

**EMERGENCE**

(A Story of Romance, Peril, and Vampires)

by

Eileen Sheehan

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Notice: This book may prove too graphic, sexually explicit, or violent for the sensitive reader. It is intended for mature readers.

NOTE: This book contains a sneak peek at "For Love of a Vampire" by Eileen Sheehan at the end.

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## PROLOGUE

Salem 1692

Kira's legs worked hard to forge her slight body down the narrow, snow laden deer path that took her from her family's cottage to the nearby village of Salem. She'd managed to slip away from home just as the sun peeked over the horizon. If all went well, she'd be back in her room before the family expected to see her rise and none would be the wiser.

She was determined to meet the ship that was arriving. Not only would the village be abuzz with news of her homeland, but, with the recent change in weather, ships would be far and few between after this; at least until the spring. If her package wasn't on the ship, then she doubted she'd see it until the thaw; which would be too late.

It was five years since her family fled England after her grandfather died and a vicious land battle between siblings ensued.

The Donnelly family was a warring family from its core. Not a day went by, when the old man was alive, without a fight breaking out between the three brothers. Their sister, Colleen, kept out of it - for the most part - , but there were times when she'd give just as good as the next guy. Angus Donnelly blamed it on a family curse. Perhaps it was. Kira didn't rightly know. All she did know was that she was awoken in the night and shuffled onto a ship to avoid being slaughtered by her father's younger brother, Richard.

The weakest of the three, Ned Donnelly managed to keep his status within the family structure because he was the oldest. According to law, he was to inherit the entire estate and family fortune. His father left a letter asking that Ned see his way to providing land and money enough to each of his siblings to allow them a decent livelihood. Since Ned wasn't a greedy man, and the estate was an affluent one, he fully intended to honor his father's wishes.

Unfortunately, his brother, Richard, - who was next in line should something happen to Ned- was determined to have it all. On more than one occasion over the three short months since his father died, he'd plotted against Ned's life. Lady Luck smiled on Ned and each attempt was thwarted by some strange occurrence. This only made Richard all the more determined.

Word reached her parents' ears about Richard hiring a professional assassin to eliminate their entire family just in time for them to escape in the middle of the night with their lives and whatever moneys was in the coffer. Fortunately, it was enough to give them a comfortable start in the new land; far from his warring family and the constant threat of death.

With the exception of Kira, the Donnelly family took to their new home quickly. Within the year they were settled on a small estate just south of Salem, where her father farmed and participated in the political dealings of the community. Kira was the only family member who missed her homeland and the lifestyle it provided. Mary Donnelly kept busy with her homemaking as well as the community sewing circle once a week. Kira's brother, James, became an

apprentice at the village print shop. Only Kira seemed unable to take her thoughts off what they were forced to leave behind and embrace what they now had.

The only thing that even remotely pleased Kira was the prospect of being married to Jasper Cunningham. Next to the Donnellys, the Cunningham family was the most affluent family in Salem. Kira and Jasper were thrown together often in an attempt by their parents to get them to like each other in hopes of an amiable match. Not that such a liking was needed in an age where families arranged marriages in accordance to status and profit for all parties involved; especially the parents.

When her mother confided in her that her father was discussing her marriage to Jasper, Kira's first thoughts were that she would be able to travel back to England and away from the primitive life that was forced on her. It didn't matter that she cared little for Jasper. Marriage to him offered freedom. That was enough.

Another bonus in being wed to Jasper was the fact that his family were not die-hard puritans, as was the majority of Salem. Living amongst so many puritans was the most difficult for Kira, who was forced to cease her practice of herbal remedies for risk of being labeled a witch. That year alone, more than twenty young girls were hanged after being accused of witchcraft.

It was scary times in Salem.

The thought of being able to freely walk in the woods and collect herbs for medicinal use once she'd returned to her homeland kept her insides excitedly smiling even if her outside was forced to maintain a calm and pious expression.



Her parents didn't know it, but she'd kept private contact with her mother's sister, Margaret, who also lamented over Kira having to live in such primitive conditions. Margaret promised to send cloth and sketches of the most recent styles of society. Kira wanted to make new dresses for herself and her mother in time for the Christmas celebration. It was to be a surprise.

