

## Wildly in the Rockies

# Chapter nine

## Revealing

Pacing the length of the beamed living room in the rustic ranch house, Lynne listened to the music from the square dance. Koyl should be there accepting congratulations from the community. She left him beside his mother's trunk when he found a letter addressed to him. It seemed an intrusion to be present when he read it.

She hugged her arms against her stomach thinking of the bird sanctuary. The big house must pay its own way and that was her responsibility. She squared her shoulders and stuffed her hands into her pockets.

Koyl came out of her room to intercept her. He held the envelope out in front of her, staying her movement. Then he looked at it more closely in admiration.

"Beautiful penmanship," he said as he held the letter up before her. He turned it over not certain what importance it might hold. The envelope was not sealed. This sudden message from Koyl's past intrigued her. She knew nothing about her own mother and could not expect any personal letter from her past.

"Let's have a look, O.K.?" He glanced at Lynne with eyebrows raised, "C'mon."

Submissively she let him pull her back into her room - Koyl's boyhood room. She stood reluctantly and settled down beside him while he sat cross-legged beside the trunk.

He pulled the brittle paper out and unfolded it. And he began to read...

'My dearest son, Forgive your father for the way he treats you. He has struggled against all odds to make a future for you and he sees you refusing to accept it. He is driven by something I do not understand. Behind his erratic behavior the doctors suspect an old injury pressing against his brain--'

"pressure against his brain," Koyl repeated. His eyes widened and color drained from his face. He sat back and pulled his feet out from under him. His brow wrinkled in a deep frown.

"an old injury." He let out a long breath and held it. Then the breath

was released in a torrent of understanding.

"He couldn't help the way he acted." Koyl's eyes were unfocussed and his head shook in hard disbelief. He looked at the letter and read on...

'Your father is a stubborn man. He will not have an examination.' Koyl stared into the paper, not seeing the words - yet seeing the reality with greater clarity.

Koyl was stunned. He looked from the paper to Lynne as if she would be a shield, a backup to absorb the astounding emotion that was reverberating through him.

His father suffered from a debilitating malady and yet no one knew. Koyl's face was frozen in shock as he tried to absorb the inconceivable fact. His unfocussed eyes darted from one unseen episode to another in a disorderly past that slowly revealed support for the truth of it.

"I wonder if Maria or Jim know about this?" Koyl's tone expressed the incredibility of it all. An image of Maria's mother, Lolita, crossed his mind. He leaned back with his hands against the floor trying to fit together pieces of an unseen puzzle. He turned to search Lynne's face as if she was expected to come up with the answer.

She expressed what seemed obvious to her, "How could they know?"

Koyl couldn't answer that nor could he accept that as a complete explanation of his father's actions. Old memories of his father flooded in to patch together a new mosaic of relationships between the young brothers and the demanding father. Peter always encouraged and praised by his father because he was willing to work hard and keep the ranch going. Koyl always pressed and challenged by his father because he wouldn't accept the hard fought legacy. Koyl withdrawing in search of approval from others.

"Lolita, that's Maria's mother, she was there for a while after my mother died," he recalled, "until he refused to let her 'coddle' me."

The more the memories flooded in, the more dimmed the faces of the past became. The only face he could discern was Jim's. Was that because Jim was prominent in the ranch operation now? Koyl couldn't remember what authority Jim had in earlier times but it certainly wasn't always as foreman. Koyl couldn't separate present from past where Jim was concerned. There was a confusion he could not explain.

Koyl lowered his eyes and read part of the letter over again... 'Forgive his actions. He is jealous of the bond that links me to you....'

Koyl's head came up and his eyes again glazed over with lost memories. Lynne's eyes followed his gaze around the room.

"Jealous of a child?" Koyl's eyes questioned the silent air of the room where his childhood playthings lay carelessly on the shelves, now only remnants of a cloak of security his mother's arms provided as she shielded him from his father's reprimands. Koyl's face registered total incredibility. His eyes focussed again at the paper and he read on....

