

Wildly in the Rockies

Chapter six

Falling

Lynne could almost hear the conspiratorial whispers of teenage girls that could be prospective guests in this part of the big house when she transformed the servant's quarters into a dormitory. She explained her plan to Louise as they moved the furniture into a more practical arrangement.

Louise was impressed but not quite sure what it would be like to go away from home with a group of girls her age. She drifted dreamily to the window to absently scan the familiar surroundings of her home.

Suddenly she shook with alarm and pounded her hand on the window as she tried to choke out the words, "T...t...there...there's smo...o smo...o...k..."

Lynne followed her gaze and saw smoke far off between the hills. "Louise! Run and tell your dad. I'll go find Jim."

They plummeted down the narrow stairs at the rear of the big house, pressing against the walls to aid their balance. Louise raced on to the dining hall to find Stefano. Lynne ran toward the ranchhouse.

"Jim! Jim!" Lynne called as she burst into the office through the outside door just as Koyl came out of his bedroom on the other side, buttoning his crisp chambray shirt.

She panicked. Koyl and Margaret were together in the living room a short time ago. Her eyes scanned the room. She didn't see Margaret leave. Was she in Koyl's room now pulling on her own clothes? Lynne's flushed face was not entirely from the exertion of her hasty run.

Her hair cascaded down the front of her shirt and framed her square chin. She caught her breath and nearly choked but the words came out.

"There's smoke up in the hills." She sucked in a deep breath. "Louise spotted it from the third floor." She swung her arm out to indicate the direction. Her breasts heaved with labored breathing under the brown hair that clung to her baggy sweat shirt. She pushed her untied hair behind her ears with her thumbs.

In an instant Koyl's gaze swept down Lynne's image of solid assurance. The nervous concern shown in her eyes did not go unnoticed. He moved to the wall map, put his finger on the location of the big house, traced his finger up

toward the only direction they could view from that side and faced Lynne.

"That's out toward the line cabin," his blue eyes narrowed and his gaze hardened. "Where's Jim? He went looking for you." Koysl strode down the hall stuffing his shirttail into his jeans as he went.

Lynne went up to the big house with Louise shortly after she watched Margaret in Koysl's arms at the ranch house door. She didn't see Jim or anyone else since.

"I don't know. I haven't seen him." Why should Jim come looking for me, she wondered. Then she rushed from the room, following Koysl as he ran toward the bunkhouse, shouting as he went.

Jim and Stefano were racing to the corral where saddled horses tossed their heads and stomped at the sudden noise of running men.

Jim yelled, "I sent Nick and Tom out to clear the fenceline of tumbleweeds. I'm going to check."

Jim rode off at a gallop.

Koysl grasped the top rail of the corral. Barely audible, he spoke to reassure himself, "They can handle controlled burning."

The tools were stored at the line cabin for just that purpose. But the fire could spread into the pine trees and be impossible to control.

Lynne came up beside Koysl and gasped short questions. "What is it? What's wrong? Are you going?"

Koysl's eyes turned to Lynne but at first his glazed look was on some imaginary scene. Then he blinked as he recaptured a lost thought.

"The ranch hands burn tumble weeds at the fence line." His gaze returned to the smoke plume rising above the trees.

Lynne looked toward the same smoke, trying to control her gasping breath.

"They don't usually have trouble." He ran his hand through his hair, still wet from his shower.

Lynne's face was flushed and her breath came in short puffs. "Jim...rode out...in...an awful hurry."

"I guess I will go have a look." Koysl reached for the reins of the nearest saddled horse.

Lynne wanted to see what was going on. She mounted Prince and waited. Unless forbidden, she intended to follow Koysl without an invitation.

Koysl was not surprised to see her astride the blood bay. Jim said she could ride. He mounted quickly and turned his big roan horse to face her.

"Are you coming?" he spoke directly to her. It was more of a command than a question.