She'd expected the cloth to be on the ship that docked several weeks ago, but it came and went with no sign of a package from Aunt Margaret. If she had to wait much longer, she feared she'd have no time to sew both dresses in secret during the hours she'd manage to steal away from curious eyes. Not to mention the fact that she'd have to attend the village Christmas celebration in an old frock that Jasper saw her in more times than she cared to admit. With a potential marriage at stake, she wanted to do all she could to make herself appealing to him.

She'd heard a rumor that Izabelle Summers' father was also speaking to Jasper's father about marriage. They weren't as wealthy a family, but she happened to know that Jasper found Izabelle pleasing to the eye. She couldn't have that wench outshine her. She had to have a new dress for Christmas. The cloth just had to be on the ship.

She approached the slippery docks with caution. There was a bad storm two days past and the docks were coated with ice, making footing precarious. The wise thing to do would be for her to wait in the comfort of the dock's caretaker's hut until the goods were unloaded, but she was far too anxious for that.

She pulled her cloak tighter and huddled against the bitter cold while doing her best to stay out of the way of the seaworthy men.

“D’ye await a letter again?” asked a swarthy sailor as he limped past her. A large trunk burdened his shoulder, causing him to slump so low Kira replied to his tattered hat and greasy hair instead of his face.

“Nay,” she said with a voice that sounded far more confident than she was. Being amidst a group of men who lacked proper etiquette and were without female companionship for months was something her mother warned her about years ago. She knew the risks, but, since Margaret’s cloth was a secret, she didn’t dare ask her brother to escort her. Had she done so, the entire village would have known her business within an hour. “I seek a package from Lady Margaret Templeton.”

“Mayhap ye should wait in the keeper’s hut,” he muttered as he continued walking by. “’Tis no place for a young lass.”

“He speaks truth,” said a voice that reverberated so deep she could have sworn it came straight from the ocean. “This is no place for a young lady; especially one as lovely as ye are.”

Kira’s nerves practically lept free of her body from the impact of the energy the stranger emitted. It wasn’t the fact that he was tall – well over six-feet - or the fact that he possessed dark eyes that seemed to look right through her flesh and settle on her soul. It was his energy; plain and simple.

She stepped back as he approached. He extended his hand while an offer to escort her safely to the caretaker’s hut formed on his thin lips.

Instinct told her that she'd be in more danger with him than with all the sailors put together, although she couldn't explain why. "I am fine, sir, but I thank ye."

Her words had no impact as the man continued toward her. Kira frantically surveyed the dock in hopes that someone might come to her rescue as he reached out and gently took her arm.

"I am fine, truly," she insisted.

"Aye, let the lass stay as she is. I shall be free in a moment to help her with her needs," sneered a black toothed passerby.

"My point, exactly," the man said with a cocked brow.

Her flesh crawled, and she shuddered at the sailor's innuendo. She didn't hesitate in relenting to her rescuer's wishes, heaving a sigh as she allowed him to escort her to the hut. All the while craning her head to inspect each laden shoulder that passed them as the sailors and dock workers continued to unload the ship.

As he deposited her at the doorstep of the hut, the stranger bowed low, took her gloved fingers in his hand, and said, "Lord, Malcolm Jameson, at thy service."

Kira curtsied in response. "Kira Donnelly."

"A pleasure," he said with a broad grin and dancing eyes that were so dark they blended with his black coat and hat. "Had I known the new world possessed such beauty, I would have come much sooner."

She could feel the heat rising in her cheeks as she lowered her eyes. She hadn't heard such elegant flirting since they left England. Where she took such complements for granted in her younger years,

her twenty-year-old ears hadn't heard such elegance in some time. She clung to them like a child to a candy stick.

"Ye blush," he said softly as the tips of his long well-manicured fingers turned her face toward him.

His touch felt icy cold, but then, it was freezing weather and he wore no gloves.

She gasped at his liberties and stepped back. "Ye are too bold, sir."

His worldly and seductive eyes bore into her innocent emerald green ones with such potency she felt immobilized.