"He is jealous with the undefinable fear a man has of a rival against whom he can not compete on equal terms - his son. He is determined to play his role of disciplining father. He gives all his energy to building this ranch for you and Peter...."

Tears welled in Koyl's eyes as his mouth formed a thin hard line. His head moved slowly up and down admitting the truth of that statement.

He turned to Lynne to explain, "Maybe he was trying to build it for me, but he was a big man in the state. I was supposed to be his extension. I couldn't see a future in it for me." His eyes darted around looking at unseen nuances to verify his statement. His gaze finally settled on the paper again and more facts unfolded as he read....

'He thinks he is a failure in preparing you for life where he has so much success with Peter. '...Perhaps that is my fault. I overreact to his attempts at discipline. I do what I think is best for you - and me. I may be terribly wrong. He's a very hard man but I forgive him. I hope that you will, too. This revelation may upset your life, but I want you to know the truth. And please forgive me, too. Your loving Mother'

Koyl turned the letter over. He got up on his knees and laid the quilt on the bed. Piece by piece he lifted his mother's handwork out of the trunk and laid it carefully on the bed. At the very bottom of the trunk he found a marriage license.

"That's all there is." He stood up and paced the room looking from the letter in one hand to the marriage license in the other.

Lynne could not help him, not that she didn't want to try. But what could she do? She couldn't begin to feel the depth of emotion that surrounded Koyl. In her sympathy borne out of practicality, she leaned toward him. She let him hug her to his chest, rocking her to bring comfort to himself.

"Thanks, Jim," the sheriff said as they shook hands outside his office. "I've got men guarding the area. I'll get out there first thing in the morning to have a look around."

"Koyl Chapman will cooperate in your investigation of the area adjacent to Chapman's fenceline."

"Yes. Well we'll see about identifyin' the body. I'll let ya know.."

"Worthington will take a look. Maybe he's seen him around."

"I'll talk to Tillie in the mornin'...and see if she heard anyone's been askin' around...or missin'..."

"Do you think he was just a hiker that had an accident in the storm?" Jim asked, standing with one hand on the jeep door, ready to leave.

"Maybe," remarked the sheriff, squinting thoughtfully, "Anyway I'll investigate proper." He shook his head. "No use tryin' to figger it out tonight. I'll let ya know."

"Nothing can be done 'til morning anyway, so I'm gonna get back before I

miss the whole shindig," and Jim waved as he started the jeep and backed away from the curb.

Lynne pushed the loose tendrils of her straight brown hair behind her ears and moved through the steps of what seemed to be the hundredth square she danced since she left Koyl beside his mother's old trunk. Lively music and infectious laughter kept the crowd animated but lateness of the hour and the vigorous activity was taking its toll on her energy.

Revolving her shoulders didn't loosen the stickiness of the bright floral cotton shirt. Square dancing brought trickles of perspiration down her backbone and in the hollow of her breasts. Her feet felt the strain of dancing in her heeled riding boots.

She exchanged one partner for another as she expertly carried on friendly patter with the local square dance club members and ranch hands from all over the county. Les was showered with attention from Margaret. He hardly noticed Lynne. She caught Edward Worthington looking her way every time she turned around.

Everyone appeared to be having fun. Outwardly Lynne tried to enjoy the party. Inwardly she grieved out of concern for the thin thread of success she saw in this venture of an isolated guest ranch.

"Swing your partner, and doz ee doe," called the fiddler.

Wayne hooked her arm as he swung Lynne around and leaned close to her ear, "Where's Koyl?" he asked, "Is Jim back?"

"Koyl will be along soon." Lynne assured him. She expected Koyl would come after he fully absorbed the information in his mother's letter. "I don't know about Jim."

"... and come on home," the fiddler called in a nasal tone. Lynne measured her steps as she danced back to the wall searching for someone to replace her. She reached for Louise's hand and pulled her in to her place in the square. During a pause in the music, the dancers' attention rivetted on the caller and Lynne ducked out the door.