He called to Stefano, "Stay here, there is nothing you can do out there."

Lynne didn't anticipate Koyl's asking--much less commanding--her to go along. She reined her horse around, put her heels to its flanks and galloped after him.

Lynne's blood bay followed Koyl's lead as they rode toward the northwest to the first cluster of trees on the hillside above the ranch buildings. The smoke was no longer visible as they rode up into the rolling terrain of tall Ponderosa pines that clustered amongst patches of green spring grass and blossoming greasewood.

Koyl turned off to the north and rode a few hundred yards before he turned to look toward the ranch buildings and pulled his horse to a stop.

"The ranch buildings aren't in danger," he said as he rose in his stirrups and looked around to reassure himself.

"This isn't going to be a raging brush fire where dried undergrowth goes up like gasoline. I've seen it ignite the healthiest sage and rabbit brush. Then the slightest breeze can change the direction of the fire. But a lightning fire is almost always accompanied by a storm driven wind."

Lynne knew Koyl was giving her valuable information. She wondered if she would ever use it.

He looked at her reassuringly, "Unless a strong wind comes up to drive it, the fire won't reach the ranch. Shall we go have a look?."

Lynne was silent beside him. Her eyebrows raised slightly as his eyes met hers.

He pulled his horse to a walk close beside hers and explained, "The grass is green and tender. It won't burn. And the fire can't jump between the few scattered trees here so it won't get to the shelter belt and endanger the buildings." She never saw a range fire but she understood the significance of the dried brush. Wrinkles of confusion formed between her eyebrows as she looked around.

"I don't see any dried bushes here. Are any of those tumbleweeds?" She asked.

"No, there aren't any here. But the Willison ranch over there," Koyl waved his arm to the northwest, "has enough for everyone."

Koyl explained, "Overgrazing destroys the topsoil. Weeds like the Russian thistle--that's the formal name for the tumbleweed--moved in. Its dried skeleton breaks loose and is tumbled by the wind like a ball across open spaces.

"The wind piles the thorny bushes against every thick stand of trees or brush until a another wind tears them loose and tumbles them off in another direction. The line fence stops all that come its way. Jim regularly burns them."

Lynne leaned toward Koyl to stay his rushing off, wanting further

information. "Isn't setting fire dangerous?"

"Burning is the easiest and it destroys the seeds that otherwise are scattered with every move of the dried bushes."

She thought Koyl was only speaking his thoughts out loud, not really talking to her at all, but he did look at her when she spoke.

"I've seen them rolling across fields. I'm not sure what they look like when they're growing," she admitted, wondering with her darting grey eyes if one would materialize among the trees.

"The rosettes on the compact round bush are innocuous looking--almost attractive--but they are spiny and hard. The plants can grow to three feet or more in diameter," he said, turning toward her with arms spread wide to illustrate the size.

"C'mon and see for yourself." He motioned her forward urging her to move ahead. They guided the horses around clumps of greasewood and spiny Hopsage. She let Prince pick his own safe footing.

They rode into a grassy area between a small grove of cottonwood trees and clusters of Ponderosa pines. She kept Prince close to Koyl's horse so she could hear his every word.

The horses threaded their way uphill through the pines, twisting into places that afforded enough space for the two horses nearly side by side. Koyl was noting the relative safety of this area where he had observed the hawks earlier that morning.

Lynne's mount misstepped and she ducked to avoid a low branch. In dodging one she was hit by another that knocked her out of her saddle on Koyl's side of her horse. Sharp hard needles stung her face. She threw up her arm to protect her eyes and grabbed for the saddle horn but came up with air instead. She squeezed her eyes tight and braced herself for a fall.

But she didn't fall.

She was pulled into Koyl's strong arms.

She was afraid to breath.

Koyl pulled her up to his chest and guided her left foot out of the stirrup. He kicked at her horse to move it ahead so her legs wouldn't be pinned and twisted between the horses. He held her tight for a moment. Then he stopped his horse and swung down to the ground holding her with his hands at her waist.

