. I’ve spent time with them. But I didn’t fall in love so I did not marry.”

“Just like that,” I tittered at his easy-going view. “Hey, why did you call Steve my mate, before? In your culture do you -”

“In my tribe, if a man and woman live together, they’re mates.” He shrugged. “Since you went camping with him, I thought you may have lived together.”

“So the woman you live with, will become your mate?” I asked in amusement.

“Yes, she will bear my young and we will be mates.”

“Sounds like the animal kingdom,” I said to myself, as I looked away.

“Which animal though?” He overheard. “Some animals mate to reproduce, then they separate. Other animals, like the wolf or the fox, take a mate and they stay with that mate, for life.”

“Really, do foxes do that? I didn’t know...” my eyebrows rose, “...I didn’t know wolves were old romantics either.”

“In a pack, the male wolves fight each other to become first, as do the females. Then the first male and the first female mate, and the other wolves help them raise the young.” Flint explained.

“Sounds like a lot of work just to get laid,” I joked.

“Has a man proposed to you, Jessica Tandy?” He asked, out of the blue.

“Um...once.”

“Why didn’t you marry this person?”

“Because something just wasn’t right about him,” I sighed. “I mean, he was a nice guy but there was something missing.”

“Were you in love with him?”

“I thought I was, but now I don’t know.”

“Was it Steve?”

“Hell no!” I cracked up laughing, as did he. “It was two guys before him. I actually did live with this guy I nearly married, for about two years.”

“Do you have children?”

“No,” I shook my head, “good ole pregnancy prevention methods, protected me from that catastrophe. But funnily enough, it was the idea that I didn’t want to have children with this guy, which made me not accept his proposal.”

“He did not make you feel safe?” Flint guessed.

“Actually, I think it was something like that.” I looked his way, impressed again at his perceptiveness.

“Then Jessica, instead of looking for a man to talk about world news with, why don’t you look for one whom you feel safe with.” He said gently.

I stared out at the long road ahead, tiredly resting my head on my hand which was propped up against the door.

“Maybe you’re right,” I said wearily, “or maybe I’ll just give up and grow into an old spinster, surrounded by cats?”

Flint laughed aloud, “with your pretty blue eyes, it would be a shame.”

“It’s not a bad life.” I shrugged it off. “I won’t be lonely, my best friend would never let that happen.”

“My friends don’t let me get lonely, either.” He smiled softly. “They have mates and young, but if they think I’ve been alone for too long, they come to visit.”

“So do you have an apartment somewhere?”

“I built a log cabin, which is as big as a house. It has three bedrooms, a bathroom, kitchen, living area and front veranda.”

“You built a log cabin, by yourself?” I stared and he nodded. “It sounds like you don’t like to get bored.”

“Occasionally I had help, such as with the plumbing or electricity.” He explained. “But I built it myself, over two years. The land it’s on has always been in my family. It’s away from the community centre of our tribal lands, so it’s quiet and secluded, amongst the trees.”

“It sounds peaceful,” I smiled sleepily, as my eyes started to close by themselves. “Tell me more about your house and your tribal lands, Flint.”

He paused and I sensed he looked over and saw how tired I was. So he started to talk softly as if he was telling a child a story. It suited his deep voice, which lulled me into a relaxed state.

“The Lokoti have always lived in the same place, in the Alaska Range. The majority of it is a large National Park, where my people hunt. We have always lived off the land and will continue to do so. We get our meat, pelts, timber and vegetables from the land. Our tribal lands are older than the township of Alma and older than the state of Alaska. We follow our own ways, which were born from loyalty and love long ago. We live by the old traditions, because it protects our families and it protects the land. What your people call, ‘land conservation’ or ‘environmentally friendly’, is what we’ve been doing for thousands of years. By respecting nature and her gifts, we also learn respect for each other. The man who takes a woman as his mate, protects and provides for her, just as the male Lokoti Wolf fights for his mate, in the wild...”

Flint kept talking in a soft manner it soon put me to sleep.

A couple of times I opened my eyes, to make sure we were still on the highway and I wasn’t being kidnapped. However the long stretch of asphalt ahead, always greeted me. I wasn’t sure what it was about this giant called Flint Riverclaw; but in his company I felt warm, comfortable and most of all safe. The last time I opened my eyes, I found a man’s jacket resting over my bare legs which must have been his.

I woke up properly at 6.33 PM or so my watch said, as I straightened and looked out the window. I still saw mountains, forest and highway in the bright ‘twilight’ of the Alaskan summer. The sun didn’t set until late here and when we were camping, the sunlight up until 11 PM; threw my sleeping pattern out of whack.

“We’ll be in Anchorage in just under an hour,” Flint greeted.

“I slept for that long?” I sounded surprised.

“You’re very tired and your blood sugar is still a little low.” He sounded understanding.

But I wondered how he would know about blood sugar levels, or even mine?

“Do you have a relative who’s a diabetic?” I asked.

“No.”

“Then how do you know so much about it?”

Flint smilingly shrugged, “I smell it.”

“You smell it?” I gave a peculiar look.

Then he changed the subject, “do you have somewhere to stay tonight?”

“Um yeah, I have a reservation at the Sheraton.” I told him, but then I paused. “Oh oh.”

“Hmm?”

“I did have a reservation at the Sheraton, but it was for a room booked under Steve’s name.” I frowned. “I wonder...?”

“Hmm?” He watched me take my mobile phone out of my bag.

“Yes, finally! I have reception again!” I cheered then I talked on the phone. “Yeah hi, can you please put me through to the Sheraton Hotel in Anchorage? Thanks.” Pause. “Hi, is this the Sheraton Hotel in Anchorage? Great! Um, I had a reservation tonight under the name of Steve Gingall, but I won’t be checking in with him. Is it possible to have a room of my own, charged to my credit card? You’re completely booked up?”

Flint watched my face fall as he listened in.

“Right. Right. Right.” My expression turned grim, before brightening. “Oh really? Could you please double check? Uh huh. Uh huh. Oh you do? That’s great! I don’t care, just book it in the name of Jessica Tandy. Yep. Uh huh. Well, check-in will probably be in an hour. Yep, OK bye.”

Then I found my driver was half watching the road and the other half was on me.

“You have a room?” He guessed.

“Phew! They were all booked up, but then they had a last minute cancellation. Yay! Oh Flint, this is good news! Tonight I’ll be sleeping in a comfortable bed, after a long hot shower, and ordering up a banquet from room service!”

“That is good news, as it’s just what you were hoping for.” He smiled.

“So what are you doing tonight?” I queried. “Are you staying with friends in Anchorage?”

“No, I’ll be driving home tonight.” He answered.

His reply hit me hard in the face, like a plank of wood. Immediately, I felt like an idiot! That’s me taken care of, but what about him?

“Oh no Flint!” I cried out. “You can’t do that! Look, I’ll call the hotel back and see if they’ve had another cancellation -”

“You don’t have to do that.”

“Let me pay for your accommodation!” I raised the phone to my ear. “It’s the least I can do.”

“Jessica, please.” He kept one hand on the wheel as he used his other to gently take the phone away. “I want to drive back home tonight.”

“But why?”

“I don’t like to be away from tribal lands for too long,” he shrugged.

“Why?”

“Because they’re my home.”

“But you’ve already driven four and a half hours, out of your way for me.” I said guiltily.

“It wasn’t out of my way.”

“Yes it was! I’m just some strange girl that stumbled into your bar, who nearly went into shock because of low blood sugar and a shitty camping trip...” I felt ridiculous as my eyes watered, “...and I must have looked like some social reject, with the crappy boyfriend. You took pity on me and drove me all the way to Anchorage!”

“I was concerned about your health,” he admitted. “But you smell much better, after the food and the nap.”

“I smell better?” My eyebrows rose. “Look Flint, let me repay you by shouting you a room in a nice hotel -”

“Jessica,” he growled out as he gently cupped my face with one hand. It was so large and warm, somehow it warmed me all over. He looked away from the road just long enough to pierce my light blue eyes with his dark brown ones. “I liked driving you to Anchorage. I’m happy that I got to spend four hours with the beautiful girl who stumbled into the bar where I play pool. I watched your face while you slept and I put my jacket over you to keep you warm. If you lived all the way in Barrow, I still would have seen you home.”

Then I don’t know what made me act this way, but I held his huge hand in my smaller two as I kissed his palm.

I knew it was forward of me to do that, but Flint didn’t seem to mind. He even caressed my cheek, before stroking my hair. When he rested his hand in my lap, the warmth made my legs heat up, as it made my heart pound. I almost wished he would do something else whilst his hand was there, but he didn’t and I knew why. He didn’t want me to think that I had to pay him back in another way.

We drove through the outskirts of Anchorage, which was sooner than I liked. A couple of times, he had to remove his hand to either change gears or use both hands on the wheel. But as soon as he’d finished, it returned to my lap.

In the city, Flint parked his truck across the road from my hotel. Reluctantly, I climbed out of the warm cab and shivered, pulling my jacket tighter. He pulled out my backpack, sleeping bag and rolled up mattress from the back and carried them into the hotel for me. He accompanied me to the front desk where I checked-in. Instead of giving my things to the Bell Boy, he insisted on carrying them to my room, for me.

In the elevator up, my eyes couldn’t leave his darker ones. I literally felt like he had a magnetic pull which was attracting me to him. I’ve never felt desire like this before. I started to argue with myself, how I could invite him to stay with me tonight? Or, would he be turned off by that kind of behaviour? I was still trying to make him out.

I used the electronic key to open my door then I turned around to face him. Reluctantly, he handed over my backpack as well as the sleeping bag and rolled-up mattress. He truly seemed sad to see me go.

“Thanks for walking me to my door.” I began. “Um, would you like to come in for a drink or something?”

I watched his eyes widen, was it with hope? But he remained quiet for a moment, as he seemed to be contemplating if he should. Does he need more encouragement?

Just as I opened my mouth to invite him in again, suddenly I found myself pushed up against the doorway, with his lips smothering mine!

His body heat seemed to radiate outwards and into me, as his larger lips moved almost forcefully. We kissed closed-mouth until I offered another invitation by opening mine. Immediately, his bigger tongue entered and felt like it took over my whole mouth.

By this stage, my heart was pounding so hard inside my chest that I felt like I was shaking. My skin turned hot as I tingled all over. This guy smelled so good, kissed so good and – and – and everything good so far!

Flint lifted me up whilst he was still kissing me, as I heard him push my things into the room with his legs.

I vaguely became aware he had carried me in, with the hotel room door shutting behind. It just felt so good kissing him, I took the liberty of running my hand through his long, dark hair. I felt him take my hair out of its pony tail so he could do the same.

“Mmm...” he growled again, “...you smell good, Jessica Tandy.”

“I haven’t showered in five days.”

“I know, your pheromones are concentrated in your sweat.” He leaned in to sniff my neck. “I like it.”

Next, I felt his teeth scrape along the sensitive skin and it turned me on even more...!

“I mean, I did try to wash myself down a bit. Er, I couldn’t jump into the whole river though, because it was too cold. Um, did you want me to have a shower first?” I offered.

Abruptly, I felt my feet leave the floor as my back hit the soft mattress. Flint had just picked me up and lay me on the bed. Our eyes met and held once more, as if he was still waiting for further encouragement.

“Yes, hell yes, what are you waiting for, take me gosh dammit!” I flung my arms about his neck.

His mouth reclaimed mine whilst his hands ran over my body. I felt them cup my breasts, run over my abdomen, over my hips, down my thighs and then up the insides of my legs. Where his hands roamed, I started to feel my clothes loosen and I realized that he was undressing me.

I started to follow suit only I wasn’t as good as he was. Whereas my clothes seemed to be melt off with his touch, I on the other hand tugged clumsily with his. I almost strangled the poor guy when I tried to pull off his t-shirt which had been under his flannel shirt. I suck at the sexily undressing your partner!

“Shit! Sorry!” I cried out in alarm. “Are you alright?”

“I’m fine, are you alright? Are you hungry? Do you want something to eat first?” Flint paused, to look down with care.

“I want to eat you!” I pulled his head back down so I could kiss him again.