"My sincerest apologies," he finally said as he released his mesmerizing hold on her and bowed low once more. "I know not what possessed me to act in a manner no better than the sailors I strove to protect ye from. Please forgive my foolishness. I shall leave ye now."

Her chest tightened with panic as he straightened his tall, lean form and turned to leave. She had no idea why, but she suddenly couldn't bear the thought of being separated from this mysterious, dark stranger.

"Please, sir," she said with urgency as she reached for his arm to stop him from leaving. "Ye were just being kind. I beg ye forgive my rudeness."

His face lit up with something that Kira could only equate to the look of a satisfied predator. With silent grace, he offered her his elbow. She took it without hesitation and allowed him to lead her away from the docks. All thoughts of marriage to Jasper or Aunt

Margaret's package were abandoned. Her only desire was to remain in this man's company, no matter what the cost.

They strolled to the edge of the village, not far from the path she'd taken from her father's farm. Her footing faltered at the sight of the path. Fear of being escorted home by him flitted through her before she remembered that he was new in town and would have no idea where she lived.

"Might I ask where thee take me?" she said in a sweet, almost trancelike voice after they'd bypassed the path and continued toward a remote and abandoned trapper's hut an easy mile from the village.

"Dost thy tire?" he asked. "We shall stop in this little hut and ye shall rest."

"Nay, sir," she said with confidence. "My legs are strong."

"Hmm," he murmured in a distracted manner as his eyes combed their surroundings. "We shall stop, none-the-less."

She obediently allowed him to lead her into the hut, all the while wondering what it was about him that made her throw caution and all of her mother's warnings to the wind like she was doing. The hut was missing a few wallboards, but, for the most part, it provided a reprieve from the bitter winds she'd been trekking through since she'd left home at dawn.

She surveyed the hut for its contents. There was a wooden table, a stool, a platform bed with a musty straw mattress still on it, a cauldron near the fireplace, and a few tin eating utensils.

"I thought this place abandoned," she said with surprise. "It shows signs of recent use."

"'Twill serve our needs," he mused, more to himself than to her.

“I am sorry, sir. I do not understand. Ye say, ‘Our needs’?” she asked; her nervousness suddenly returning.

“Indeed” he said as he removed his coat, hat, and waistcoat. “Lie down on the mattress.”

“Pardon?” she practically screeched as she nervously inched toward the door.

“Ye are a maiden, are ye not?” he asked firmly.

“Sir! Ye should not ask such things,” she gasped with clear offense.

“Either ye answer or I shall check for myself,” he said with a dark scowl. “Are ye a maiden?”

She looked at him with fear and bewilderment and slowly nodded.

“’Tis what I thought. Now, please lay down on that bedding,” he said in a voice so monotone he could have been ordering a dish of stew at the inn.

“I fear ye have the wrong girl, sir,” she said as she rushed for the door.

The speed in which he was upon her shocked her into submission. Stunned, she gave him minimal resistance when he pulled her to the cot and lowered her onto the musty straw mattress. His eyes bore into hers as he lifted her skirts and adjusted her body into a position that allowed him to fit his slim form between her slender thighs. Her mind shouted for her to resist... to put up some type of fight... but her body felt frozen.

“I am sure ‘tis not what ye desired for thy first time with a man,” he said apologetically, “but, I assure ye that ye shall thank me for it later.”

She wanted to scream, but all she could manage was a muffled gurgle deep in her throat as he took his slender fingers and massaged the sensitive nub in her apex. She tensed as she resisted the foreign sensations he was creating. She wanted to close her eyes to hide her shame, but he held her in some form of trance with his own. Her abdomen contracted as moistness formed between her legs and a feeling like she might explode from the inside out overtook her. Her hips gyrated as if they had a mind of their own and he smiled.

“Good. I feared ‘twould take much longer to prepare ye,” he said before he rammed himself deep into the folds of her core and proceeded to seek his own satisfaction.

The shock of his actions lasted far longer than the pain. To her surprise – and horror- it actually began to feel good. She tried to stop her body from responding, but to no avail. Her hips encouraged his every move as they rose to meet his and the muscles tightened as if to prevent him from escaping. His roar filled her ears as his seed filled her womb.