She needed the fresh air to clear her whirling head. She wanted to get away from so many strangers and so much noise. She glanced behind her to the closed door and hoped no one was going to follow. She moved quickly to get away into the shadows.

The jeep was nowhere in sight but it rarely was left out in the yard. If Jim hadn't returned from delivering the corpse to the town undertaker it was probably because he stopped for a talk with the sheriff. Lynne took little time to contemplate the mystery surrounding the body. Publicity about the death could adversely affect the success of the dude ranch and Koyl would fail to keep the ranch. Koyl's failure would mean her failure. She shuddered at the thought.

Lynne saw no one within the periphery of the security light between the

dining hall and the corral. She moved out of the shadows toward the ranch house drawn by the magnetic attraction she felt toward Koyl. She wanted to be with him but was at a loss about what to do while he tried to sort the thoughts brought on by his mother's letter. Lynne had comforted him as much as she could. But this new development did not change the reality of her job.

She couldn't see that Koyl's life would change with the new details of his parents. He may be all the more determined to have his ranch. His financial problems wouldn't go away but she hoped they wouldn't multiply either.

Much work was still to be done. And much of it fell on her shoulders. She walked towards the barn. Her smart white jeans stood out in the yellow gleam of the security light. The corralled horses raised their heads and watched her come. She heard their plodding and moved toward the rail.

With her forearms on the rail, she folded her hands together and rested her chin against them. The horses moved restlessly with their ears and tails twitching at the persistent insects. The horses stomped and brushed against each other in moving around the corral, keeping mosquitoes away. Her coppery mount came closer and reached his muzzle to her hand.

She rubbed the horse's nose and chided, "You want to share those biting critters with me, huh?" She waved the mosquitoes away, listening to the music drift on the still air. The tune was slow and melancholy. A shiver ran through her. She pulled her hair out of the pony tail and spread it around her neck and cheeks to keep the mosquitoes away.

"Oh, Prince," Lynne sighed deeply as she clutched at the hard jaw and scratched the hollow underneath. She leaned against the horse's head. She had been in Koyl's arms because he wanted comfort. He wanted her to take the management job so he could save the ranch for his research. What about her feelings? She had wants and needs too. She clung to Prince in her confusion.

"Why do I feel so empty? I don't want to get mixed up in Koyl's problem. I don't know what to think of him." Lynne spoke in a voice much louder than she realized. It was as if she expected an answer when she looked into the soft round eyes of the horse and scratched at its bony jaw.

"Just think of him as a boss doin' what has to be done," Jim answered as he stepped out of the darkness.

Lynne jumped in alarm and turned to face Jim, relieved that he had returned. Her hair cascaded around her shoulders as the angry mosquitoes buzzed away. But Jim didn't give her a chance to speak.

"He's got schedules to make. Deadlines to meet. He's got a big job to do. Just see that you do yours." Jim's voice was crisp and matter of fact. He was feeling apprehensive about the corpse and his tension brought out a harshness in his voice that Lynne never heard before.

"That's what I have been doing - and I have a feeling that isn't enough," Lynne replied, knowing that she could do so little to help. But it was true that

Koyl had pressures on him to succeed. Many people depended on him for their livelihood. Her shame at her selfishness brought a flush to her face.

"Has he told you he didn't like the job you're doin'?" Jim asked with an irritable tone to his voice that bordered on disbelief.

"No, never." Lynne's confusion was too emotionally tangled up to explain precisely, "but I'm never sure...."

"You'll have to figure that out for yourself, I guess," he slapped at an insect at his neck. Lynne tried to puzzle out her mixed feelings but she didn't have a comment.

"Just appreciate that he gives you credit for having good sense. He does depend on you." Jim's voice trailed off as he turned away.