I felt him chuckle as he seemed to relax more, by moving his half-naked body up against mine. I started to wonder if he was holding himself back? Why, was he worried he might hurt me? I opened myself up to him as much as I could with my open-mouthed kisses, my sighs or how I held onto him tightly.

At last we were completely undressed as Flint lowered himself again after removing his jeans. Then he hesitated, as he looked me over and from the expression on his face, he looked like he was about to change his mind?

“What is it?” I sat up, worriedly.

“Wait, let me look on you.” He gently pushed me back down. Then with one hand resting on my shoulder, his other moved over my body as he touched, teased and taunted the senses! Oh shit, his warm hand doing this to my body, felt good!

He soon found out how good it felt when he placed it over my crotch. His fingers pushed apart my moist folds and how wet I was, seemed to please him. He began to massage whilst further exploring at the same time, as he watched my face.

“Man, you’re a tease!” I moaned, before playfully biting his lower lip.

“I like your body, Jessica.”

Flint kept massaging, enjoying my response to his constant touch.

A couple of times, he pushed his fingers deep inside which made me moan. He used his other hand to push my legs further apart before he moved to sit in between. He watched closely, the closer I came to climaxing, as if the process of watching me come, fascinated him. His large hand kept moving over my crotch as my pleasure grew. His fingers felt delightful...!

Then it hit! The orgasm ballooned upwards through my torso. My body froze as I tried to hold on to it for as long as possible. His hand held my hip as his other went in and out of my groin, moving with the wetness.

He ducked his head to take my right nipple into his mouth. He gently chewed on it with his sharp teeth which made me a little uneasy. It seemed unusual that they were so sharp. His eyes were closed, as I heard his breathing turn faster and faster, like panting. He seemed to gratify himself, by running his nose over my skin, before kissing it and touching over and over again. I think I heard a growl escape, too?

When is this guy going to just have me? What’s his game? I’ve never had foreplay go for so long, isn’t he excited enough yet?

“Flint -” I started to speak, as I was going to offer to go down on him, but the words stuck in my throat.

When he looked back, his eyes were glowing! His brown eyes were glowing some kind of bluish colour, or maybe it was turquoise? No, no, I must be imagining it... No, wait! He just looked up at me again and his brown eyes are definitely glowing turquoise.

C’mon Jess, don’t be ridiculous! People’s eyes don’t change colours, nor do they glow! His dark eyes must be reflecting some kind of light in the room. Yeah...that’s it.

Flint continued to make growling noises, as his mouth ‘mauled’ my torso, whilst his large hand kept touching and then touching some more. I felt his sharp teeth scrape over my left nipple, before his warm, wet tongue soothed the sting. I gasped as my head went back into the pillow. I think I’m going to come again!

This guy seemed to be getting off, on making me come! His growls confirmed this, as the wetter I became or the louder I moaned, he would follow it with a growl. I had to admit, this was the most ‘different’ kind of sex I’d ever had although it certainly wasn’t the worst.

As the orgasm grew, I felt my abdominal muscles expand and contract, as I felt one of his fingers push into me, as his other massaged my clit. Shit, this guy was good at this! No wonder he’s unmarried, why settle down when he can be doing this with whomever and whenever?

My pleasure climbed higher as I felt my body open itself up inside and out, when Flint gave a huge push. He thrust himself all the way inside in a single heave. I cried out, as I clung onto his back at his oh so perfectly timed manoeuvre. He moved quickly and so

fast and hard, he was well and truly riding me, as I was well and truly riding the wave of ecstasy, which hadn't come crashing down yet.

The bed was shaking hard from how forcefully he was moving. He pushed and pulled at my body, which in turn heightened my already escalating pleasure. Flint seemed to be enjoying this as much as I was, when he lost control and I felt a sharp pain in my left breast where he had bitten too hard!

My mouth opened in a cry of pain but it sounded like a cry of pleasure... then I realized it was because I was feeling so much of both. How was he doing this? How was he pushing at the right speed, the right angle and doing the right moves to make my orgasm go on and on...?

Finally, the orgasm completely pushed me over the brink of ecstasy, like it was a cliff with a watery ending to fall into... as Flint came right after me.

It truly felt like landing in a pool of water from how excited he became and came. But I didn't care, I was on the pill. He could come all he wants and I would be safe.

Eventually, his face left my breasts which he'd been worshipping; as he kissed his way up my neck, over my jaw line and back to my mouth. All I could do was just lie there in happy exhaustion, but this guy still seemed to have so much energy! Maybe it's why his muscles are so huge? I recalled he worked in the construction business, so that could be why. His dark eyes peered into mine as he kissed me softly, over and over.

"You're hungry, it's why you feel weak," he spoke with his deep voice. "You wanted to order room service, didn't you?"

What is this guy, a telepath? I snuggled against his huge, warm body which he seemed to appreciate. He held me closely against his larger form.

"Dinner in bed?" I offered.

"Sounds good," he smiled back.

I rolled away to grab the hotel booklet off the bedside table which had the menu inside, but then I didn't have to roll back. Flint moved up behind, so his warm skin was pressing against mine. My body drank up his greater body heat, which he was more than happy to provide. He nuzzled my neck as I proceeded to flick through the room service guide.

"Let's order a bottle of wine," I sighed romantically.

"I don't drink wine," he chuckled.

"Never?" I turned to look into his eyes.

"Nope," he replied then he reminded, "I drink anything but alcohol."

"Then what else do you feel like...?"

"A glass of milk."

"What?" I cracked up laughing.

"I like to drink milk with my meal," he smilingly shrugged.

"Actually, that does sound good," I mused, "with a red meat dish?"

"A rare steak with a gravy or sauce?" He caught onto my thinking.

"Mmm... sounds good." I went along. "Like Steak Diane with mash potato?"

"It does sound good," he chewed on my ear.

"Man, your teeth are sharp." I remarked, uneasily.

Immediately he stopped; "did I hurt you?"

"No, but I'm just not used to it." I admitted.

As if to see I really was alright, he angled my face towards him to examine it.

"I'm OK," I reassured, "it's just that..."

“Yes?”

“...it’s just that you’re the most different kind of man, I’ve ever been with.” I confessed as I shyly looked down.

I felt silly, like I was a girl losing her virginity for the first time instead of a mature 29 year old woman.

“But you like it, don’t you?”

“Yes,” I admitted but I couldn’t meet his gaze.

He moved his face closer so our eyes could meet. Then as he held them, he slowly kissed me with his sharp teeth lightly grazing my lips. I liked it, as I found myself returning to my back and pulling him over me.

Shit he can kiss, and he smells so good, as well as feels so good! Is this guy real, or am I dreaming the whole thing? I placed my hand on his wide chest to feel his strong heart beat, to fight off the surreal ness of this scenario.

Flint put his hand over my heart too when he frowned; “your heart is racing and your blood sugar is low again, we should eat.”

“Do you know First Aid or something?”

“No.”

“Then how do you know all of this?” I wondered.

“By sight, smell, touch...” he ran his nose down my cheek, to my neck where he nuzzled into it, “...and taste.”

My arms tightened about him as I dropped the menu and forgot all about food.

But he stopped himself when he decided; “first we eat, then we continue with the evening’s entertainment.”

I couldn’t stop tittering, which probably made me sound like a chipmunk to the poor hotel employee I spoke to when I ordered our food.

The time on the clock radio which sat on the bedside table, read as 8.33 AM.

My flight was in an hour and a half. One side of my brain was singing, ‘miss it and stay with Flint’; as the other retorted in a responsible tone, ‘you have a meeting with the company’s top clients tomorrow morning, they’re depending on you.’ As usual, the boring side won.

I’d just come out of the shower and silently dressed, careful not to disturb my overnight guest.

I smiled to myself as I looked down on his sleeping form. He was so tall, his feet were hanging over the end of the bed. I looked over his bronzed, muscled body with the sheet lying carelessly over his waist. His long, dark hair was perfectly contrasted against the white cotton.

He must be exhausted, we’d been up until 4 AM doing things to each other which could now make me blush. I guess that was the beauty of a one-night-stand; you could experiment and do things you’d always wanted to try without worrying about seeing the person again. It was a pity in this instance, as I could imagine seeing Flint again and again.

Flashbacks ran through my mind of the previous night’s events. The way he seemed to take control and move me into whatever position he liked; normally I’d say no to,

however last night I felt 'safe' enough to try. I just went with the flow and man, was I rewarded for it! I can't recall ever coming so much in my life! It was like my body completely opened itself, inside out for this guy.

But now I was showered, changed and packed. I'd done this so silently, he didn't even stir. I started to write my name and contact details on the hotel stationery by the phone when I changed my mind. Instead, I put the piece of paper in my pocket.

No Jess, just leave things as they are. Why spoil a naughty night of fun, with the obligatory 'I'll call you'? Maybe he won't call, I mean why should he try to keep in contact? You're not from Alaska, you're all the way in Seattle!

I sighed in defeat as I stood there, looking over his large, masculine form. I couldn't help but to smile at the nice memory of him. Nup, lets just leave last night as that, without complicating it with reality.

Quiet as a mouse, I picked up my belongings and departed the room.

On my way out of the hotel, I settled the bill for the accommodation and room service. When Flint wakes up, there'll be nothing for him to pay. It was the least I could do for the guy, after driving four hours for me.

With one last look of longing towards the elevator, I climbed into the awaiting cab for the ride to the airport. As it pulled out onto the busy road, I felt this weird, physical pull, to return to him. But I shrugged it off as I took my ticket out of my personal organizer and looked straight ahead.



24th August 1999

"Jess, you're a mess!" Chris said frustrated, down the phone.

"I know," I whined, "I don't know what's wrong with me."

I was simultaneously talking to my best friend whilst preparing my nightly glass of wine with dinner.

Using my head to balance the handset on my shoulder, I moved around my small kitchen. I poured the glass of wine first, before pulling a frozen TV dinner out of the freezer. I struggled to even take the meal out of the box because my hands were shaking so much!

"What is with my body lately?" I complained. "Since I got back from Alaska, my hands have been shaking non-stop! Sometimes at night, my whole body trembles."

"It's been that bad, for the past three days?" My best friend asked in concern.

"Yeah."

"How are your sugar levels?" Chris wondered if it was my diabetes.

"Weird, my levels are either a little high or a little low. They won't plateau in the healthy range, they're all over the place."

"Have you gone to see the doctor?"

"No, I haven't had the time." I sighed. "I've had so many important meetings and presentations, the last couple of days."

"Jess, this is your diabetes! You can't just ignore it and hope it goes away." She sounded disapproving.

"I know," I moaned. "But that method worked on Steve, didn't it?"

She laughed aloud before she asked, “you still haven’t heard from the guy?”

“Nope.”

“Well if you ever do, I hope you give him an earful! Just stranding you in Alaska like that!”

“He didn’t STRAND me, in fact I ditched him,” I said smugly.

“Yeah, for the tall, dark, handsome stranger named ‘Flint Riverclaw’. Man, you can’t come up with a more rugged, frontier name than that.” Chris sounded like a radio announcer, making me laugh.

“No you can’t.”

Then she said vehemently, “but Steve still STRANDED you, because he made you feel it was safer trusting a complete stranger for a ride, than him.”

“Yeah I guess.” I paused before I smiled to myself. “But it all worked out in the end, didn’t it?”

“Are you wearing that ‘cat that stole the cream’ grin again, whilst you’re thinking about Mr. ‘Tall-Dark-and-Handsome’, in your hotel room?” She asked knowingly.

“Yep.”

“Maybe you should contact him.”

“I wish!”

“I’m serious, Jess.” She needled. “Give him a call.”

“And say what, ‘let’s have a long distance relationship?’” I sung sarcastically. “Come off it, Chris! The man lives in the middle of nowhere, in a state far, far away.”

“Don’t be such a pessimist, maybe he has fond memories of you too?”

“Even if he did, what’s it going to prove?” I asked grouchy. “What are we going to do; fly to see the other, a couple of times a year?”

“It sounds like the sex would be worth it.”

“Yeah, it would be worth it.” I sighed wistfully, whilst staring at the cardboard box, my dinner came in. “Besides, I don’t know how to contact him again.”