He slowly pulled away from her, releasing his hold on her body as he did. His focus was now on the virgin blood that oozed out onto the dirty straw mattress.

With his eyes no longer keeping her in a subdued state, she was free to move. Yet, she simply lay and stared at the ceiling while her mother’s words of warning haunted her. What was she thinking?

Now, she was ruined. Jasper would never marry her, and she would never get out of this barbaric land.

She was so engrossed in her own sorrow that she barely noticed when he buried his head between her legs and began to lick the blood from her flesh. When the realization of his actions finally hit her, the thought of asking him his reasoning entered her mind, but quickly fled when she felt a piercing pain as he sunk his teeth deep into her inner thigh.

She pulled at his hair while frantically struggling to squirm free, but he held her leg with a vice grip while he sucked at the blood that was spurting with enough speed from the piercings in her flesh to make her fear for her life. Did this man rape her only to drain her of her blood? She'd learned of vampires in fairy tales, but never considered them to be real.

Her mind pondered the idea that Lord Malcolm Jameson might actually be a real vampire until the world went black.

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"Ye were supposed to kill them, not turn them!" shouted an angry man whose voice sounded terribly familiar to Kira's foggy mind. She felt odd, but in a way she couldn't explain. It took her a moment to remember that she'd foolishly followed a strange man from the docks to a trapper's hut and was raped and drained of a good deal of blood as a result.

"She was far too beautiful to kill," said the voice she recognized as that of her rapist. "I have a mind to keep her for myself."

"That was not our deal!" the angry man bellowed.



A wicked laugh escaped her rapist as he said in a voice that resembled a wolf's snarl, "I make and keep deals as I see fit."

"I desire my coin be returned," demanded the irate man.

"Really now?" said the rapist.

"I warn thee, Jameson, I am no one to toy with," the angry man said.

"No doubt, Donnelly," he said in a taunting tone.

At the mention of her surname, Kira's eyes flew open. She was now able to put a name to that familiar voice. It was none other than her wicked uncle Richard Donnelly; the man responsible for forcing her to leave her beloved England and live in this primitive land.

She was surprised at the power involved in her springing from the mattress. She was filled with energy and rage. She wanted nothing more than to break her rotten uncle's neck. Something told her that, if she truly wanted to, she'd succeed. She took a moment to weigh her emotions and decide what to do.

She looked around the small hut as her uncle stared back at her with open horror and her rapist with a smug smile.

"Ah, I see ye have awoken; my pet," the rapist said as he moved toward her.

She backed away from him, vowing he'd touch her no more. She felt powerful enough to fight him off now. She didn't know why. She just knew that she could if she wanted to.

"Ye shall touch me no more," she hissed.

"There was good reason for what I did," Lord Jameson said as he slowly moved toward her. "I took thy maidenhead prior to turning ye. It has been my experience that when a woman is turned vampire

with her maidenhead intact, it can be quite disconcerting and, well, a nuisance for both parties. Vampires are highly sexual. I did what I did as an act of kindness to we both.”

A ‘humph’ escaped her as she turned her attention to her uncle and snarled, “Ye are the reason I was dragged to this land and forced to live amongst farmers and savages.”

“Show some respect for thy elders, wench,” Richard hissed as he reached out to slap her face.

She grabbed his wrist in a vice grip and pulled him close. She acted by instinct rather than thought when she pulled him to her with lightning speed, lowered her fangs, and sank them deep into the jugger vein of his neck. His screams were loud and wild as he struggled to free himself. He pummeled at her head with his fist and managed to loosen her enough for blood to spurt into her face. She snarled and dug her fangs even deeper into his willing flesh. Her uncle’s struggled grew weaker until he lay limp in her arms. She didn’t stop sucking until every last drop of blood was drained from his body.

Lord Jameson leaned against the wall of the hut watching his newly made vampire kill the man who’d contracted him to kill her and her entire family. There was something about her that was different from the others he’d turned. It wasn’t the fact that she was far stronger than he expected her to be. He couldn’t put his finger on it, but he wasn’t worried. He knew it would eventually be revealed to him.

Kira tossed her uncle’s limp body to the floor and wiped at the blood that coated the majority of her face.