Yes, Lynne thought, Koyl depends on me - to jump when he calls, be where he wants me, do what he wants me to do - that's what he depends on. And another thought niggled at her. *Isn't that what you agreed to do when you took the job?* She confused her employment contract with her emotions. She heard Jim scuffling beside her.

He asked, "Where is Koyl anyway?"

"In my room with an old trunk." Lynne answered.

"He should be at the party. It's his housewarming. You'd better come, Lynne. In no small part, it's yours, too." Jim looked closely at Lynne's veiled expression when she offered no response.

"Lynne? Did you hear me?"

"Huh...? Oh, yes I heard you," Lynne answered. She nuzzled Prince's soft chin, feeling the hard hairs buckling against her palms, "If I used my good sense I'd walk out of here right now."

But she knew she wouldn't. Her heart was lost to Koyl and could never be retrieved.

Wayne pulled Joan aside and whispered, "Let's go see what's keeping Koyl."

Joan shook her head affirmatively, "Any excuse to get out of here. I'm getting too old for this sort of thing."

They slipped along the wall and went out the door without a question. Ed watched them go. He had some questions of his own. He followed without a sound. Lynne must have slipped out before. He didn't see her leave. She wasn't in the kitchen, he checked that out when he noticed she was missing from the square dance lineup.

A half moon hung in the western sky, blotting out all but the brightest stars. The security light down by the barn shut those out too.

"Did you see Margaret wrapped around Les?" Joan asked, "She hates the square dancing but is determined to get some attention." She breathed in the fresh night air, wondering at the sharp odor of the horses.

"Margaret strikes me as a very spoiled child. But she won't go beyond

the physical with Les. You know the extent of his fortune."

"I wonder what's keeping Koyl away from the party. It's his housewarming, after all." Joan held Wayne's hand, walking contentedly by his side.

"Let's try his office first. Maybe he got so involved in studying that data he has on those hawks that he forgot the party," Wayne knew some scientists who would do that.

Out of earshot, Ed watched the two, mildly curious of their destination. He found no evidence that Les Nelson had a deep personal relationship with Lynne regardless of what Koyl implied. Ed wanted to get to know her better now that he was certain she was unattached.

Ed wondered if she was with Koyl. He thought it was strange that Koyl was not at his own party, although Koyl struck him as an odd character from the first time they met. Ed shrugged that off. Right now he was more interested in finding Lynne.

He looked around trying to decide what to do. Music and laughter came from the dining hall but his attention to ranch routine made him more attuned to sounds of the ranch. Horses milling in the corral drew his attention.

Ed wondered at the white post that seemed out of place in the corral fence. He went forward to investigate.

The post moved. It was a slender figure - Lynne - he was sure. He hesitated and studied the surroundings. Lynne was alone!

She turned at the sound of the footsteps that Ed made with deliberate clamor so she would be aware of his approach.

"Hello," he called, "Are you giving the mosquitoes a change of diet?" His loins were itching and it wasn't from mosquitoes.

Jim burst into the ranch house and strode quickly to Lynne's open door. "I hope tha-," he paused mid-sentence at the sight of Koyl beside the open trunk.

"Hey, what's going on?"

Koyl came to his feet and nodded at the papers he held in his hand, "I'm not sure. I was hoping you could shed some light. I opened up a trunk expecting memories and found a puzzle instead," he said pensively.

Koyl searched Jim's features noting his square chin and pale blue eyes. Koyl pulled at the side of his beard.

"So what's the mystery?" Jim wanted to know.

Together they read the letter. They looked at each other.

"What do you know about this?" Koyl asked.

A veil of disbelief fell across Jim's eyes. He took in a deep breath and let it all out in one forceful sentence.

"I didn't know, Koyl, I swear I didn't know." Jim's face reflected all the amazement his weathered features could expose.

Jim put his arm around Koyl's shoulders, "You've got a party goin' that you should concentrate on tonight. Get over there and take care of that now," Jim urged. He put his arm down and tightened his mouth in thought.

"We'll talk to Maria tomorrow. She was the one who had the trunk brought in here. Maybe she's got some answers."