“How small was the small town, he came from? Call the bar where you met and ask the bartender who seemed nice, if you could get this guy’s contact details? Or even leave the bartender with yours, to pass on to Flint.” She planned.

“Hmm,” I frowned as I leant back on my kitchen bench, to think about it. “But I don’t remember the name of the bar.”

“You said there was just one bar, right?”

“Yeah?”

“Then use the directory assistance website to look up bars or the said bar, in Alma.” She said chirpily. “It shouldn’t be too hard to find.”

“I don’t know, Chris.” I sighed again. “Maybe it would come across as stalker behaviour and turn the guy off? Maybe I should just move on.”

Then I hesitated as I looked down at my trembling hands.

My voice dropped, “but you wanna know something funny? I partly think that my shakiness is because of him.”

“Huh?” Chris sounded stumped. “Like how?”

“The shakiness gets worse at night, when I’m lying in bed and thinking of him…” my voice trailed off then I laughed nervously. “Sounds stupid, huh?”

“It sounds like your body is missing the great sex, which you haven’t had in so long.” She said cheekily. “Out of ten, what would you rate Flint?”

“Ten out of ten.”

“And Steve?”

“Five out of ten.”

“And Josh, whom you dated before Steve?”

“Four out of ten.”

“Then what the hell are you waiting for, woman? Call Flint right now and set up another date! Fly to Alaska and meet him for dirty weekends!” She practically shouted over the phone.

“Chris, times like this remind me why you’re my best friend.” I giggled.

“Yeah well, out of the two of us; one of us needs to get lucky, so we can talk about it in full detail for the other person’s benefit.” She muttered.

“Chris, you would get lucky more often if you deliberately didn’t scare away the guys. As soon as you start talking about your self defence classes as well as your evening lectures on feminism, you attend at College? The guy wonders if you’re about to break him.”

“Ha!” She scoffed. “They’re all weaklings, anyways. I can’t find a man strong enough to handle me! I really need to find myself a Klingon.”

She referred back to her other hobby which was aside from talking about sex, was watching Star Trek.

“Tell me about Klingon sex again?” I giggled.

“If you break your collar bone on the wedding night, it’s good luck for the marriage.” She recited. “Man, I really need to find myself a Klingon and you need to call this Flint Riverclaw.”

“Yeah but Chris, what do I say?” I asked nervously.

Just then my Persian Blue jumped up onto the kitchen bench to sniff at the frozen food. I reached out to tickle under Fritz’s chin, as he purred loudly. He even raised his head higher to encourage me to rub for longer.

“Why can’t men be like Fritz here?” I bemoaned. “He’s straight forward with what he wants.”

“If men were like cats, they’d be harder to get along with. Nah, you need to find a man who’s like a dog. They’re more loyal.” She disagreed.

This made me pause as it reminded me of the person I was missing.

“You know, Flint talked about dogs, or more like wolves and foxes.” I told her. “Did you know that they mate for life?”

“No, I didn’t know that.” She said thoughtfully. “Maybe that’s why I like dogs so much. If you could marry a dog, you wouldn’t have to worry about divorce.”

“I don’t think Flint went to College, but he had life experience.” I reminisced, as I tickled Fritz’s ears and he appreciatively rubbed against my hand.

“Would you please just bite the bullet, and call this guy?” She pretended to sound cross.

“But what if he doesn’t want to drive four hours to Anchorage, to see me when I fly up, to see him?” I moaned. “What if he never wants to see me again?”

Out of the blue, Fritz pulled back from my hand and hissed at the front door! Then he jumped off the kitchen bench and bolted into the bedroom. He scrambled across my small apartment within two seconds flat.

I wondered aloud, “what the hell is wrong with that cat?”

“Was that Fritz just then?” She queried.

Next, I heard from my front door; KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK!

“Hang on, there’s someone at the door.” I told her. “I’ll call you back.”

“Actually don’t.” She yawned. “I’m pretty tired, I ran a training group today. I’ll call you tomorrow instead.”

“OK, bye.” I hung up.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK!

Whoever it was, were pretty demanding with how hard they hit the door. I walked up and instead of looking through the peep hole, I simply opened it. However as soon as I did, my eyes bulged and my jaw practically dropped to the floor.

Flint Riverclaw stood in the hallway of my apartment building.

With his height and broad shoulders, he practically filled the entire doorway. I stared at the Native Alaskan man in bewilderment. What the hell was he doing here?

“Er, hi...” I uttered out in shock.

He looked me up and down in my business suit, complete with stockings and high heels. Whereas, he was wearing the same clothes I remember him in, the flannel shirt and jeans. It was like he hadn’t gone home yet, since the hotel.

But how did he track me here? I took the piece of paper with my name and address, home with me. Did he somehow find out my information from my credit card details left with the hotel?

His dark eyes pierced mine as he asked in his deep voice; “Jessica, how are you?”

“Er, um... I’m fine.”

Then he gave a knowing look as he said, “the shaking is worse, isn’t it.”

It was more of a statement than a question. But how would he know that? And why the hell, is he wearing that knowing look? I was about to demand that he explain himself when he spoke again.

“Can I come in?” He asked politely. “We have things to discuss.”

“...um, OK...?” Helplessly, as if I couldn’t say no to him, I stepped aside.

As he came in, I caught another whiff of his delicious deodorant or whatever it was, he was wearing. My eyes drifted closed for a second as I held my breath, before I closed the door. But my hand remained on the doorknob, in case I had to make a quit getaway, from my own apartment.

Flint stood in my living area as he looked about my home. He looked like a giant in the confines of my personal space. I even caught him sniff, as he glanced about.

“You have a cat?” He remembered.

“Yes.”

“He’s hiding in the bedroom.” He looked towards the doorway. “The animal is going to have difficulty with my presence, while I’m here.”

What the...? How does he know where Fritz is hiding? Besides, it sounded creepy, the way he was sure the animal would be frightened of him.

Then Flint saw how I was standing by the door and he nodded towards the four seated dining table, “perhaps we should sit down.”

I must admit, by showing up out of the blue like this, seriously had me spooked.

“Please,” he said softly, making his deep voice sound even deeper.

Nervously, I came to stand on the other side of the table. I watched him walk up and sit down at the chair across. He was so big, he even dwarfed my furniture.

“We should talk,” he nodded towards the chair I was standing behind.

“Talk about what?” I asked warily.

“Please,” he repeated.

Again I felt like I couldn’t say no to him, so I pulled the chair back and sat down.

Just then, he reached across the table to rest his large, warm hands, on my smaller, trembling ones.

To my amazement, my shaking immediately stopped! His body heat travelled up my arms, across my shoulders and warmed me all over. I looked on with wide eyes as he smiled kindly.

“I’ve missed you,” he began.

“I’ve um, missed you too.” I admitted.

“I know, shaking is one of the symptoms.” He said mysteriously. “How is your diabetes?”

“Um, it’s OK.” I lied.

“Your sugar level has been up and down, hasn’t it?” He guessed again.

What the hell...? Who IS this guy? Is he stalking me?! Sharply, I pulled back my hands.

I asked accusatorily; “Flint, how did you find me?”

“I arrived in Seattle this morning, after driving here.”

My eyes bulged, “you drove here from Anchorage?”

“When I woke up in the hotel room and saw you were gone, I rushed to Anchorage Airport. However your plane was taking off and I just missed you. So I hopped in my truck and drove here.”

I scoffed back, “if you were at the airport, why didn’t you just fly here?”

“I don’t like to fly,” he said simply.

“So you’ve spent the last three days, driving here?”

“Yes.”

I folded my arms as I sat back, to openly examine him; “why Flint?”

“Jessica,” he took a deep breath, as if he were about to announce something important; “we are mates.”

“We’re what?”

“We are mates.”

“Oh sure!” I cracked up laughing. “So, do you do this to all the girls?”

“No,” he answered. “In the past if I’ve been with a woman, it’s been different. We can hold ourselves back.”

“You can hold yourself back? But not this time, not with me?” I asked, sceptically.

“With you it was different.” He explained. “I tried to hold myself back, but the way we connected, and how you opened yourself up to me? I couldn’t hold myself back from completely being with you.”

His words made my face flush, as it unnerved me how he sensed I had opened myself, more than I had with any other guy.

“Jessica,” he took hold of my hands again, “you are carrying my child.”

“I’m what?”

“You’re pregnant.”

“Sure I am!” I burst out laughing whilst pulling my hands back a second time.

“You are.”

“Um Flint, not to downgrade your manhood or anything, but I’m on the pill.”

“It doesn’t work on my kind,” he said.

“Your kind?” My eyebrows rose. “So you hopped into your truck and drove from Anchorage to Seattle, to tell me that I’m your mate because I’m carrying your child?”

“When one of us takes a mate, it usually results in pregnancy immediately. But even if you weren’t carrying my child, we would still be mates.” He continued.

“Oh that’s right, because you didn’t hold back?”

He looked me in the eye to say, “I couldn’t hold back, because I fell in love with you.”

“So explain to me why I’m pregnant and the pill doesn’t work on ‘your kind’?” I crossed my arms again.

He closed his eyes as he sighed deeply, “I have to show you something.”

“Oh yeah?” I asked uneasily. “You can’t just explain it to me?”

“Very well,” he spoke with his eyes closed, “I will tell you first.”

“OK,” I waited for it.

He opened his dark eyes, to meet mine; “I am a Lokoti Werewolf.”

“You’re a Lokoti what?”

“I am a Lokoti Werewolf.”

“Oh, is that a name for an ice hockey team, or something?” I frowned in confusion.

“You play sport, is that it?”

“You do know what a Werewolf is, don’t you?”

“Something dog-like, with claws?” I shrugged. “Like in the movies, ‘The Howling’, or ‘An American Werewolf In London’, or some such?”

“They’re more like North American Werewolves or European Werewolves, I am a different kind of Werewolf.”

“Right! Of course you are! You’re a Werewolf!” I spoke with false bravado. “I have a one night stand with a guy, who drives down from Anchorage to Seattle, to tell me that I’m his mate and that I’m carrying his child because he’s a Werewolf? Thank God for this Flint, otherwise I would have been worried you were a crazed stalker!”

He looked on in amusement at my sarcasm as he sat calmly.

I carried on, “does this mean that I’m carrying a baby Werewolf?”

“Our son will be born human.” He declared. “However after his tenth birthday, if I or one of the pack should die? Then he would turn on the following full moon, to take his place among the ranks.”

“A pack...? Oh great, there’s a PACK of you? Wonderful, so you’re not alone in thinking you’re a Werewolf? That’s fantastic! Do you have club meetings?”

“We hunt together on a full moon.” He snickered at my way of putting it. “When the tribe is threatened, we fight together to remove the threat.”

“Great! Just like a gang of bikies or something...” my bravado dropped as did my head, when I almost banged it maddeningly on the table, “...please say that you’re not in the mob?”

“We don’t participate in organized crime.” Flint frowned upon the idea. “Our existence is kept a secret, protected by the humans in the tribe.”

“If this is such a secret Flint, then why the hell did you just drive all the way from Alaska to Washington, to tell me this?” I raised my head to look his way.

“Because we are mates and you are carrying my child.”

“And that means?”

“I came to bring you back to Lokoti Tribal Lands, to live with me.” He said seriously.

I burst into laughter, “oh right! So I just pack up my place and quit my job and put my apartment on the market? Then I hop into your old, blue, pick up truck, and let you drive me all the way back to Alma?”

“I’m sorry I didn’t wake up, so we could have talked about this in Anchorage.” Flint tried to take my hand again, but I moved away. A hurt expression passed over his face but he continued as if he were being patient with me. “If we hadn’t of separated, you wouldn’t be feeling so unwell. I could have driven you back to tribal lands with me then.”

“Oh you could have?” I looked on like he was a loon. “So this is the way you induct people into your pack; you have a one night stand with someone, you follow them interstate and then you try to drag them back?”

“Jessica, please -”

“You said in the bar that you were concerned about my safety and that you would see me to the airport, so I could go home!”

“I did, as I did not foresee myself mating with you.”