“Ye are magnificent,” her rapist said with awe in his voice. “I look forward to the years ahead, my pet.”

“Ye shall spend them without me!” she bellowed as she ran from the hut with a speed so fast that her maker was shocked to discover he couldn’t catch her.

Her first inclination was to head for the safety of her family, but she quickly changed her plans. Even in her newly altered state, she understood the dangers involved with her being in the company of her family. She hated her uncle, true, but sucking the life’s blood from him wasn’t a conscious act. It was done by instinct. She couldn’t chance it happening with someone she loved. There was also the matter of her leading that vile vampire to her family’s doorstep.

She’d gained ground between herself and that monster, but she was very aware that he still chased her. Something had to be done to prevent him from catching up, but what?

Almost as soon as the question entered her mind, the solution followed. With a smile of relief, she raced to the little cottage in the woods where the good witch, Agatha, resided. It was hidden from the majority of Salem’s population for obvious reasons. Kira only learned of Agatha a few years ago when she stumbled upon her cottage while out gathering mushrooms. She’d tripped over some large roots and twisted her ankle. Seeing Agatha outside in her garden, she’d approached her for help.

Kira would never forget the shocked look on Agatha’s face when she approached. Nor the witch’s broad smile that followed as she informed Kira that the only people who were able to see her were

those with witch's blood. It was the first time Kira was made aware of who she truly was.

Kira studied with Agatha on the sly, during which time they became great friends. She trusted the witch and believed in her goodness. If anyone knew how to reverse what just happened to her, it would be Agatha. She could also hide from the vampire behind the witch's shield to give Agatha time to correct the situation.

Although Agatha allowed her entry to her cottage, she shattered Kira's hopes when she sadly shook her head and said she knew of no reversal spell for turning a vampire back into a human. To make matters worse, because the vampire drank of Kira's witch's blood, he would be able to find her little cottage; just as Kira had done a few years earlier. In short, there was no true sanctuary or solution for her there.

Agatha could put up a force field to hold off the vampire, but it would take all of her strength to do it and, since a vampire's strength and stamina far exceeded hers, it would eventually weaken enough for him to break through it.

"There must be something ye can do to help," Kira cried as she paced the large main room of Agatha's cottage. "Look at all the herbs and potions ye have. Can not one of them be of assistance? I feel him getting closer. He will be upon us shortly."

"Vampires live extremely long lives," Agatha said, while wringing her hands nervously. "Mayhap 'tis not such a bad thing."

"I know very little of vampires," Kira muttered as she picked up a garland of garlic, sniffed it, wrinkled her nose, and tossed it far away. "Twould appear some of what I heard is correct. Therefore, I must

assume all is correct. If he catches me, I will be bound to him forever. I cannot abide that. I just cannot.”

“He is thy maker,” Agatha said softly.

“He is also my rapist,” Kira spat.

A loud gasp escaped the witch’s mouth before she snapped it shut and pursed her lips to keep it so. She was aware of the existence of vampires, but had never been exposed to them. She had no idea what to do to help her friend. She understood the bond having sex would create. Witches were known to do the same at times. Although, the sexual ritual a witch used was accompanied by a spell. She could only assume that the drinking of Kira’s blood after having sex with her was the equivalent.

She felt genuine sorrow for the fate of her friend, but was also concerned for her own safety. Kira admitted what she’d done to her uncle without a second thought. Agatha had placed a repelling shield around her body to hide the scent of her own human blood from Kira, just in case. If she was required to use all of her energy to create a force field around her cottage against Kira’s maker, she wouldn’t have the energy to maintain the repelling shield.

She didn’t need Kira to tell her of the nearness of her maker. She could see it in the way her friend and student’s face and mannerisms were altering. It wouldn’t be long before the master vampire would gain control over the young woman and she’d be faced with a decision of what to do. If she was going to do something to prevent it. It would have to be soon. Her eyes quickly scanned the interior of her cottage for a weapon, should she need it. It was then

that she spotted the ancient spell book her grandmother gifted her on her fifteenth birthday and hope sprung forth.