The boisterous noise continued after Koyl stepped inside the dining hall but a wave of recognition quickly swept through the dancers. The expectations changed and the caller led the dancers through a short routine that left them in four lines facing him.

Bouquets of pale purple lilacs lined the tables that were pushed against the wall. Their perfume dominated the air and filled Koyl's nostrils pleasantly over the heat of the roomful of active sweaty people.

Bright green streamers led into bunches of balloons in many purple tones that obscured the white painted ceiling of narrow wainscoting. Koyl smiled with the knowledge that this was Lynne's touch. A simple, yet elegant, statement that brought a warm springtime feeling inside this plain functional hall. He filled with the pleasure that Lynne had agreed to have the party here instead of up in the big house - the guest house. He'd better get used to calling it that from now on.

The band swung into a tinny rendition of "Hail to the chief" and everyone called and clapped until Koyl shook his head and raised his hands in a quieting gesture.

"I suppose I'll have to reward you for that acclimation, but first, let me thank you all for coming." His eyes emphasized his appreciation as his gaze swept the crowd, recognizing that many of them attended Peter's funeral.

"I can only hope that this is the beginning of a new direction for the Chapman ranch. It's that hope I want to share with you." The folds around Koyl's eyes crinkled with pleasure until the eyes themselves nearly disappeared. He scanned the faces for Lynne. He would probably find her in the kitchen.

"Maria has refreshments for you and then we'll go and tour the new guest house." More applause and whistling. And everyone turned to welcome Maria with the promised refreshments.

"Ed, don't," Lynne mumbled against his chest. She tried to step back from the embrace that Ed was not ready to release. The kiss he planted on her lips fell flat of any feeling and she regretted being compromised into position to receive it. She pushed at his chest and leaned back. He squeezed her harder and leaned down to kiss her again.

"Let her go," Koyl growled menacingly as he took long determined strides toward the couple. Lynne stopped struggling and Ed turned to stare at Koyl's interruption. The ears on the horses shot forward and their heads swung to



face the angry command.

"I thought you didn't want her," Ed snapped. He turned back to look defensively into Lynne's face. He moved Lynne around so his body protected her from Koyl.

What did Ed say? Lynne leaned to look around at Koyl, her eyes mirroring the horrible feeling that shot through her body when the implication of Ed's words registered in her mind. He lost his balance at her movement and they fell against the corral fence frightening the horses. That was all the time that Koyl needed to reach Ed and grab him by the arm.

"Take your hands off her," Koyl commanded. He swung a punch at Ed's jaw that drove him against the post. Ed made no move to defend himself and slid slowly to the ground. He clenched his fists. The lean young rancher wasn't used to having girls ordered out of his arms. But he wasn't about to fight with his neighbor anyway.

Lynne stepped in front of Ed to prevent further attack by this ferocious animal that was the man she loved. A curious horror rose in her.

"What did he mean? You didn't want me?" Lynne insisted.

At Koyl's hesitation she pushed her inquiry, "Am I discussed like some kind of commodity?"

Ed was slowly getting to his feet, with his hand tenderly holding his bruised jaw.

"She wasn't so unwilling a minute ago," Ed insisted.

Lynne at first accepted Ed's sympathy when he charmingly offered his companionship. He wasn't satisfied to leave it at that. She wasn't quick to reward him for his consolation efforts.

Koyl looked hard at Lynne. Anger fired out of his eyes. The shards of anger from Lynne's eyes met his with equal power. They shook the barrier he constructed to keep out the painful realization that Lynne might be willing to accept advances of younger men. He flinched at the recollection of her reception of Les here by the corral when they came in from the hawk's nest.

"How dare you think you can barter me around." Lynne snapped in a low menacing tone.

Lynne's anger made her eyes big shiny pools of reflected light. She backed up against the corral and her hands came to rest behind her on the middle rail. With her chin and chest thrust forward she looked like a wild rooster ready to take on the world. She stared up at Koyl with a contempt that stung him.