“Would you please stop calling it that! It was just sex! And I’m NOT pregnant! I’m on the pill and have been for ten years! I’m NOT pregnant, I’ve never been pregnant and I never will get pregnant! I’m NOT your mate!”

“Jessica, listen to me -”

“Man, I thought you were a nice guy, Flint. My previous memories of that night were also nice. But your behaviour right now, by following me home and saying I have to come back with you? It makes you sound like a FREAK!”

“Jessica, I understand your surprise, I do. It’s because our customs would be seen as unusual by outsiders, couplings between a Lokoti Werewolf and mate, are usually with Lokoti women. I did not plan for this to happen -” he spoke and he would have said more, but suddenly I stood up and left the table.

“Right, that’s it.” I defiantly walked into the kitchen to pick up the phone again. I held out the handset so he could see it. “Flint, I have to ask you to leave and never come back, or I’ll call the police.”

He slowly stood up as he tried to hold my gaze, “you are afraid of me.”

“Damn straight!” I shouted. “What did you expect?!”

“If I showed you my Werewolf form then you’d believe me. But it would also frighten you further. I don’t want to do that because your heart is racing too fast as it is. Please tell me what else I can do?” He pleaded.

“Walk out that door and don’t come back again!” I pointed the way.

He sighed heavily as he shook his head. Then to make matters worse, he started to take off his shirt and then his t-shirt as he kicked off his boots. He’s undressing in my living area... why, is he going to force himself on me?

“What the hell are you doing?!” I screeched. “Right that’s it! I AM calling the police!”

I turned away so I could dial 911, but it didn’t work. I tried again, but I saw my hands were shaking so badly, I kept hitting the 2 instead. I took a deep breath to try to calm myself, as a little more slowly I pressed the keypad. But I could barely hold the handset properly because I was shaking so much!

“9-1-1, what’s the emergency?” A female voice, greeted.

Suddenly the line went dead when a clawed hand, hit the 'end call' function on my electronic phone!

I screamed as I dropped the handset and leapt backwards in fright!

It was a large man's hand with unnaturally long, sharp nails, connected to an impossibly large, muscled arm; which was attached to an impossibly large, muscled torso. His muscle bulk was huge! Then my eyes moved past the bulky neck, to the human head whose mouth had sharp, elongated teeth, jutting past his lips. They stopped at his waiting, glowing turquoise eyes; before swinging down again to see the monster, standing in my kitchen in just his jeans. Oh yeah, the nails on his bare feet, also looked long and sharp.

Glowing turquoise eyes...? Then that means that night in the hotel room, I wasn't imagining things! I recalled how sharp his teeth had felt as I remembered all the growling noises he had made. Right now, he or it, was panting as it stood in the entranceway of my kitchen.

Holy shit, I screwed a Werewolf! Or one screwed me, depending on how you looked at it. I had sex with a Werewolf, albeit it was good sex but nonetheless it was sex. Now this Werewolf is claiming that I'm his pregnant mate?

As cool as a cucumber, the monster used its clawed hand to pick up the handset from the floor and put it back on the phone. But it wasn't the only thing to fall in the shock of the proceedings, as my trembling legs gave out.

My racing heart, shallow breathing and shaking limbs, couldn't take anymore of this. I felt my legs collapse from underneath, the same time a curtain of darkness dropped over my eyes. Then so did I, onto my linoleum kitchen floor...

...

...I don't know how long I was out for, but I felt that I was lying somewhere soft and warm. With my eyes still shut, I realized I was lying on top of my bed with a coat over me. I think it was a man's coat, as it was big and smelled like Flint.

It smelled like Flint? The tall, Native Alaskan, who was a Lokoti Werewolf...? The monster that was in my kitchen entranceway...?

My eyes snapped open and the first thing I saw was Flint's human face gazing down in concern. He was dabbing something cool and wet on my forehead, like a damp face cloth. He smiled warmly as if to reassure, but his smile didn't last long.

"Jessica, you are very weak." He said gravely. "Before you, there has never been a case of a Lokoti Werewolf apart from his mate for so long. Your heart rate and your blood pressure are too high."

I believed him since I felt light headed and dizzy. It was like the time I accidentally dosed myself too high with insulin. The walls of my bedroom looked like they were moving as if everything was swaying. Were we having an earth quake or was it just me?

"C-c-call an ambulance..." I couldn't speak properly, "...m-m-m-my doctor's n-n-number is on my diabetics c-c-c-card, which is in my p-p-purse."

"I can give you something that will heal you immediately." He said calmly. "You have to trust me, Jessica."

But all I could do was stare up at him, dazed. I was too weak to panic which could have been for the best, especially with what happened next.

Flint was already sitting topless on the side of my bed when before my eyes his muscles expanded to look a hell of a lot bigger. The nails on his hands turned longer and pointer

as did his teeth, which protruded from his mouth. His dark brown eyes glowed a turquoise colour, with his black pupils disappearing.

Then I watched him raise his right arm and use the claws on his left hand, to put a gash in his wrist.

When he moved his wound to my mouth, fear took hold. Oh shit, he's trying to feed me his blood! He's trying to turn me into another Werewolf!

"Nooo...", I rolled my head away, "...please don't, Flint!"

"My blood won't turn you into a Lokoti Werewolf, Jessica." He spoke in a thunderous voice. "Only Lokoti are born with the gene to become one of us. But my blood will make you strong."

Using his claw-like left hand, he raised my head to press his bleeding right wrist, against my mouth.

At first I refused to let it past my lips so instead the warm, thick blood, started to trickle down my chin.

"No harm will come to you as my mate." He growled softly as his way to cajole. "Now drink and heal."

Then I don't know why, but I believed him. Against my better judgment or even my control, my lips parted. He gently pushed his wound into my mouth, as I lay there, staring up into his glowing turquoise eyes. I felt his blood pool inside, until I had no choice but to swallow or choke.

Flint sat patiently, as I swallowed reluctant mouthful after reluctant mouthful. As I did, he ducked his head to tenderly run his nose over my forehead. Was he sniffing my state of health? He did say that he could do that.

However after my fourth time, I realized what he was talking about. I DID feel stronger. My racing heart started to slow, as the dizziness subsided. I felt my arms and legs, stop trembling. When I tried to sit up, Flint wouldn't remove his arm.

"Just a couple more mouthfuls," he insisted as he watched my return to health.

Reluctantly, I kept drinking, expecting myself to gag at any minute, but I didn't. This bloodletting didn't taste as bad as I had imagined it would. However, I certainly didn't want people to ever find out that I drank blood!

I noticed as we were doing this, the Lokoti Werewolf started to get turned on.

He kept sniffing around my face or neck as he ran his clawed hand, over my suit. I lay still, almost afraid to move. His glowing turquoise eyes tried to hold my human blue ones as I felt him hoist up my skirt. Then the heat of his hand felt good against my skin as he stroked my inner thighs.

My heart started to pound in excitement rather than fear. His claws managed to tear the tops of my stockings along with my underwear, but leave the skin unharmed. The ruined garments lay in disuse on top of the bed. Then my eyes almost popped out of their sockets, when I felt his clawed hand separate my moist cheeks, to rub my clit.

Somehow his long, sharp claws didn't hurt, instead they tantalized... how was he doing this? He used the pads on his fingers to do the massaging, but I felt the edges of his unnaturally long nails, touch my sensitive area. It even felt ticklish, adding to the pleasure.

Although the trembling had subsided, it was like I had lost control of my body. I felt my yearning cry out; 'more! more!' the wetter I became. I grabbed hold of his hugely

muscled torso, to try to pull him over me. I heard him undo his jeans as he moved on top and then I felt him push himself inside.

Immediately, Flint fell into a hard and fast rhythm, which made my bed frame squeal in protest. I repositioned my hips to allow him further access. I liked his hard, strong movements, whilst I still had the taste of his blood inside my mouth. From the crotch upwards, I felt my body open itself up to him. As if he felt this too, the next couple of heaves were pushing himself deeper before recommencing his fast pace.

My body seemed to be waiting for something, it seemed to be waiting for him to come. I wanted him to fill me, I wanted to feel myself become so wet, just like in that hotel room. I already had his blood inside me, but now I wanted something else of his. It really was like I was turning into a raging, hungry, beast, myself!

I think he sensed this, as he grabbed hold of my hips with the both of his clawed hands to push harder. When he did, I noticed there was now a small, pink line in his skin where the gash used to be. Wow, he had healed that fast? This turned me on even more, as I looked up at this supernatural creature who for some unknown reason, had chosen me as his mate.

Flint raised himself to his knees, lifting my hips up along with him. He held me taught as he pounded hard. From the amount of the squeaking with the force of the bed rocking, I was partially worried the neighbours might hear. In the past, I used to worry about this but now I challenged someone to interrupt us! I almost giggled at the idea, of anyone seeing Flint in his huge form between my legs, and how they would be calling 911 instead.

As he came, the hypnotizing, warm wetness engulfed my crotch. When he stopped, I almost lifted my head to beg for more, but I found I didn't have to. He was changing positions to roll me over. I didn't care if my face was being pushed into the pillow, I didn't complain as my business suit was being sullied. All my stockings and underwear were good for now, was the trash. All I cared about was making this hot, hungry desire, be quenched. I noticed that my breathing was coming out like a panting, just like his was.

Here I am, actually having really hot, animalistic sex... I am the mate of a Werewolf... Boy, is Chris going to be jealous if she finds out! I wondered if this was what she was picturing, when she spoke about Klingon sex?

For nearly an hour of the male moving me into different positions, of me coming, him coming and then changing over; we were well and truly spent.

I lay on my stomach, enjoying the last of my feelings of ecstasy dissolve into physical satisfaction. It felt like my heart was pounding in my crotch instead of my chest. I could feel the blood rush through my veins, as my skin felt like it was glowing, just as Flint's eyes did. He was lying on top of me, like a living electric blanket especially with his body heat.

Lastly, I felt him nestle his face into my sweaty hair and growl in a satiated manner. He didn't feel so heavy now which meant he must have changed back. The nails on his hands which held me close to him, also looked normal again.

"Flint?"

"Yes?"

"Do you have any other mates that I should know about?"

"No."

“So I’m the only one?”

“Yes.”

“You said before that in the hotel room you couldn’t hold back…”

“Yes.”

“What does that mean?”

“My kind can hold back from coming, so the female isn’t impregnated.”

“And you said that usually you could do this?”

“Yes.”

“So in the past you’ve had sex, but you were able to hold yourself back?”

“Yes.”

“Then was it still pleasurable for you?”

“In its own way.”

“And when you don’t hold back?”

“It’s EXTREMELY pleasurable.” He growled softly in my ear, before kissing it.

“How many women have you been with in the past?”

“A few.”

“How many is a few?”

“There have been a few over the many years.”

“How few is a few, and how many is the many years?” I pressed.

“Jessica, I’m 75 years old.”

Pause… my eyes widened as my mouth fell open. “Are you kidding me?”

“No,” he chuckled as he kissed the side of my face.

“And you’re only taking a mate NOW?”

“Yes.”

“Because you never fell in love until now?”

“Yes.”

“Then why now? Why me?” I turned my head so I could see his face. “I’m a career woman. I have my own apartment and a cat and I’m on the fast track in the company I work for.”

“Because you stumbled into Charlie’s Bar and you were pretty and you smelled good.” He smiled softly.

“So what happens now, I just pack up and move to Alaska with you?”

“Yes.”

“And then what?”

“In nine months our son will be born.”

“What if it’s a girl?”

“It won’t be a girl.”

“But how do you know that?”

“The first born is always a male, so he may turn into a Lokoti Werewolf. He will protect his younger siblings as he will the tribe. He will be the head of his family.”

I frowned at the sound of this, “oh yeah and what about the woman?”

“She becomes the mate of either the Lokoti Werewolf or the Warrior.”

“Warrior?”

“A Warrior is a human male. Only fifteen males in the tribe become a Lokoti Werewolf. When a member of the pack dies, a human male is activated to take his place. Usually it’s a son or a grandson or sometimes a brother, of the late Werewolf.”