“I can think of only one thing to do to keep ye from his grasp and, possibly, reverse -or at least lessen- the bloodlust ye have,” Agatha said with an anxious tone. “I recall seeing something in this book my grandmother gifted to me. She was a powerful witch.”

“Please hurry,” Kira struggled to say in a voice that echoed with a male tone.

Agatha grabbed the spell book and quickly flipped through the pages while she warily moved away from her friend whose emerald green eyes were displaying flecks of dancing red light.

## ONE

New York City, 2017

“I can’t believe you’re really leaving,” Pricilla pouted as she leaned against the doorframe.

“I’ll be back in time for Thanksgiving dinner,” Edwin said as he closed the zipper on his travel bag.

“What am I supposed to do for the week you’re gone?” she whined.

“Maybe you can take advantage of the time without me to reconnect with some of your friends? I ran into Sally a few days ago and she was complaining that you two never get together anymore. She blamed me for it.” He strode to her and cupped her chin in his hand. “I’ve never tried to keep you from your friends, my love. I don’t like it that they think I do.”

“I’m happy with it being just us. They seem so immature lately,” she said with a scowl. “Their conversation is mundane and frivolous. We’ve just grown apart.”

“When did this happen?” he asked with surprise.

“It’s been a gradual thing,” she replied. “I don’t know how it happened or why. It just did.”

“Never-the-less, I’m getting the blame for it.” He kissed her lightly on the lips. “It takes time and effort to keep friendships alive. Almost as much as it takes to keep love alive. I’m putting in the time and work required to keep my friendship with Mark and Tim healthy, maybe you should follow my example and do the same?”

“You have things in common with them,” she said softly. “You enjoy the same activities. I don’t like what those girls do anymore.”

“Come on,” he said with exasperation. “Are you going to stand there and tell me that you wouldn’t enjoy a little down time with the girls? Go spend a day at the spa or a night out on the town. Do something that’s for your pleasure alone, without having to consider me. It’ll do you good. I’ll even leave you a credit card.”

“I suppose it might be fun,” she mused.

“You are my girlfriend and you mean the world to me,” he assured her as he lightly held her slender upper arms with his strong hands, “but it isn’t healthy for us to constantly be up each other’s ass like we’ve been. I’m taking this hunting trip with my buddies for your sake as well as mine. It’ll be good for all of us.”

Pricilla’s heavy sigh of resignation caused the sides of her plump breasts that were amply displayed in her tight, mohair sweater to lightly graze his wrists. It was all that was needed for an erection to form. He shifted his stance in an attempt to ease the tension that was building up in his jeans. His friends were expected to arrive within the half hour. He really had no time for fooling around. Yet, as hard as he tried, he couldn’t subdue the building pressure in his groin.

Giving in to his body’s demands, he pulled her into a lover’s embrace and kissed her passionately. “Let me give you something to hold you over until I get back,” he whispered huskily when his lips finally released hers.

“I thought you were pressed for time,” she managed to say as he pulled her to the bed.



“I am,” he replied, “but you’re too damned sexy to leave without a proper good-bye.”

A giggle of sheer delight escaped her lips as he playfully shoved her onto her back on the bed and proceeded to raise her sweater and bra to gain access to her abundant breasts.

“You aren’t even going to undo my bra?” she asked with surprise.

“No time or patience, baby,” he replied before he suctioned the broad rim of her nipple into his mouth.

“Really, Edwin,” she said in a weak attempt to admonish him as her body succumbed to his mouth’s ministrations.

He moved from breast to breast while his impatient hands awkwardly removed her jeans and panties. She considered helping him, but thought better of it. The longer it took him to make love to her, the better the chances of his friends leaving without him.

With that thought in mind, she shoved his face from her breasts, wincing just a little at the fact that his mouth refused to release her nipple until it was absolutely necessary. She’d often wondered, by the way he coveted her breasts and the ferocity in which he suckled, if he’d been breast fed by his mother a little longer than necessary. She’d learned of such things in psychology class, but never openly brought it up to Edwin. The last thing she wanted to do was to make him feel uncomfortable in the bedroom. Besides, for the most part, she found it sexy and arousing.

His look of surprise made her smile as she assured him she had no intention of stopping their love making. She just wanted to give him something to remember her by, like he was giving to her.