The angry exchange between them sizzled with an electricity that begged for understanding. Ed was fascinated. He was forgotten in the wake of expressed hate that was akin to the gravity of violent love. He walked away holding his injured jaw.

Lynne and Koyl stood staring defiantly at each other. Lynne with her eyes glossed by the security light. Koyl with his eyes glinted from the moon.

He leaned toward her to read the emotion in her eyes, trying to separate them from the glaring light.

"Don't you touch me," Lynne's hands came up across her chest in a gesture of self protection. Koyl stopped with hands outstretched.

"I never said I didn't want you," Koyl said with a hardness emphasized by the persistent stomping of the horses.

Lynne held her breath, her blazing eyes daring him to explain.

Before she knew what happened, he grabbed her hard against him, pinning her arms back against the rail. His mouth was pressed against her lips and an insect drank, unnoticed and undisturbed from the vein that throbbed on her temple.

Koyl released her with the same abruptness but before he turned to go, he explained, "I told him I hadn't spoken for you." Anger rose up in him and he didn't understand why he wanted to shake her.

She stood immobile by the rail. Lynne's confusion left her staring wide eyed.

"Didn't Maria instruct you to be ready to give all those merry makers a tour of the big house," Koyl stated in a strong hard declaration, and not at all like the simple question it should be.

"You'd better be up there and have all the lights on before they finish their ice cream." Koyl gave orders like the boss that he was.

Prince nudged his muzzle against Lynne's back through the corral rails. He shook his head to dislodge the hungry mosquitoes. His tail swished in crashing concert with his stomping hooves. Insects buzzed an angry symphony in their insistent quest for blood.

Lynne watched Koyl's back as he headed toward the barn. Her chest heaved as she dug her fingernails into the wood. Did that kiss mean that he had spoken for her? It wasn't the kiss of passion she wanted. It was a demanding kiss - like a hot brand upon a piece of property.

She could do without that. There was no room in her life for a cold domineering man. She would make sure that didn't happen again. She was an employee. And she could do her job. With determined footsteps she made her way up the hill.

Her biggest challenge was yet to come. How was she going to make herself stop loving him?

"I knew your mother before she met Oliver." Jim's eyes grew larger as the dim memories became clearer. Koyl pressed Jim to delve into the past after all the guests had left. They stood facing a mild breeze on the ranch house lawn.

"Your dad was a promising rancher, a handsome man, I thought he loved her." Jim looked down at his boots and dug his toe into the dewy grass adding, "and I thought she loved him."

Jim recalled those youthful days. "I hired on as one of the cowboys, far removed from the ranch house. Never saw much of her at all. I guess they were in love. Oliver was a hard, driving man. Wanted to carve out a solid place for himself in the state. Succeeded pretty well for a time, I'd say. Can't really say if any of us realized that he was slipping. Never had the slightest notion he was sick."

"I guess it doesn't matter now," Koyl said with a desolate edge to his voice. "I've got to get this ranch out of debt no matter what else comes up."

"If we can keep the guest rooms full, you might just make it, Koyl. "Everyone's working hard for you," Jim turned to go to the bunkhouse, "Well, G'night."

The handwork was scattered on her bed. Lynne reflected that it would have been more appropriate if Koyl removed the trunk to his room but she did not mind putting away the lovely work so meticulously done by Koyl's mother. An embroidered piece held her eyes. Birds with wings outspread were intertwined on ribbons with the name, Koyl, on a white muslin pillowcover. Upon closer examination of the stitching, the weight shifted and she shook the cloth to have a gold chain fall upon her bed. She folded it back into the material and put it in the trunk and carefully closed the lid.

She sighed at the thought that her problems couldn't be shut away that easily, nor into such a pretty container. She admired the intricate tooling on the tin that covered the old wooden chest.