“But what if a girl becomes a Lokoti Werewolf?”

“Women are carriers of the Lokoti Werewolf gene to pass onto her sons, but never change themselves.”

“Why not?”

“Because males are physically stronger and they’re the protectors of their women and children.”

“Flint, it sounds a bit archaic and sexist to me.”

“Perhaps, but it has been this way for a thousand years and more.” He sighed as he snuggled deeper into my curves.

“You should meet my best friend, Chris.” I muttered. “She does self defence as well as classes on feminism. She would have a lot to say about your tribe.”

He chuckled whilst holding me contentedly, “if it sounds like I’m overlooking the importance of a woman’s role, I’m not. Women are on our Council of Tribal Elders and help our Medicine Men with herbal remedies. Women are not only our homemakers but they help oversee the tribe, as they oversee their own families. But the woman is not expected to assist the Warrior or Werewolf, in protecting or providing for the family.”

“Flint?”

“Yes, Jessica?”

“If I do quit my job and move to Alaska with you, no offence but from what I remember of that tiny town called Alma? I don’t see much work for a PR person.” I frowned, pensively.

“Perhaps not.”

“So then what will I do?”

“Settle down and have our baby.”

“And then what?”

“Have another baby, I guess.” I felt him shrug.

“But what will I do about a job?”

“Don’t worry Jessica, I can provide for you. If you would like to work, it won’t be from financial necessity.”

“Flint, I know you’re saying that to try to make me feel safe? But it’s actually frightening me even more. I feel like I’m expected to live with a caveman while he’s still learning how to make fire.”

I thought that taunt would annoy him but his voice sounded calm, like he was being patient with me.

“You will have a comfortable house, with comfortable furnishings. You will have an indoor bathroom with hot showers and will you not have to use a tree for a bathroom.” He recited my previous rant, in good humour. “You will have a kitchen with a stocked pantry and a refrigerator. If I see you have difficulty with anything, I will certainly step in to help.”

“I’m a bad cook,” I warned.

“I’m a good cook,” he replied.

“I’m anal retentive about cleanliness.” I went on. “I used to fight over how the towels on the towel rack should be left, with the last guy I lived with.”

“I’m sure you did, you don’t seem to have a problem with speaking up.” He chuckled once more.

“What if you get tired of my temper tantrums? If we get divorced, I could be stuck in Alaska.”

He moved off my back to roll me onto my side so I was facing him. With his human hand, he caressed my sweaty face. His tender mannerisms surprised me, as they showed he was a gentle giant.

“Jessica, taking a mate is held with great reverence by my people. When we are joined, we do not take the wants and needs of our partner lightly. Once a Werewolf claims a mate, the mating is for life. When you invited me into your hotel room in Anchorage three days ago, I accepted because I was already in love with you. I wouldn’t have mated with you if I thought you would be harmed by the process.”

Flint’s words, coupled with his deep voice and his serious expression, made me believe him. What the hell was it about this guy which made him so trustworthy? Maybe it was his supernatural difference which lured me in? A whole new future opened up to me, in ways I couldn’t have possibly imagined.

A giggle even escaped; “so, when do we do this?”

“It all depends on you, when can you pack up and drive back with me?”

“Well, my work will need four weeks notice -” I began.

“Four weeks?” He sat up startled. “FOUR weeks?”

I sat up too, “yeah, why?”

“Jessica, the next full moon will be in eighteen days.”

“So?” I started, but I stopped myself. “Oh yeah, you’re a Werewolf. Do full moons really affect you...?” I stopped again when I saw his worried expression.

“The full moon pulls on our psyche, just as it does to Earth’s oceans. It makes our bloodlust boil and if we don’t hunt animal, we could turn on a human...”

This time he paused, when he saw the frightened look on my face.

“... no Jessica, I would never turn on you. Lokoti Werewolves don’t crave the flesh of their mate, family or members of the tribe. But being here in Seattle, away from my hunting grounds, it would be too risky. Any human that is not Lokoti, is a temptation.”

“But what would happen?” I asked, worriedly.

“A century ago, we were able to curb our bloodlust from hunting human to animal. In the National Park, we hunt bear, caribou, moose or other large animals. But I cannot hunt here, in a city. I could revert and turn on a human and become a murderer. It’s the reason why my kind prohibits alcohol, as we must retain constant control of our dangerous hunger.”

“Then maybe you should drive back to Alaska tomorrow and as soon as I’ve got my affairs in order, I’ll fly to Anchorage?”

His eyebrows rose, warily; “we were apart for three days when it affected your pulse, your blood pressure and even your diabetes. We would not be able to part for four weeks.”

“Wait, all of what I’d been feeling the last three days was because we were APART?”

“Of course,” he said evenly. “When a Lokoti Werewolf claims a mate, the process is for life and it’s only severed by death. If they are parted whilst alive, the physical symptoms can be debilitating.”

I looked on in annoyance, “but you didn’t look like you were shaking, or anything.”

“Being away from you makes my bloodlust boil.” He confessed. “Not even hunting, can purge the hunger for my mate.”

Then he nodded towards my messed up bed spread, referring to our prior activities.

“So let me get this straight...” I processed this information, “...your bloodlust will boil if you’re stuck in Seattle during a full moon, where you might eat a human? But if you go back to your hunting grounds without me, your bloodlust will still have a hissy-fit because we’re parted.”

“Yes.”

I stood up in a huff. “Man, this mating business SUCKS!”

He remained seated with his undone jeans, as he watched me take off my rumpled clothes.

I completely undressed before I stood before him, naked. My soiled suit was dropped into the laundry basket, whilst the ruined underwear was chucked into the bin. Lastly, I pulled on my bathrobe which hung on a hook on the bedroom door, before I turned on him.

“Wait, what if I didn’t want to be your mate?”

He looked on, unsure; “what do you mean?”

“I mean, what if I still wanted to kick you out of my apartment? What if I refused to come back to Alaska with you? What then?” I looked on demandingly.

Just then Flint Riverclaw stood up so he could tower over me with his greater height. I could even see the muscles across his shoulders and down his arms flex, as if he were restraining himself. It was as if to add emphasis to his next words.

He spoke gravely, “you wouldn’t have thrown me out of your apartment, just as you wouldn’t throw me out of your life. If it came to the worst, I could use my will on you, to make you submit. But I would rather not, as I love the woman not the puppet, she may turn into.”

“A puppet? Your ‘will’? What is this crap?” I took a step backwards.

“Do not fear me, Jessica Riverclaw,” he growled out as his dark eyes flashed their bright, turquoise colour. “I swore you would not come to harm when we met, and I intend to keep that promise.”

“Answer the question, Flint! What would have happened, if I refused to move to Alaska as your mate? What would happen, with the symptoms then? Would they be worse, for the rest of my life?”

He said simply, “I do not know if they’d be a life long illness, because there has never been an instance where the Lokoti Werewolf lost a living mate.”

“Why, because your kind can use their ‘will’ on them, to bring them to heel?” My eyes narrowed suspiciously.

“Jessica,” he rested the both of his hands on my shoulders, as he looked me in the eye. “I will tell you this now, however, you will later come to realize this yourself. When a Lokoti Werewolf takes a mate, it is a biological and an empathic, joining. I have your scent, which means I will always run to you if I sensed you were in danger. It was how I found you today. Once I was in your city, I tracked you down by smell. I could feel your shakiness so I drove all day to reach you as fast as I could. I felt your shock when you found me standing on your doorstep, as I felt your terror when you saw me, in my other form. I feel it when you’re cold or when you’re hungry or ill. With this in mind, the Lokoti Werewolf becomes overprotective of his mate. Once our lives are settled in Alaska, you will come to know a peace you have never felt before.”

I blinked and then I blinked again, as I stared at Mr. Tall-Dark-And-Handsome standing before me, in my bedroom. Perhaps, I should call myself, Mrs. Tall-Dark-And-Handsome since biologically speaking, we were 'married' now. I felt like all the fight in me had packed up and moved somewhere else. Funnily enough, that would be me too in the next couple of days.

That evening, I showered before we went to bed. When I curled up between the sheets, at first it felt unusual that someone spooned me, from behind. With the extra persons' body heat, I ended up kicking off the quilt lest overheat. However it didn't take me long to slip into sleep, with the feel of Flint's strong heart beat, reverberating through his skin and into mine.

BEEP BEEP! BEEP BEEP! BEEP BEEP!

It can't be 6 AM, already? Sleepily, my head rose to look on the source of the noise when a muscled arm reached over to turn it off. Then I rolled over, to come face to face with the second person in the bed. His long, black hair looked good against my yellow rose, patterned sheets.

"Good morning," he gave a sleepy smile.

"Morning."

"Did you sleep well?"

"How could I not?" I teased. "Maybe you 'willed' me to sleep?"

Flint chuckled as he tried to snuggle down with me, however I squirmed out of his hold.

"I have to get ready for work." I informed.

"That's a shame," he said unhappily. "I could lie in bed with you, all day."

Strangely, I felt the same way when usually, I was a person who didn't like to be idle. I was one of those 'get up and go', kind of people. I used to be one of those 'yuppies' who prided herself with a well-paid job and a future paved in success. I was meant for fast-paced city living, instead of slow country lifestyle.

To my surprise, when I climbed out of bed to get ready for work, Flint acted in similar fashion. Whereas I put on a red business suit with stockings and high heels, he pulled on his pair of jeans and a flannel shirt. When I went into the bathroom to fix my hair and make-up, he went into the kitchen to switch on the kettle.

"Would you like some scrambled eggs on toast?" He called out.

I paused in putting on my mascara to call back, "I don't have time to eat."

At 6.45 AM I departed the apartment on the dot, however a second person followed me out the door. Instead of catching the bus, Flint insisted on driving me. He obediently followed my directions to drop me off in front of the building where my office was.

"I'll pick you up, after work." He offered.

"No, don't do that." My face flushed. "I'll just get the bus."

I climbed out of his truck when he passed me my briefcase which had been sitting on the seat, between us.

"I'll pick you up, after work." He repeated, before he drove off to disappear into the traffic.

Before I walked through the automatic, sliding doors; my head rose to look up at the glass façade of the high rise, like I was never going to see it again.

“Here goes nothing,” I muttered to myself, as I carried my briefcase into the building.

The elevator let me out on the ninth floor then I passed through another set of sliding doors and into the office of ‘Wildenstein Dreams’. The familiar faces gave their familiar smiles, as I nodded back. I passed through the administration area, to come to my corner office.

Abruptly, I stopped short in my doorway as I surveyed the scene. My laptop sat on top of my glass top desk, waiting to be switched on. My telephone had several lights flickering on its’ panel, indicating numerous messages left for me. My high-backed, office chair was behind the desk, with the glass wall behind it displaying the views of Seattle’s harbour side.

I had worked hard for five solid years for this office and its view... now I was going to say goodbye to it.

“Damn it,” I breathed.

Instead of going inside, I turned and headed towards somebody else’s office.

“Hi Jess,” my boss’s secretary seated at her desk, looked up in surprise. “You don’t have a meeting, this morning.”

“I know, but I need to speak to Kristy, please.” I spoke reluctantly.

“Oh, well she might be able to squeeze you in before her 8.15.” Mona looked at her watch before she picked up the phone. “Kristy? It’s Jessica, requesting to speak to you.” Then she put down the handset and nodded towards the closed door, behind her. “Go on in.”

The meeting began well, with Kristy advising me the clients I met with on Monday morning were impressed with my presentation. But when I gave her my resignation, things quickly went downhill. At first she thought I was threatening to leave for a pay rise, until I told her I had to give four days notice instead of four weeks. Then she accused me of going to work for one of our competition.

Lastly, she had a security guard escort me back to my office, to watch me pack up my things. My face burned in humiliation as the administration staff stared at me as if I had just been fired. I was given a cardboard box to put my personal items in, as the security guard confiscated my rolodex in case I’d try to poach clients.

Then the guard escorted me to the elevator, past everyone’s desks. I heard a couple of, “bye Jess” as I walked through, but otherwise they must have thought I’d been caught stealing or something as such. The elevator went ‘bing’ and the double doors opened and at 8.23 am I left the floor where my office was, unemployed.