"Lynne...Lynne...are you all right?" he whispered. He called her by her first name. She never heard him do that before. She raised her face and opened her eyes in complete surprise.

"I...I...I...think so." She was shaken and stared dazedly at his beard. Her gaze moved up to his mouth. Then to his eyes. His intense blue eyes. She couldn't risk looking into them. She mustn't let him see how much his

attention meant to her. Her eyelids fluttered closed and her hands clutched at his shoulders to maintain her balance.

Koyl pulled her full length against his own and let her head rest against his shoulder. How fresh her fragrance! Her freshness appealed to him that night in the moonlight. He cupped her head in his hand and tightened his arm about her waist. His chin rested against her temple.

When Koyl's beard touched her forehead, Lynne's arms moved up and her fingers slipped into his hair.

At once she remembered the Vogue model's hands behind his head. Then hers came down as if they were burned.

Koyl set his jaw and let her slowly back up. His questioning eyes bore into hers. Wasn't he simply comforting her? Of course not. He was indulging himself in the pleasure of holding her, smelling her, wanting her. He started to tell her how much.

"What did you expect? I only...you're so..."

"I know what I am. Just leave me alone."

"I kept you from falling. It was you that..."

She reached for Prince's reins. She knew what she did. She held him. She wanted him to kiss her. Surely Koyl could hear her heart pounding. It was deafening in her ears. She put her hand on the horse's neck.

"Are you sure you're all right?" He stood back. He didn't want to give up so easily but she didn't want him to touch her.

She said, "I'm fine," and took the reins, leaning against Prince to raise her foot to the stirrup.

Koyl shrugged. He was not surprised. He was too old for her. He'd better get her back on her horse before he made a complete fool of himself. He'd done that several times before.

He'd better not let a branch get in her way again. He looked from her to the tree above to judge the distance from the branches that might strike her when she mounted her horse. Impatiently he grabbed lowest branch and pulled it out of her way.

The swish of wings carried the hawk away from the tree.

And then he saw it! The nest he had been looking for! The commotion during Lynne's fall alarmed the hawk enough to make it flee from its nest.

Koyl grinned and whooped, "You found it!" He let go of the branch and grabbed Lynne and swung her around.

Lynne was shocked at his sudden enthusiasm. She had no idea what he was excited about. Her gaze followed his to the tree top.

"What did I find?" she asked, her breath expelled with incredible force.

"The nest I spent two days looking for. The nest I need to examine for my report." Koyl was breathless with excitement. He dropped his arms from

Lynne as a guilty look crossed his face.

He stammered a moment and then fumbled at his saddlebags. He pulled out a roll of red plastic tape. He tied short streamers around several branches.

"There. I should be able to find that in the dark," he said as he stepped back to survey the streamers. His mouth disappeared into a hard straight line between his flowing moustache and his well brushed beard. His eyes darted to Lynne and back up at the nest.

Lynne began to understand why Koyl was so excited. This was another episode in the life of one of his birds. And his whole life was built around the lives of birds.

"That will keep," he said and they rode in silence to look at the fire.

Ledd, the muscled skinhead, looked at the fire and it ignited an appalling fear in him for a different reason. He stumbled into the ravine shouting, "Boss, the whole damn woods caught on fire. We're gonna have ta get outta here quick so it don't burn us too." He collapsed against the heavy wooden table to catch his breath.

"Where? How? Oh God, yes, we have to get these babies out of here," the boss agreed in a ferocious rage. Out of his corner vision he saw Herb coming from the direction of the fire. The bastard had been smoking again and the smoke was coming down on their heads. Ledd would have to take care of him before they left.

He gestured angrily at Herb and pointed toward the box of fabricated bombs, "Go put 'em in your car. And don't let anyone see you. Lock 'em in the trunk, then get back here to help with the other pieces."