She got no resistance when she shoved him onto his back and freed his engorged rod from his pants. A low groan escaped him as the warm, moist, softness of her mouth consumed it with a lover's kiss. If he'd been able to see the gleam in her eyes at the victory she thought to be so near, he might have lost his mood for love making. As it was, all thoughts of his friends waiting in the lobby fled as she brought him to erotic heights before demanding that he do the same for her.

He eagerly buried his head in the apex of her thighs to do her bidding. Making love to Pricilla was one of the highlights of his relationship with her. In fact it was the only real reason he stayed with her and professed a love he wasn't sure he truly felt. He worshiped her body as he worshipped nothing else. The way she openly responded to his love making and the feel of her soft, sexy curves far outweighed her selfish, whiny, and oftentimes demanding ways.

Being a well-built, attractive man, Edwin had more than his fair share of girlfriends during the twenty-seven years of his life. None of them compared to Pricilla in the bedroom. Having prim and proper Pricilla eagerly respond to his beck and call whenever he was horny was like having a high paid hooker who was presentable enough to bring home to mama. What more could a man ask for?

It wasn't all sex with him where she was concerned. There were times, when she wasn't whining or complaining about this or that, or demanding to have her way in a childish and spoiled fashion, when he actually found her interesting and fun. Sadly, those times

were getting further and further apart as a result of her incessant pressing for a commitment that he wasn't prepared to make.

His hunting trip would serve multiple purposes. It would give him a long overdue reunion with his two best friends, give him a much-needed break from Pricilla's clinginess, and allow him time to think about whether he should take the next step with her or break things off.

The doorbell began to incessantly ring simultaneously to him slipping into her soft, moist sheath. He increased his speed of motion in order to bring peaking on quickly. She clung to his hips as if trying to slow him down and prolong his ejaculation, but to no avail. Thanks to their foreplay, he was ready for release almost as soon as he entered her.

She lay in quiet dejection as he pulled out of her and ran to the intercom and assured his buddies he'd be down in a flash. After doing a quick wash of his private area in the en suite bathroom, he scrambled into his jeans and shoes, grabbed his coat and luggage, and headed for a door.

As if by afterthought, he returned to the bed where she still lay motionless and gave her swollen lips a quick kiss good-bye.

Although he openly admitted to himself that he stayed with Pricilla mainly for the sex, he still respected her enough to want to shelter her from the crude comments men were capable of. Whether she was present to hear them or not, allowing them to be said seemed unfair and cruel. So, when his friends began to make jests about what he might have been doing with her to keep him from being on time, he lied and said that he was alone in the apartment, but had fallen asleep.

He wasn't fond of lying, but there were times when it was better to lie than to hurt feelings or have an altercation due to disagreements. Sadly, since he'd met Pricilla, he noticed he was doing more lying than he was comfortable with. Yet, another reason to clear his head and think while on the hunting trip.

## TWO

Due to a nor'easter that started just about the time Edwin hopped into the SUV, the normal three-and-a-half-hour drive took almost five hours to reach the cabin in the hills on the edge of the Wachusett Mountain Reservation that belonged to Tim's uncle. Edwin was thankful that Tim was a professional stunt driver and, therefore, fully capable of maneuvering the SUV over slick, snow, and ice laden roads.

Having monitored the weather, they'd deliberately taken Tim's vehicle; with Tim manning the wheel. They'd also stopped and stocked up on provisions to bring with them, rather than pick some up in town after they'd arrived and settled in. Even so, they were surprised and taken aback by the conditions of the road.

"We spend too much time in the city," Mark grumbled as he wiped away the foggy film that accumulated on his window from the heat of his breath and looked out onto the winter wonderland. "I'd forgotten what real roads looked like during a storm."

"The city can get pretty bogged down," Edwin reminded him.

"Yea, but for how long? The plows are out at the first sign of a snowflake in the city. There's not a plow in sight here. No cars either, for that matter. Looks like we're the only idiots out in this shit. It's a wonder you can find the road, Tim."