Her hair still wet from the shower she took after she bid the guests goodnight at the end of the guest house tour, she reached for a towel to further dry it before she crawled into bed. Although she was weary, she knew she couldn't sleep. She sat in the rocker and ruffled her hair in the thirsty bathtowel, relieved to be rid of the clinging cigarette odor from the thick smokey atmosphere of the party. She pulled the comb through her hair and idly let the long strands spread apart over the shoulders of her fluffy robe to encourage quicker drying.

The shoebox from which Koyl took the key to the trunk was open on the shelf where he left it. Lynne picked up the box and sat with it on her lap. She was curious about the things that Koyl, the boy, collected. She was intruding into a child's private world, but the box was left opened and she would be careful how she handled everything, she assured herself. Her fingers lifted a tattered snapshot, discolored to a dingy brown. A small child smiled widely, astride a stick horse.

Lynne started with a tinge of guilt at the knock on the door. It could only be Koyl this time of night and she was going through his childhood treasures.

"Lynne? Lynne. May I come in?"

She could not refuse Koyl entry to his childhood room. She clinched her teeth, wondering what he wanted, but stayed as she was, sitting in the rocker

with her hair widely spread across her shoulders and told him to come in.

Lynne's anger rekindled as she thought of the words Koyl exchanged with Ed by the corral. As if she could be passed around like an inanimate possession! The man she belonged to would be chosen by her, if she decided to 'belong' to any man at all, and she'd vowed many times that she would not.

Koyl stepped into her room and closed the door behind him. His shirt hung unbuttoned and his feet were bare. Padding softly, hesitantly, on the wide fir flooring, he came toward her with his hands widespread. His face, when she dared to look, was sorrowful, remorseful. He stood before her as if she were a judge and he a prisoner awaiting verdict.

In matters of the law, possession counts for nine tenths of the process, but in matters of the heart, where does possession come into play? Compassion struggled with possession. The full force of her own desire to possess this man struck her with a peculiar irony.

The full impact of Koyl's troubled features registered deep within the very core of her being and her anger died. She found no words. How could she speak without revealing everything?

"I saw your light. I wasn't going to bother you, but..." His pause was pregnant with remorse.

"It's your room and your stuff," she admitted, her arm sweeping an invitation to the room, the tattered snapshot fluttering in her hand.

Koyl's gaze fastened on the snapshot then drifted to the box in her lap. He dropped to his knees beside her, asking, "What did you find?"

He picked at the child's possessions in the box. His bearing held none of the calculated coldness he'd shown earlier by the corral. In his features she saw little difference from the faded image of a little boy dressed in a big hat and chaps with a sheriff's star on his chest.

"I found a toy star," she said and went to retrieve it from her jeans.

Koyl held the box but did not rise as he admired her openly. *If only she weren't so young*, he thought, *or if she could love me just a little. If only she could understand how much I need her. But she never will, she hates what she sees in my past.*

Lynne returned to the rocking chair. Koyl was still on his knees beside it. She thrust the badge close to his eyes so he could see the worn letters.

"Where did you find that?"

"Under the trees beyond the garden."

"I didn't get to play much after mother died." His voice faded out and his eyes glistened. He looked into it, almost through it, with longing.

Lynne was tormented at his anguish. Was he trying to recapture happy moments from the past? She always had loving care after her mother's death, but when his mother died, he had not. Was that why he couldn't love? Had he forgotten how?

She dropped the snapshot into the box and reached forward to cup his

bearded jaws in her hands, unmindful of the sagging opening of her robe.

His eyes came up in a silent plea as he dropped the box to the floor. His scalp tingled when her fingers slid into his hair and a swift ping of ecstasy shot down his body as he pulled her toward him to kiss the hollow between her breasts.

Her freshness was his undoing, his want of her was overwhelming. If he could have her once, perhaps - just perhaps - he could get her out of his system. He wanted her with every fiber of his being.