The boss threw pipe lengths, wire, and other articles into another box. "Hell, we're only half finished."

Herb lifted the heavy box with wise understanding of an experienced explosives-handler and moved quickly out of the camouflaged hideout, knowing it wouldn't be an easy job getting the box to his car. It wasn't any too easy walking to the ravine with his backpack and now a vicious wind whipped dirt into his eyes.

Koyl scowled at the rising wind when he jumped off his horse near the fence. If the brush still held sparks the fire still might be fanned and spread into the pines. He knelt beside the ranch hands.

"What happened? Are you all right?" Tom told him all he knew.

Lynne kept her horse tightly reined. Prince stomped and snorted with the whites of his eyes expressing his fear of the smoke and flames. Koyl's horse was frightened, too. Lynne grabbed its reins and led it away from the

smoke. She could at least be of that much help.

Smoke drifted in sheets and was dissipated by the wind. The men moved about with pitchforks, poking and turning the piles still smoldering by the fence. A man shoveled dirt to smother the embers that glowed in the wind. This burned area was now a barrier that protected the log cabin if the fire raged back on it.

"Everything will be O.K.," Koysl called. He came running up to get his horse.

"It's burning itself out here," Tom agreed, "but it may go farther on Willison's dry brush."

"We can't stop it from getting to that cluster of pines but it won't go beyond them. The ground's too bare."

The wind fiercely pushed the fire from one tree to another away from the fence in a ferocious effort to sweep across the parched Willison ranch.

Lynne watched in fascinated horror as the fire consumed the needles off one huge Ponderosa pine in seconds before moving on to the next. Then with the wild irony of a mountain storm, the direction of the wind changed and became an insurmountable barrier to the very flames with which it had conspired to feed just minutes before.

After the fire at the fence was contained, the smoke drifted away. The horses grazed beyond the smoke, tethered by their dangling reins, ears attentive to the action but no longer frantic.

Lynne mounted, turned Prince, and watched Koysl ride off into the trees behind the cabin.

Koysl didn't invite her to follow as he moved his horse forward quickly, as if certain of his destination.

She expected him to go back to the ranch so she followed him confidently. She began to doubt his destination when he made his own trail around the rocky basalt outcroppings and high widespreading greasewood that filled the open spaces between the pines.

She was aware of the hard wind although it had little force in the deeply wooded bushy area where she followed Koysl. The tree tops bent in the wind and muffled the sound of the plodding hooves of her horse. If any birds or animals lingered they froze in silence.

Lynne watched Koysl slow down. Hesitating, he twisted in the saddle and craned his neck to look around the trees in several directions. He sat still and cocked his head to one side and listened.

The wind swished wildly through the overhead branches. Here was the sudden storm sweeping down from the mountains as Cal Willison predicted.

Koysl moved his horse ahead. Lynne followed. This was not the downhill trail she expected would lead toward the ranch house. He moved out of sight.

He was searching for something.

She pulled Prince to a stop, waiting to see which direction Koyl would take. Then she heard a loud "Whoa" that faded off to silence.

Lynne put her heels to Prince's flank and rounded the brush, breaking out in a clearing. Koyl had disappeared beyond some trees. Then she saw his horse again.

But it had no rider!

She pushed Prince faster, crouching down to prevent being swept off her saddle by the low hanging branches. She watched Koyl's horse bound a few steps as if frightened, then wheel around with its ears forward. She could not see what had frightened the big roan that Koyl chose to ride that day.

The horse stopped as the reins dragged along the undergrowth. It cautiously moved sideways a step at a time then lowered its nose and noisily sipped from the flowing stream.

Koyl sprawled face down, his head against a rock. Lynne jumped to the ground beside him. Her stomach churned. She caught her breath. The wind mourned through the treetops.