A boyish grin consumed Tim's face as he assured his pals that he'd driven in far worse than this on more than one occasion for some movie stunt or another. His calm demeanor relaxed his buddies into light conversation to help pass the time away. Before long, they were

discussing their hunting strategy, as well as the size rack they desired on the deer they hoped to get.

The long drive leading to the cabin was barely discernable. Had the sign at the end of it, declaring the property to be private, not still displayed a few letters of the warning message, they might have missed it altogether. Even with four-wheel-drive, they fishtailed their way up the tree-lined, dirt drive until they reached the proud looking log cabin in the middle of a clearing.

“Home sweet home,” Tim said as he shut down the engine.

“For a whole week,” Mark yawned as he opened the passenger’s door and slid out into the darkness. “Shit it’s cold!”

“I don’t care,” Tim said as he eagerly followed suit. “My legs have been folded up for so long, they no longer feel like my own.”

“How were you able to drive, then?” Edwin asked with concern as he slipped out from the back seat.

“It wasn’t easy,” Tim replied as he tested his legs for stability.

“You should have let one of us take over,” Edwin admonished.

“You’d wreck a bike on a summer’s day, and you know it,” Tim teased.

“You have a point,” Edwin said with a grin.

“Can you two girls quit yapping and help me empty the back of this thing, so we can go inside?” Mark barked.

“The ever-impatient lawyer,” Edwin chuckled as he patted Tim on the back and moved to help Mark with the luggage and supplies.

“I’ll bet it’s just as cold inside as it is outside,” Mark complained.

“Geez,” Edwin said with a grin, “So cranky. I hope you brought some tampons with you.”

“Cute, doc. What now? Will you lay me on the couch to analyze me?” Mark growled, not admitting that Edwin’s joke alerted him to the foul mood he’d promised himself he wouldn’t bring along. “Trust me. All I need is time away from the wife. I’m starting to complain like her.”

“Don’t worry, buddy,” Tim said assuredly. “We’ll have you back to your old self in no time.”

“If I don’t freeze to death first,” Mark said with a tone that displayed mild humor mixed with seriousness.

“It shouldn’t be too cold inside,” Tim said. “My uncle leaves the heat between forty and fifty degrees to keep the pipes from freezing.”

“That works for me,” Edwin said as he climbed the steps. He was almost to the top step when he lost his footing and tumbled backward, landing on his back at Tim’s feet.

After a moment of stunned silence on all three friends’ part, Tim bent down to help him up. “Are you alright, buddy?”

“There’s ice on the steps beneath the snow,” Edwin replied.

“Am I mistaken?” Mark asked while he did his best to collect the goods that fell from the bags when Edwin tumbled. “Doesn’t your uncle have a caretaker for this place?”

“He was supposed to have the place set up for us,” Tim said apologetically.

“I get the unexpected dumping of snow, but lights would have been nice,” Mark said as he pulled his cell phone out and used the flashlight to inspect the stairs. “These things are treacherous.”

“I have some salt in the back of the SUV,” Tim said as he hurried to retrieve it.

“Your uncle needs to fire that lazy, son-of-a-bitch caretaker,” Mark called after him. He turned to Edwin. “Are you okay, really?”

“I’m not made of china,” Edwin said with a forced smile. “It’s more my pride than my ass.”

“You landed pretty hard on your back,” Mark pointed out.

“My neck and shoulder blades hurt a bit, but I’ve no doubt I’ll be fine in the morning,” Edwin assured him. “Let’s just get inside and warmed up. It’s frigid out here.”

They managed to get themselves unloaded and set up in the cabin with no more incidents. Within an hour there was a toasty fire in the fireplace and the three of them were warming themselves from the inside out; each with a whiskey in hand.

They were pleased to discover the place had been dusted and aired out. The beds were also freshly made and ready to sink into. Exhausted from the stress of the drive through the storm and the cold that awaited them, they agreed to call it a night and start fresh in the morning.

The cabin was large enough to provide a private bedroom for each of them. Edwin was the first to retire. Happy to discover fresh towels and toiletries in the en suite bathroom, he hopped into the shower and allowed the hot water to warm his bones and soothe his wounded muscles. When he stepped out of the shower and stood before the mirror, he saw signs of serious bruising. He could only imagine the color it would be in the morning.