My heart was pounding as my legs wavered and on unsteady feet, I walked out of the building and into the bright light. Uncharacteristically, it was a sunny day in Seattle that morning, the day my resignation turned into instant dismissal. Oh the irony to have beauty and warmth, when inside I felt cold and scared.

Suddenly, I heard a screech of tires when an old, blue, pick up truck, pulled up in the ‘no parking’ area, in front of the building.

Flint leapt out of the driver’s side as he rushed up to take the box in one arm as his other, escorted me to his vehicle.

“Did you sense then that I just got fired?” I gaped.

His concerned eyes peered into my own, “is that what happened? I just felt that you were angry and then embarrassed and now, very frightened.”

Then it all poured out, “she just completely overreacted! At first she was singing praises for my work then she accused me of corporate espionage! She even had a security guard escort me out of the office!”

He carefully placed my box of things in the back before he opened the door to the passenger’s side for me.

When he climbed behind the wheel, I clutched his arm to say; “she even threatened not to pay out my accumulated annual leave, because I can’t work the last four weeks!”

This made him pause, “how much leave do you have?”

“After all my hard work for the last five years and the first year of not taking any time off; twelve weeks!”

Now he made a move to get out again, “I’ll go talk to her.”

Imagining an angry Lokoti Werewolf with glowing eyes, long nails and sharp teeth, growling at the bitch; did make me feel better, but I didn’t want him to get into trouble.

“No Flint!” I pulled him back. “The security guards have guns, I don’t want you to get hurt.”

He turned pensive, “as long as they don’t have silver bullets, it should be OK.”

Then we sat quietly in his truck for a moment or two, before I heard him chuckle and I couldn’t help but to join him by giggling.

“Think of it this way,” his arm rested over my shoulders, “you’re free now and you’ll never have to see her again.”

“Actually, I was laughing over the idea of you scaring the pants off her.”

He guffawed at this before turning the key in the ignition and driving us out of there.



30th August 1999

“Jessica...? Jessica, wake up. We’re nearly there.”

Flint’s voice was gentle as was his shaking, to stir me from my sleep. I opened my eyes to look out the windscreen. But all I saw was more highway, more forest and more snow-capped, mountain ranges.

“Huh, this is it?” I uttered out. “These are your tribal lands?”

“No, we’re coming up to Alma.” He put his large, warm arm about my shoulders.

“Our tribal lands are outside of town, on the north side.”

I snuggled into his side and watched as he turned off the main highway which ran from Anchorage to Fairbanks. We turned onto a smaller, concealed road which had a sign that read ‘Alma 5 miles’ and underneath, ‘Tok 184 miles’. This only accentuated the feeling of isolation out here.

As we approached the small town, we drove past another sign which told us Alma had a population of 709 people. I looked on with new eyes at what would be part of my home. What I originally thought of as a ‘one man and his one dog’ place to live, I tried to see its’ good side.

The tiny town had one main street where Charlie’s Bar was situated, as well as a small supermarket, a milk bar and a gas station. The cinema was inside an old, small building,

which looked like it also functioned as a town hall. It was advertising its one and only movie which would have opened in the rest of America, well over a month ago. My cosmopolitan evenings of 'dinner and a show' with friends in Seattle; had been reduced to going to Charlie's Bar and attending the small cinema with one movie, for my entertaining pleasure.

The main street was predominantly made up of residential homes which we passed. At the end of the road sat a large building, which served as both Alma's Elementary and High School. This is where my kid will go to learn, one day?

Abruptly the township finished and I found ourselves driving through forest again.

"This is the highway that Main Street is on, which goes on to Tok." He informed. "If you ever wanted to drive to Fairbanks which is the closest, you would drive off tribal lands, through Alma and back onto the larger highway."

Flint drove with one hand on the wheel as his other arm held me. Then he said proudly, "now we're coming up to our tribal lands."

I sat up straighter to look about. I watched as he pulled off the concealed road and onto a dirt one. We passed a Federal Wildlife sign which read, 'Hunter National Park' and then after it, was a much smaller sign which said, 'Lokoti Community Centre.'

After another mile, the forest cleared to show a tiny village made up of wooden houses with stone chimneys. The dirt roads were only one-lane wide, with the odd pick up truck or RV's passing each other by driving on the fringes. The wooden houses weren't large, but they had mown lawns.

I saw Lokoti children run from one house to the next as they played together. Occasionally, adults came outside to check up on them and when they saw us drive by, they raised their hands in greeting. Flint nodded back as he seemed to know everyone.

He drove past a large, grassy block, which must have served as a sports field, as I saw some boys were playing soccer. Next to the 'sports field', was a small, wooden building with a sign up, advertising it was a general store. Out the front, I saw one gas pump, where a Lokoti was filling up his RV.

At a small intersection, Flint turned his truck away from the village, towards a forest encrusted hill. His old pick up truck, chugged up the steep, dirt road. Along the way he pointed at a log cabin, sitting on the slope.

"That's John Wisetail's place." He said. "I helped him build his house after he helped me build mine. He lives there with his wife Unka and their three kids."

"I met him in the bar, didn't I?" I remembered.

"Yep," he answered, before he continued. "I built my house first and John built his house second. Then the Riley's built theirs a couple years later and now the Windchime's are building theirs, on top of the hill."

"If you built your house first, how long ago was that?" I queried.

"Oh it was back in the sixties," he thought aloud. "I guess it would have been '64 that I started and completed it in '65."

My eyes widened over the fact that my new 'husband' was old enough to be my grandfather, even if he didn't look it. Flint caught my look of surprise, which made him chuckle. Then he pulled me close to deliver a kiss to my forehead.

"What's the population of your tribe, Flint?" I queried.

"Oh, we have around 167 people," he shrugged, "which now includes you."

"So I'm number 167?" I smiled.

“You sure are, so our son will be number 168.”

He turned off the steep, dirt road and into a dirt driveway. The sight of a long, wooden veranda out the front of a large log cabin greeted us. There was no yard or garden to speak of, just surrounding forest. But in spite of myself, I liked this house immediately. It looked homey and even welcoming.

Flint pulled up in front of the wooden, porch steps and I climbed out of the truck immediately. Instead of making a move to get my things from the back, he took hold of my hand to lead me to the front door. He rattled his keys as he made a move to unlock it, when he paused.

“Oh, I forgot to lock up when I left.” He smiled in good humour and then he simply turned the door knob.

“You forgot to lock up?” I gawked. “You’ve been away for nearly two weeks! What if you were robbed?”

“We don’t have break-ins, here. If somebody needed to borrow something of mine, they would leave a note of what they took and how long they’d need it for.” He shrugged it off.

Then he swung open the door and stood back to let me go in first before turning quiet, to watch my reaction.

I walked into the large living area which was a lounge and dining room combined. A large stone fireplace was situated in the lounge area, which had two old, leather couches and a couple of bookshelves, full of books. The walls were rough, showing concealer between the large logs, which gave the house a rustic appearance. The wooden floors were polished and there was a pine dining table set that could seat six.

I wandered into the kitchen which was small and old fashioned, with an old gas stove. I hate gas, I’m going to change it to an electric, as well as buy a microwave. Then I saw a bathroom which had the laundry beside it, to find both had polished wooden floors too, instead of tiles. In the bathroom, was an old, wrought iron tub, with a shower head over it and a shower curtain. I decided I’d have this bathroom redone to put in a separate shower.

Flint followed me down a small hallway to look in on the bedrooms. I saw two tidy guest bedrooms, with single beds and hand-woven quilts on top. When I poked my head inside the main bedroom, I found a queen sized bed with another hand-woven quilt. There were two bedside tables and a large wardrobe. Aside from the leather couches in the lounge room, all the furniture in the house was constructed of pine. I wondered if they were made here, from the ample trees of the surrounding forest?

“Was the pine furniture built here?” I asked.

“Yes, some of the families in the tribe run furniture construction businesses.” He answered and then he watched me dawdle back into the living area. “Well Jessica, can you see yourself being happy here?”

His voice sounded casual but I detected he was nervous. When I looked on his face, I saw an anxious expression. The old giant was worried if his house stood up to my standards? I thought that was so sweet!

“I love it!” I beamed, which made his face light up. “I even love the rustic walls, coupled with the polished wooden floors.”

“You do?” His eyes widened with hope.

“But there are a couple of things I’d like to change, please?” I asked, feeling hopeful myself.

“Yes?”

“I’d like new couches.” I pointed at his old leather ones and then I waved towards the kitchen. “And can we please get an electric stove instead of a gas one? I’ve never liked gas, especially when I nearly burnt my face off, trying to use my grandmother’s.”

“Sure.”

“Plus a microwave, they’re easier to use.” I went on. “And I want a new bathroom with a separate shower.”

“It’s the safe thing to do,” his hand settled over my stomach. “When you get bigger, you shouldn’t climb over the sides of a bathtub, to shower.”

My heart warmed at how easy going he was, instead of refusing my demands.

“Oh Flint, I have a good feeling about this!” I threw my arms about his large size.

He squeezed me back, “I told you it would all work out, Jessica.”

I pulled out of his embrace as I began to plan aloud; “with the proceeds I have from selling the apartment and paying off the mortgage, leaves me with twelve thousand. Then for selling my car, makes it fifteen and a half thousand dollars, we can use to do up the kitchen and the bathroom. We could hire contractors from Fairbanks, as it’s a hell of a lot closer than Anchorage.”

His shoulders stiffened as he pulled them back to declare; “you will not use your money towards the house. I have some money, saved up over the years.”

“But Flint, what if what I want is too expensive or out of your price range?”

“Jessica,” he cupped my face, “when we go shopping, you’ll point out what you want and I’ll pay for it. Then we’ll bring these things back in my truck and I’ll install the stove and redo the bathroom myself. If I need extra hands, my friends in the tribe will help.”

“Yeah, but what if I want a really expensive stove -” I tried again.

“You keep your money for yourself,” he said adamantly.

“Flint, please let me help -”

“Invest it,” he said simply. “You never know if times will turn hard and we may need it for the children.”

“On that note, it’s a good thing my best friend is a financial adviser,” I snickered.

He grinned in good humour after meeting my demanding ‘bestest bud’. “So, do you think Chris will like the house, when she comes to visit?”

“When we’ve done up the kitchen and bathroom and living area, she’s gonna love it!” I beamed back. “Leave it to me, Flint. I’m a PR person, I design events, from catering to decoration to entertainment to publicity!”

Flint wore this silly smile on his face as he pulled me into another embrace.

“I certainly have faith in you Jessica Riverclaw, there’s no doubt about that.”

As his lips smothered mine, I almost turned to jell-o with the feel of my softer body pressed up against his firmer one. It felt like nothing could go wrong, whenever he held me in his larger, stronger arms...

“Knock, knock!”

Abruptly we pulled apart to see a familiar looking Lokoti man, standing with an older looking Lokoti woman, in the front doorway. Behind them were three Lokoti youths in the shapes of two teenaged boys and a girl. They looked like they were trying not to laugh at the sappy scene they had just stumbled onto.

“John and Unka,” he smiled warmly, “come on in.”

“Well howdy there Jessica, it’s good to see you again!” The father came inside first with his hand reaching out to shake mine.

I shook his large, strong hand back; “I bet you’re surprised to see me here, John Wisetail.”

“Not really,” he laughed back. “I saw my best friend was smitten, the moment you walked into Charlie’s Bar.”

He did? I flashed Flint a look of surprise as he stood back to let the introductions take place. I thought I had noticed him first, the day of our meeting.

“Let me introduce you to my lovely wife, Unka.” His best friend waved towards the older looking woman who shook my hand next. Then he indicated to his older sons and the younger daughter, “and these are our handful, Mark, Sean and Alice.”

The children appeared to be in their mid to late teens and very curious of me. Alice stared at my blonde hair, as her brothers checked out my figure. I think they were also looking at my black jeans and dark pink, velvet top which looked a little city, compared to their country wear of blue denim and suede.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Jessica.” Their mother held onto my hand, before she passed Flint a mock frown. “It’s good to see the old bear finally start a family! Did you know he’s the only member of the pack, to wait this long to take a mate? The Tribal Elders began to worry, if it was the end of the Riverclaw line or what!”