Blood poured out at his temple. She held her fingers against the gash. She needed something to stop the flowing. He wore no neckerchief. Her hands groped Koyl's pockets for a handkerchief. None. She checked her own pockets. She pulled out a clean tissue and pressed it against the bleeding vein.

Koyl's arms lay twisted grotesquely under his body. He looked terribly hurt.

She mustn't panic. She must do something. The tissue compress had stopped the flow of blood. It clung to his temple when she took her hand away.

A small shiny beetle crawled up his beard. She was horrified at the sight. She must get his face out of the dirt.

Koyl mustn't be dead. Her fingers moved cautiously upon his backbone and lingered at his neck. His spine was intact.

"Koyl! Koyl! Can you hear me?" She slipped her hands under him to test her ability to turn him over, then hesitated.

"Oh, I hope no bones are broken." She felt along his limbs one more time. His muscles were limp and pliable. She choked back indecision as she frantically looked around her.

His legs seemed to be all right. She tried to examine his arms, hesitating to move him but wanting desperately to get his face out of the dirt.

She pushed at his body, pulling his arm from under him, turning him over at the same time. His body flopped back under its unconscious weight with his face upturned. She brushed decayed needles and dirt off his face.

She stripped off her sweatshirt and wiped his eyes with the sleeve. Then she folded the shirt and carefully tucked it under his head.

He still didn't look comfortable. Knowing that shock was more dangerous than an injury, she looked around calculating the options. His thin chambray shirt would not keep him warm. Her eyes were drawn to the horses.

Saddle blankets! She caught Prince and had his saddle and blanket off in one easy movement. She laid the warm blanket over Koyl and tucked it around his shoulders while it was still warm from Prince's body.

Lynne leaned over and touched Koyl's face. He was warm and he was breathing. But he was still unconscious. She checked the dried tissue on his forehead. There was no more bleeding.

She pressed her fingers against his silky beard and felt his jaws intact with no apparent injury. She pushed the hair back at his temple. His head was beginning to swell at the hairline around the bloody gash. His head felt dangerously warm to her fingers.

If she only had something to make a cold compress to keep down the swelling. She looked to the mountain stream. No doubt the water would be cold. She had nothing with which to make a compress.

She looked at Koyl's clothes and then her own. It was no use to try to tear a strip from her knitted shirt or tough jeans. The fashionable holes she had made in similar garments required scissors and strong acid.

Her sweeping gaze went to her heavy cotton terry socks. One would make a thirsty compress. She removed one sock and shoved her foot back into her sticky running shoe. She hurried to the stream and soaked the sock in the cold icy water. She folded it to palm size and held it against the swelling on Koyl's head.

"Koyl...Koyl...Oh wake up...Please...wake up."

The wind was an unwelcome companion. It broke into her thoughts. She looked skyward hoping to ward off any suggestion of rain. The line cabin wasn't too far away, she reasoned. Except for the stream, the area had no unusual landmarks that she could count on to guide her back if she did find her way to the cabin.

As she recalled the helicopter view, the stream was a long way from the ranch buildings. Koyl's head moved and she turned the wet sock over and placed the colder side to his temple. She looked at him closely, hoping he would open his eyes.

The wind was pushing the long needled branches of the tall pines in loud swishing hypnotizing motions. Although she wanted to go for help, she didn't know which direction to go, and she wasn't sure she could find her way back. But more to the point she didn't want to leave Koyl at all.

With a sudden inspiration, she tied Prince's reins together over his neck and slapped his rump after heading him in the direction they had come. Stefano would know something was wrong and Prince's tracks would be a clue

to their location.

She shook her head in dismay. Koyl's eyes remained closed but his breathing changed to short gasps. In one last effort to find some sign of consciousness, she put her hands on Koyl's shoulders and gently shook him.

"Koyl, you've got to wake up! Wake up!" She couldn't hide the fear that clutched her.

His eyelids opened for a dazed second. She shook him again. His arms moved.

