

Cars whizzed by her on the highway in both directions. Kate didn't know whether to be glad or mad no one stopped. She didn't think she'd left any leads for Peter to pick up but after Los Angeles she wasn't counting on anything. She swallowed the panic that kept clogging her throat. Here she was, out here in the open, vulnerable to anyone...

A blinding flash of headlights and the crunching of tires on gravel startled her, freezing her in place. Her stomach clenched and the familiar taste of fear crawled up her throat as a door slammed and a tall figure outlined in the lights moved toward her. God, could they have found her this easily? No, stop and take a breath, dummy. They've had all the miles since L.A. to catch her. Why wait for now?

Then who had stopped? Someone just as bad?

Kate looked frantically around her for a place to hide.

Too late. Here he came, whoever he was, a dark shadow moving toward her with panther-like grace.

"You look as if you could use some help." The disembodied voice was deep, rusty, as if it wasn't used much, and she detected a hint of a drawl.

Then he was in front of her, materializing like smoke out of the blackness of the night. Kate took a deep breath. Her heart banged against her ribs like a jackhammer, not just from fear. The unexpected visceral punch of his powerful male presence caught her totally off guard. It was the fatigue. It had to be.

"Sorry I scared you." His voice was deep and gravelly. "I spotted you over here on the side of the highway and figured you had car trouble."

"Y-Yes." She cleared her throat. "Yes, I do." As he came closer and the truck's headlights shone on him, she got a better look.

He was tall and lean, a black tee shirt and worn black jeans molding his body, outlining every muscle. The jeans brushing the tops of scuffed western boots. Thick dark hair, just a little bit long and so inky it barely reflected the headlights, accentuated a lean face full of sharp planes and angles.

Dark stubble shadowed his jaw, and deep lines bracketed his mouth and the corners of his eyes. Not the face of someone who smiled often. His black eyes, looking out from beneath thick, dark lashes, were like coal that had been chipped from the earth.

If her life had been normal—normal?—she'd have reacted to him like a cat to cream. But right now her only concern was staying alive, and she had no idea which side of *that* coin this man was on.

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