“It took a special one to finally catch my eye, Unka.” He smiled softly.

“Oh, I can see that!” Unka laughed good naturedly. “With your pretty face, fair hair and bright eyes, I can see why Flint has stars in his!”

It wasn’t just his face that flushed, it was mine as well at her cheekiness.

“Now Jessica,” she turned back my way. “I don’t know how much of our customs Flint has explained, but when a couple moves in together, the tribe throws them a Housewarming.”

“Really?” I asked in surprise.

“But since the old bear built this house long ago and it’s fully equipped, he’s beaten us to the punch line.” Unka passed him another frown.

“We’re getting new living room furniture and we’ll be redoing the bathroom and kitchen.” He announced.

“Good!” John cried out, relieved. “You see, there’s going to be a Housewarming yet.”

“Unka, are you stirring up trouble again?” Flint chuckled at his best friend’s wife.

John turned my way, “my wife has been stewing about this, since she heard of your coupling. She and a couple of the women in the tribe, even had a meeting about it!”

“Tradition is tradition,” she said sternly. “Since Flint is First in the Lokoti Werewolf pack, he should know better than to try to skip on his own Housewarming.”

This gave me a jolt, at having another person know about my husband’s supernatural condition.

“Er, you know about that?” My eyes widened at their candour.

“Know about it...?” John chuckled. “I hunt with the old bear, every full moon.”

The news made my eyes bulge, when I realized that there were two Lokoti Werewolves in the room. Then I remembered something else they said. “Hang on, what do you mean Flint is First in the pack?”

“Exactly that,” John shrugged, “he’s our leader.”

My surprised eyes swung in his direction; “you’re the leader of the pack?”

Flint simply smiled as his answer as if it wasn’t a big deal.

“Yes and what kind of example were you setting to your younger members, waiting so long to take a mate?” She jokingly chastised.

He answered with, “I was waiting for Jessica.”

This made my heart warm as I took hold of his hand and he squeezed it back.

Unka moved the conversation on when she put her arm about my shoulders and together we looked about the house.

“Well my dear, are we going to add ‘the woman’s touch’ to the old bear’s bachelor pad, or what?”

“We certainly are!” I laughed along with this friendly and funny woman.

“Now what kind of couches do you want?” She started to plan.

“Um, I don’t know.” I pondered. “I was thinking of ordering some catalogues, or looking up some furniture stores online.”

“Online?” She gave a funny look.

“The internet, Mom.” Mark advised.

“The internet?” She quizzed. “I thought that was just a school thing?”

“We got a new computer room at school,” Sean explained. “We’ve been telling Mom, how we surf the internet during class.”

“And email our friends,” Alice put in.

Unka rolled her eyes at me, “emails are electronic letters that are sent down phone lines, apparently... however that works!”

“Ah yeah, I use the internet frequently.” I tried not to snicker. “I’ll be emailing my best friend back in Seattle on a regular basis.”

“Sounds too complicated for me!” She waved it off. “Mark, where’s my bag?”

Her eldest handed over her large handbag which he had been carrying for her. Out of which, Unka pulled out a small pile of decorating magazines. This woman had more savvy than I gave her credit for!

“The kids can keep their internet, while I go about things the old fashioned way.” She said stubbornly. “Here you go Jessica, you can have these. Some of them are a couple of months old, I have John pick them up for me when he’s in Fairbanks. But it’ll give you an idea of what to do with this place.”

“Thank you Unka!” I gushed appreciatively, as I gazed upon the magazines as if they were the best thing since sliced bread.

“This one is exclusively on furniture and these ones here, are about interior decorating. Some of the shops and companies they mention are in Fairbanks. We can pick up whatnot and bring back here. Give us a month and we’ll have your house set up good and proper!” She promised.

“A month long Housewarming?” John chuckled to Flint. “Sounds like it’s goin’ to be some month, now don’t it?”

“It does,” he agreed.

“But don’t you two fret,” John went on. “The pack as well as the tribe, want to get involved. Many hands make light work, so you’re not going to be doing it all, yourselves. I think everyone wants to take part in celebrating the tribe’s oldest bachelor finally taking a mate.”

I felt my face heat up in humility, as everyone looked on me like an exciting change had come.

“Let’s not just stand here, let’s get her things in from the truck.” Unka organized. “Now Jessica, as the men bring in your boxes, you wait inside with me and tell us where you want everything.”

Then I watched the males in the shapes of Flint, John, Mark and Sean obey her command by streaming out the front door.

I saw that although the Lokoti had their established roles of men and women; women were by no means trodden on. This filled me with relief, as a couple of times I’d been scared by Flint’s sexism. I can’t imagine a Lokoti male ever telling Unka what she could or couldn’t do.

The rest of the afternoon went by with laughter, fun and organizing; and I saw just how far Unka’s influence extended. She had not only decided that I was a friend, but she was kind and mothering in a way, I didn’t find condescending. Whenever somebody was about to put a box somewhere, she halted them and asked me if I wanted it to be moved somewhere else. Then as soon as I had spoken, the males obeyed.

Unka seemed to know exactly what she was doing. As she helped me organize, she’d pause and ask me how I liked my linen folded, or kitchen utensils arranged. I could tell she was trying not to step on my toes, or overrun my house. Instead, she acted like a second-in-command by issuing orders to the men or children, which were requests she received from me.

Once my household goods from Seattle were put away, she sent her husband and eldest home to pick up the food she’d made. While they were gone, I told her my ideas of tiling the bathroom and laundry. She nodded along, envisioning my plans and she especially agreed to the separate shower idea.

When John and Mark returned, they unpacked large Tupperware containers full of cold chicken, slices of ham, potato salad, green salad, bread rolls and butter. We all sat down at the dining table and ate, particularly me since I was so hungry! Also, I felt appreciative towards the older woman for cooking for me on my first night in my new home.

“Thank you so much, Unka.” I said repeatedly, as I spooned some extra potato salad on my plate. “This is delicious!”

“I thought you’d be tired from your journey,” she said understandingly. “I’d prefer not to cook, after driving three days straight.”

“Especially in your condition,” her husband added on.

Their children watched as I also helped myself to a second bread roll, which I slathered in butter. Having an audience made me feel a little self-conscious. Was I making a pig out of myself?

“Um Flint, would you like half of this bread roll?” I offered weakly, although I would have happily eaten the whole thing myself.

“No, you eat up, Jessica.” He put it back on my plate. “Eat as much as you want.”

“You are eating for two.” His best friend agreed. “And the food is all yours, since we’re leaving the leftovers behind.”

“Really?” My expression perked up, giving away my delight.

“Women who carry the young of a Lokoti Werewolf, always eat more than women who are mated to human males.” Unka declared. “Just you wait until the cravings start.”

Right as she said that, I'd picked up the potato salad again to put even more on my plate.

"I think they already have." John chuckled and soon he was joined by the rest of the table.

"Whoops," I blushed and put the container down again.

But then Flint picked it up, recommenced with my serving and then he did the same for himself. Next, he picked up the chicken and lastly, the ham. As he picked up his fork to eat his second large helping, he passed me a wink.

"Don't ever feel bad about eating, Jessica." She giggled. "Because your Lokoti Werewolf husband is always gonna eat more than you."

I became further acquainted with the bathroom when I had a leisurely, long, hot shower. Using the wall to lean on, I climbed out of the tub before proceeding to the sink to brush my teeth. By the time I exited, a cloud of steam billowed out behind.

Wearing my flannel, yellow pajamas, I walked in to find Flint reading in bed. He was perusing the pages by his bedside lamp. But I could tell he was waiting for me, for as soon as I came in, he put his book aside before pulling back the covers, to welcome me.

Instead of lying down beside, I climbed into his lap to straddle him. Then my hands ran up and down his bronzed, bare chest. He smiled softly with his dark eyes looking particularly warm.

"Flint...?"

"Yes, Jessica?"

This made me smile, the way he always said my name in full. It also made me ask something else instead of what I had been wanting to. "Why don't you ever call me 'Jess'?"

"I like your full name." He said simply.

"Everyone else back in Seattle calls me Jess, but you and the Wisetail's, call me Jessica."

"Do you prefer, 'Jess'?"

"I don't mind, I was just wondering."

"Jessica is a very pretty name." He said fondly.

I tittered back, "I like your name, too. It's very natural sounding... like a scene stolen from nature."

Then teasingly, I brushed his lips with mine which I could tell he also liked, by the way he gripped tighter onto my waist.

I pulled back to ask my next question. "Flint...?"

"Yes?"

"How and when did John and Unka, get together? She looks so much older than him, does he have a 'cougar' fetish?" I joked.

"John's actually twenty years older than Unka."

My mouth fell open in surprise, "you're kidding me!"

"No," he chuckled. "But outsiders think it's the other way around, because of our slower aging process."

"You mean the Lokoti Tribe's slower aging process, or a Lokoti Werewolf's?"

“A Lokoti Werewolf’s.”

I sighed as I momentarily looked away, to stare at what would come to be called ‘my side of the bed’. I mused, “it answers the question why I originally thought you were 39 years old.”

He said optimistically, “but it’s a good thing that I’m much older than you.”

This made me give a funny look, “why?”

“A Lokoti Werewolf can live for two hundred years.” He explained. “If you should die before me, I won’t be left alone for years until I join you, in the next life.”

My hands rested on his warm chest as I examined the earnest expression on his face.

I tried to joke again, “yeah but you can marry another, ‘young bit of stuff’, when I’m gone.”

“No,” he said unhappily.

“No?”

“Just as the mating process is for life, we mate once and never again.” He frowned. “If anything happened to you, I would mourn you all my remaining years.”

“Oh.” I sat up straighter, in further surprise. “So if I got hit by a truck tomorrow -”

“Then I would be alone for the rest of my life, starting tomorrow.” He interrupted. “Now let’s talk about something else.”

The idea clearly disturbed him, so he comforted himself by holding his new wife closer.

I felt his large hands slip under my pajama shirt, to stroke the skin underneath. Then my right hand caught a wisp of his long, black hair and playfully, I tickled his face with it. It made him guffaw quietly, as his hands moved up and down, under my clothes.

After a long moment, I had to ask because the curiosity was killing me; “why would you remain alone, if something happened to me?”

His dark gaze met and held mine; “the same reason why you shake, when we’re apart.”

I remembered, “because mating is a biological and empathic joining?”

“Yes.”

“Is this the same for the other Lokoti Werewolves?”

“Yes.”

“So if Unka dies before John...”

“He will live out the rest of his life, alone.”

My face screwed up, “that does sound depressing, let’s talk about something else.”

Flint was more than happy to, although we didn’t have much more discussion. Instead, he switched off his lamp and then lay lower in the bed, whilst ensuring I remained on top. As such, I found myself lying over him, basking in the heat coming off his body. The hypnotizing rocking of his chest slowly rising and falling with his steady breathing, lulled me into a relaxed state.

Sleepily, I yawned out; “g’night, Flint.”

“Sweet dreams, Jessica Riverclaw.”

TO: christine_steel@smartfinancestrategies.com

FROM: jessicariverclaw@warmmail.com

SUBJECT: The Quiet Life

DATE: 30/ 10/ 1999

Dear Chris and Fritz,

I hope you two are getting along better, back in Seattle. Sorry Chris, about Fritz scratching up your furniture. I don't think he hates you as he always used to love your visits. Maybe he's marking his territory, in his new surroundings? Give him time, and soon you'll have a warm, little, purring machine, sleeping soundly on the end of your bed.

My house isn't chaotic anymore with all the renovations done. It was completed in two weeks, thanks to the help we received from our friends and neighbours. I think I mentioned in my last email, Flint took another two weeks off work, to do the house? But his best friend John Wisetail did the same, so the two could work together. He and his wife Unka, also came shopping with us in Fairbanks when we bought the new couches and electric stove/ oven. What we couldn't fit in the back of Flint's pick up, they kindly put in theirs.