Lynne watched his eyes open but they weren't focusing. She put her hands behind his shoulders but only managed to lift them slightly as she leaned to look into his eyes.

His head fell back and his eyes opened, this time with some recognition, slightly surprised.

"Lynne?" His focus went beyond her face and off into the sky. Then his eyes closed again.

"Koyl. You've got to wake up." She was encouraged by his recognition. She held her breath but when he didn't respond she whispered with deep despair, "Koyl, look at me. Talk to me."

She added desperately, "You've got to be all right." Her hands couldn't begin to grasp his muscled shoulders. His arms were limp and she felt the sagging weight of his biceps. She clutched at his shirt and shook him gently again. She felt a slight firming of his shoulder muscles.

"Oh...h...h...h...my head." He pushed off the saddle blanket and put his hand on the compress at his temple. His eyes went to Lynne's face and dropped to her tee shirt. His eyes blinked and closed again. His head slumped sideways.

The ominous sound of the moaning wind added to Lynne's gloom. She groaned in her helplessness.

Koyl's eyelids fluttered with his sudden body movement. He grimaced and held his breath as he struggled to sit up.

Lynne helped him move to rest against the rock. His muscles had regained their controlled firmness and she felt a surge of relief. She pulled the blanket around his back. He leaned against the rock with his hand holding the cold compress to his head and one arm clutching the saddle blanket to his chest.

"Where am I?" he asked. His bleary gaze moved to the his surroundings and came to rest on his horse. Then he remembered.

When Lynne tried to answer he looked at her with suspicion in his pained eyes. She was relieved that he was conscious. He was still in shock and she silently wished she could care for him properly.

Koyl sat immobile. His eyes blinked slowly and he looked disoriented as

he gazed at Lynne's face. Then his gaze went slowly downward, lingering on her breasts heaving beneath a worn tee shirt. His eyebrows tugged up slightly and Lynne was aware that she had removed her sweatshirt in her first attempt to make him comfortable.

She grabbed her crumpled sweatshirt and shook out the leaves and dirt. Blood streaked the front. She pulled it down over her head, grateful for the moment she could hide from his stare as she slid her head through its cold damp interior.

Lynne squatted down in front of Koyl to study him more closely. She sat with a tight mouth, "Maybe you are badly hurt. I just don't know if I could find my way back if I left you, Koyl."

His eyelids slowly opened and he clamped them tight and blinked again as if to clear his head.

"You called me Koyl," he said with wonder and his eyes closed again. He held his head, trying to stop the spinning.

With his eyes tightly closed, he whispered, "Can I call you Lynne?"

Lynne frowned at the silly request. He must be delirious.

"I've got to get help," she said to herself. She stood up to get Koyl's horse. She heard a noise that sounded like hoofbeats but she couldn't be certain over the racket of the wind in the treetops. She ran a few steps and strained to look around the bushes and through the trees where there was the suggestion of movement. She caught a glimpse of a horse and rider.

Cupping her hands around her mouth, she yelled, "Over here! We're over here!" She took a deep breath and yelled with more force, "Hurry!" She stood frozen to the spot, afraid she was imagining help that wouldn't come.

She hugged her stomach shivering in the crisp air of late afternoon, her chill from her fear and anxiety rather than the spring air. She held her breath as the rider moved around the trees and she was relieved to see that it was Jim. She waved her arms until she was sure he saw her. Then she ran back and knelt beside Koyl.

The next day when Koyl asked how she happened to be with him when he hit his head, Lynne explained, "I thought you were going back to the ranch and I was following you."

She studied his beard, deciding that he looked so much like the teddy bears she liked to cuddle. He lay stretched back in the luxurious leather recliner and she remembered examining his jaw beneath the soft facial hair. She rubbed her fingers against her thumb and palm reclaiming the feeling that swept through her when she worried over Koyl after his injury by the stream.

"The doctor said your first aid probably helped my general condition. Actually saved me from future problems." Koyl said seriously with his blue

eyes boring deep into hers.