No other woman ever affected him this way. *I could have her now. It's wrong but I can't stop myself. Just one word and I'd go away. She could stop me. Why doesn't she?*

She knew it would be wiser to pull away, remembering his branding kiss at the corral, but his lips made a tingling track of sucking pushes up her breast, to her shoulder, to her neck and her will to resist was replaced with her own yearning, her own needs.

She went down to her knees against him, at her own insistence, responding to his rapid kisses, now tender, supplicating, filled with longing and hot desire. Her fingers raked his hair, rocking his head against her, moving with his ardent tugging kisses. She kissed his hair where the sharp smell of antiseptic lingered in his own male scent.

He kissed every inch of skin he could expose within his embrace - her chin, her mouth, her cheeks, her temple, the top of her head. His crisp chest hair sensitized the soft tender skin of her breasts.

She ought to be resisting. She should push him away. And in answer to her own logic, she put her arms around his shoulders and pulled him tighter still.

"Lynne...oh...my darling...you make me crazy." He lifted her to her feet in one fluid movement, not letting up on his embrace. Her robe opened full length and he pressed her naked hips against his powerful loins, hardening his desire.

She raised her lips and he covered them with the softness of his own, building from the tender touch of yearning to a full loving passion that neither could resist. Neither thought, both acted, and in complete unison, with complete desire, each strained to please the other.

They were carried to new heights, with unnamed aches soothed as they never dreamed could be. She received in total ecstasy and his heart soared with eagles when she gave herself freely, forcefully, as he gently, lovingly, reverently, awakened her to his needs and her own.

Caringly, she let her body respond naturally to the primal act. She discovered with intense passion, an inner grasp that brought satisfaction in a throbbing to match the driving force within her.

For long delicious moments, Lynne held Koyl's spent body against hers, enjoying his weight upon her. He rolled off to the side holding her loosely to

him and they slept.

Her stiffening arm tingled under his head and the discomfort woke her. She studied him intently. Her emotions swelled within her. She loved him. This union was a wonderful development. At least he loved her with his body.

It was only sexual, she knew, and there should be more than that to love. Inexperienced as she was, she was not naive. Koyle hadn't taken her because he loved her. Not the way she loved him. He was worried, he was weary, he was confused. He used her for emotional release.

In spite of the aphrodisiac his loving had been, it didn't leave her completely happy. Her body tensed and Koyle stirred, his eyelids slowly revealing his blue, blue eyes. She was distracted momentarily by the tightening of his arm across her waist. A terrible thought frightened her. Maybe she had not pleased him after all.

Koyle was awakened by her breath push-pulling at his beard, feeling her warm firm body so right against his own that he kept his eyes closed to savor the feeling of her moist skin and bask in his good fortune. His left arm lay across her body, his hand upon her right breast, his other flattened under part of his hard muscled chest. Both her arms possessively encircled him, her left against the pillow capturing his neck, her right curled around his shoulder. Even the way her left leg wound around his right one, felt binding and possessive. He was hers and he liked that. It took all his analytical patience to remain still as he mentally traced the way his left leg lay between hers with his knee resting against her softness. She had given him a gift for which there was no measure.

He would wake her and tell her how he loved her. He raised up on his elbow, releasing her arm from beneath his neck. Her hair was scattered loosely on the pillow, in lovely tangled waves. It was only then that he realized she was observing him. He caught a strange expression in her clear grey eyes turn to regret. It hurt his ego to see that she was not gratified by his loving passion. What did he expect? He had taken advantage of her and seduction was a terrible act, an abomination on one he loved so dearly. How could he have done such a dishonorable thing?

He pushed away and got up. He reached for his pants and stammered, "I'm sorry."

Lynne's worst fears were verified. "You're sorry you made love to me?"

She sprung out of bed, picked up his shirt and flung it at him. That coldness returned to his eyes. She'd fulfilled his needs. Why the regrets? Her heartfelt pain stabbed him with angry words. "Get out of here."

She held the door open and pushed him out.

She flung herself across the bed and cried herself into a restless sleep.