John is a plumber by trade but he and Flint are also handymen. I love John and Unka's sense of humour, especially when they tease Flint. They always call him 'the old bear' and when they were renovating, I'd hear:

"Flint, we can't tile the new shower recess yet, until I put the pipes, taps and shower head in. Now hold your horses and go make us some coffee."

"Then put the pipes and taps in, so I can tile my new shower."

"You can't see straight since you got married, you old bear. It's a good thing you've got me, helping you. You'd tile the entire bathroom before realizing you forgot the plumbing! What's Jessica supposed to do, stand in a cubicle with no water and pretend to wash herself?"

Unka and I were sitting at the table, drinking coffee and munching on some cookies she'd made; and we burst out laughing when we heard that!

I think you'll love the bathroom and laundry when you come up. I chose terracotta-red tiles for the floor, to go with the wooden floors of the house. Then on the walls, there are slate-grey tiles so it's keeping to the rustic, country style. The couches are a navy blue material to go with the dark red curtains. By the fireplace is a bear-skin rug we purchased off somebody in the tribe who makes them, as well as suede jackets made from either caribou or moose hide.

Flint bought me one and it looks authentic, complete with tassels and the odd bead work. It's very warm as it's lined with fur. I'll take you to see them when you visit, if you'd like one to take back to Seattle. They also make fur-in-lined, suede boots, which are also water proof and guaranteed to stave off frost bite.

It's already snowed a couple of times, usually at night. The snow melts during the day, but with the daylight getting shorter, reminds us that winter is coming. We have a fire burning every night and we've put radiator heaters in the bathroom, main bedroom and the two smaller bedrooms. You'll be warm and cosy, I promise.

You'll also enjoy Flint's cooking, as well as Unka's. Funnily enough, you'll have the chance to sample the rest of the tribe's culinary expertise too. I don't blame Unka, John or Flint since the secret that I'm a bad cook, has come out. But the tribe's people keep paying me in food – LoL! Our fridge and freezer almost always has Tupperware

containers full of casseroles, pasta bakes, stroganoff or something that someone has brought over.

What happened was, people heard from Unka that I know my way around computers, and I was experienced in organizing events. At the end of the first week when she came over for coffee and cake (which she made), she brought somebody with her. The woman wanted to organize a birthday party for her 8 year old daughter, with a fairy theme since she was obsessed with them. The mother couldn't buy what she needed in Alma, so I showed her how to look up places online in Fairbanks or Anchorage, which she could order from. I helped organize a fairy costume for the birthday girl, as well as a pink, glittery, themed party.

It took us the whole afternoon ordering online using my laptop, as well as phoning a couple of places. But the mother was so appreciative, the very next day she returned with a massive Tupperware container full of caribou casserole! It was delicious too, with lots of herbs and the meat was so tender, you hardly had to chew on it. I ended up dividing it into several smaller containers to put in the freezer, to eat during the week.

The party was a success and word got round. Sometimes when I'm picking up milk from the general store on tribal lands, or shopping in the supermarket in Alma, I'm approached. An older Lokoti will say they just got a new computer but they don't know how to set it up. I'd go over and set up the desktop, along with their printer/ scanner and show them how to use the internet, email, photocopy, scan, send attachments, fax, print etc. Then the next day, the person will turn up on my doorstep, with a meal they cooked up.

I met the council of Lokoti Tribal Elders when they asked for my help in organizing a tribal celebration in the Meeting Hall. Then a couple of days later, one of the Elder's called by with smoked salmon... Mmm, authentic, fresh, smoked salmon! A couple of the families in the tribe make it and it tastes so much better than that what we used to buy in the supermarket. Once you try it Chris, you may not want to leave!

I only do these things one or two days a week, otherwise, my life could be called very quiet. Every couple of days, Flint will get a lift with somebody in the tribe he works with, so I can use his truck. However, I like to go grocery shopping in Alma with Unka because we chat so much, it turns into a social event. She'll pick me and drive me into town with her, with us sometimes grabbing lunch in Charlie's Bar, beforehand.

Often, I'll go walking. The first couple of times, Flint took me to show me more of the community centre. Just outside the residential area, are the Holy Grounds which have the three Sacred Totems. My husband would point out the painted and carved animals and tell me stories, which explained their importance. Now I like to walk by myself whilst listening to my Walkman. There's a dirt path that runs from my house, through the woods to the river. The water is such a dark blue colour, it's meditative to just sit by the side and stare at the currents. Then with the breath-taking backdrop of the mountainous peaks of the Alaska Range, I feel like I'm inside a postcard.

At first it felt surreal, not going to work five days a week. Then my body felt like it let out a huge sigh of relief, as the tension in my shoulders slipped away. It's relaxing not having to worry about meetings, presentations, reports, invoices or moody bosses. It's almost like I can do whatever I want, whenever I want. If I want to go shopping for clothes for me or the baby, I do the 1.5 hour drive to Fairbanks. If I want to chat, I drop in on the Wisetail's. Flint's incredibly easy going too, we hardly ever argue. He likes to

read and I like to send emails, surf the net or blog, so often our evenings are filled with comfortable silence.

Thanks for sending me those DVD's by the way, I enjoyed the movies. I watched a couple of them with Unka one evening when our husbands were out. You see, Flint and John are members of something of a 'club' per se. There's a group of 15 men, who follow this kind of tribal custom of hunting altogether on a full moon. The males are the tribe's strongest and fastest and with their keen hearing and smell, they hunt large animals in the National Park. The first time it happened, Unka came over to keep me company and we made popcorn and it turned into a movie night. The second time, I went to her house and played board games with her and her kids.

Another member of this 'club' is the tribe's Medicine Man. Although he hasn't gone to medical school, he has this uncanny knack of accurately diagnosing illness. He always knows my sugar level without the blood tests. His name is Philip and he comes by every two weeks to check how the pregnancy is affecting my diabetes. Yes, you read that right Chris, a 'doctor' that goes to see the patient, instead of the other way around.

He recommended that I visit a GP in Fairbanks to get a new prescription, since my dosage of insulin had to be changed. When I did, the doctor who did go to medical school, verified what he had said and wrote out the script. I think he knew him, as he told me how he was amazed that Philip always knew exactly what was wrong with the patients he sent to him.

Well that's about it for now. Before you pay for your airfare, look up flights that go to Fairbanks instead of Anchorage, as it's closer. Flint's also looking forward to your visit next month, as he's told all our friends. I think Unka is planning on having us over for dinner during your stay.

Give Fritz a tickle under the chin for me,
Love Jess.



30th May, 2000

Two weeks ago, David Emanuel Riverclaw entered the world. It was a home birth, since the labour was so short there wasn't time to drive to Fairbanks' hospital. But it was also a difficult birth and I'd have to say the most painful experience of my life.

Everything happened suddenly; Flint and I were at the Wisetail's for lunch when I got my first contraction. After the second, my water broke and drenched the seat of my husband's truck. When we arrived home, the Medicine Man arrived shortly after us, having been called.

Flint carried me into the bedroom and then followed the instructions issued by Philip. Every single towel in the house was used to try to soak up the blood. But I didn't care about the linen, with the excruciating contractions.

Outside of the bedroom I heard voices which belonged to John and Unka, who came to offer their help. Unka turned into my midwife, with Philip as my physician and Flint as my birthing partner. John busied himself by carting off the soiled to the laundry, before

fetching new towels or sheets. My husband sat behind me on the bloodstained bed, rubbing my back or holding my hands.

“Breathe deeply, Jessica.” He tried to soothe. “Your heart is racing and your puffing is too shallow.”

“I don’t care about the fucking breathing exercises,” I growled back. “I just want this kid out of me!”

“If you keep breathing the way you are now, you’ll hyperventilate.” Unka frowned.

“C’mon Jessica, breathe deeply with me.” Flint instructed. “Hee hee, hoo hoo. Hee hee, hoo hoo.”

Philip passed a concerned look to his makeshift assistant, “her blood sugar is dropping which is why she’s feeling weak. She needs a glass of juice to bring her energy back up.”

Immediately, she left the bedroom and when she brought back the beverage, I swear a glass of cold apple juice, never looked so good! However, my hands trembled terribly when I tried to drink, so Flint had to hold the glass for me. I was even in a worse condition than the first day we met.

After two hours of agony, bearing down, bloodstained towels and sheets; a bloodied baby appeared in Phillip’s hands which were between my parted legs.

“He’s here!” Unka beamed down. “Your son is here!”

The Medicine Man cut the umbilical chord and then passed the newborn to the older woman, to clean up.

Then he looked from me, to my husband with a serious expression. “As we proceed with the afterbirth, we need to slow down her heart rate and stabilize her blood pressure.”

I wasn’t sure why he looked at Flint when he said that. As if he could do something, my husband held me closely as he gazed upon my sweaty face. His dark brown eyes looked full of love, which shone outwards.

“Jessica Riverclaw, you can relax now.” He spoke softly in his deep voice. “You did good. Our son is here and soon you can meet him. But right now, I need you to concentrate on my heart beat. Can you do that for me, Jessica? Can you feel it beating out of my chest and into yours?”

Since my back was resting against his chest, I could indeed. I recognized he was talking in his soothing manner, which put me into a relaxed state all those months ago that day he drove me to Anchorage. I felt his chest rise and fall with his steady breathing, the same rhythmic movement which lulls me to sleep, every night. His eyes never left mine, so I could see them begin to glow turquoise, with the black pupils disappearing.

“No harm will come to you as my mate.” His changed voice rumbled out like distant thunder. “Now drink and heal.”

Flint had put a gash in his wrist again, which was being pressed against my parted lips. His glowing turquoise eyes held mine, as I sipped. I sensed what he was trying to do, impart both his will and his life force onto his mate.

“Good...,” Philip’s voice sounded far away, “...her heart rate and blood pressure, are slowly returning to normal.”

“But wait,” I heard Unka say unhappily, “look at how much blood that’s come out with the afterbirth.”

“I know.” He replied, gravely. “She shouldn’t conceive again, it’s just too dangerous.”

Soon afterwards I fell asleep, or perhaps I passed out? All I remember, was waking up when it was dark and feeling a lot cleaner. The sheets on the bed had also been changed with no sign of blood anywhere.

Flint walked into the bedroom in new clothes, holding our 'bundle of joy'. The babe which was wrapped in a blanket, looked tiny in his large hands and arms. The gentle giant carefully sat on the bed beside, so he could pass me our child.

"This is David Emanuel Riverclaw?" I looked on, in awe.

"This is our son," my husband put his arms about the both of us.

Momentarily, I looked away from his cute little pink face, into the larger and mature one of Flint's.

"I overheard what Philip said, before I fell asleep..." I began.

"Yes?"

My throat constricted but I forced out; "...is it true, that our first child will be our only child?"

"Yes."

"Oh Flint, I'm so sorry -"

"Sssshhhh!" He held me closer, by pushing my head against his chest. "There will be none of that, Jessica Riverclaw."

"But -"

"You and my son are alive and well, how can I find fault with that?"

"But you were hoping for more children." I sniffed disappointedly.

"It was a difficult birth and I would not risk your life to put you through it again. Remember, we are mates and this process happens once in our lifetime. I would not risk losing you, nor would my body. It will change, so not to impregnate you again."

"What do you mean, your body will change?"

He looked like he was trying not to laugh at my curious mind, which was still so full of questions, even now. Instead, he ducked his head to tenderly run his nose along my forehead before planting a kiss there. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath, inhaling his attractive pheromones and relishing his body heat. Then together, our attention returned to the baby.

My eyes filled with tears as I stared at this little miracle, which we had created. I found it ironic, with all the time and effort that goes into preparation and presentation of events; here was the crowning achievement and he was created by accident. Oh what a story we would have to tell him, one day...

About the author:

K.R. Smith is writing the sci-fi, paranormal romance novels called The Circulate Series. This novella is flashbacks of family history, a story within a story. For information or to read more about the Lokoti Werewolves, please visit <http://onaya3.blogspot.com/>. Thanks for reading and I hope you enjoyed the tail ;-)

The Circulate Series

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* The glowing turquoise eyes on the cover, were created by Isabel de Sequera; the graphic artist of The Circulate Series.

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