She hoped he could not read her mind as she took on a casual air and shrugged her shoulders.

"I just happened to be in the neighborhood so I prevented you from bleeding to death." She stepped closer and added quietly, "I'm glad it wasn't serious."

Jim gave a complete report when he returned with Koyl by helicopter after an overnight stay in the hospital.

Lynne's gaze moved from Koyl's beard to the gash on his forehead that was now swathed in bandages. "Is it still painful?" She drew back the hand she hesitantly reached out with which to comfort him.

She missed the vestige of the sparkle in his eyes when he half closed his lids and feigned discomfort and pain.

"I'll pull through with proper care," and his head lay back against the soft tan leather headrest.

Lynne absently noted this new chair was not black like those in the other rooms but her focus was on the dark brown hair resting against the creamy leather. She stood close beside him, her features filled with apprehension.

"Is there anything I can do--anything at all?" She couldn't identify the strange look that flashed across his face.

He closed his eyes and sighed deeply, murmuring, "A kiss would make it better." He raised one eyelid and sneaked a peek at her.

"Why..." Lynne gasped. Her immediate reaction was to raise her hand.

He grasped her wrist and held it hard. His eyes were narrow slits as he searched her heart through her own wide grey eyes. He slowly pulled on her arm and she came forward mesmerized under his spell.

"A kiss would have a very healing effect."

She didn't know how to answer that. He sounded serious enough and kissing him occurred to her many times. She stood transfixed with the longing pouring out of her hooded eyes. In her moment of hesitation she offered less resistance and his gentle tug was harder than he intended. She fell against his chest and her hair spilled across his shoulder. He leaned his jaw against her forehead as he held her close.

Lynne's breath caught in her throat and turbulent emotions swept her senses. She felt the security of Koyl's strong arms. She smelled his masculine scent through the antiseptic odor of his bandage.

All the enjoyable images of him appeared before her closed eyelids. But some not so enjoyable appeared also. She saw his arms around a Vogue model. Her body tensed and she struggled to get up out of his arms.

Koyl didn't offer any resistance. He opened his arms and planted a

quick kiss on her cheek as she pulled away. Her previous concern was replaced with indignation. She backed away and put her hands on her hips.

"I came to the ranch to do a decorating job. I don't have to put up with any of this."

"Any of what?" He asked, with an innocence contradicted by the hard look in his eyes.

She couldn't spit out the anger she felt. Not that she was angry with him. She was angry at herself for becoming emotionally entangled with her employer.

He spoke slowly, "Are you going to tell me you don't feel something between us?"

Lynne wanted to shout 'Yes' but she didn't trust her own voice. She felt a terrible longing to have him experience the same affection for her that she felt for him. But could she dare hope for that? She knew what she saw by the ranch house door. He held Margaret in his arms. She saw him kiss Margaret.

Lynne raised cloudy grey eyes doubtfully to his. She remained silent.

"I hired you because I needed a job done and you've done it well." He hesitated.

Lynne stared into his eyes. Her stunned expression compelled him to continue.

"When Lynne Redding turned out to be the young woman I kissed in the moonlight, I was glad. I saw more ahead for me and I hoped more for you also. I thought you liked the ranch. I'm happy to keep you here under the guise of a job, if that's the way it is."

She remembered the moonlight kiss vividly. And the kiss in the mansion. And the almost kiss under the hawk's nest. What she felt she could not explain but she didn't want to fall in love with him. She could not believe he could love her anyway. She was too young and inexperienced to attract the superb man who sat before her. He must be toying with her.

A look of comprehension crossed Lynne's face. This well known scientist, experienced in the ways of the world and women, was glad she was here. For what? Kissing? Did he think she was here for his gratification? For a moment she was hurt at the implication. Then she was angry. She would not be so easily kissed and lured under his spell.

She glared down at him. She had to hate him to prevent herself from loving him.