

Storm Warrior (The Grim Series) (5 page)

The attack came out of nowhere. She was grabbed by the shirtfront and pushed backward over the hood of her car. Morgan found herself face-to-face with a rough-looking man with a scraggly goatee. His bloodshot blue eyes were set in a pallid face marked with open sores, and he was holding a knife to her throat.

“I’ll cut you, bitch. Understand? Where’s your fuckin’ purse?”

“In the car. It’s in the car—in the trunk,” she breathed, afraid to move.

“Why the hell’s it in there? You lyin’ to me?”

She held her hands up. “No. No. I don’t need it in the clinic; it’s in the way there. I lock it in the trunk where it’s safe.”

He snorted at that. Still holding the front of her shirt, he yanked her to her feet but didn’t let go. “Open it,” he said, waving the knife. Morgan fumbled for her keys with shaking fingers, then scrabbled through them for the right one, and somehow managed to get it into the keyhole. The sores on the man’s face were a clue, but her brain felt paralyzed. Suddenly she knew.

Meth.

The guy was a meth user and probably needed cash for a cheap hit. He might not hurt her if she could pay him off...unless he had a big drug debt. She unlocked the trunk and tried to step back.

“Naw-aw,” he said, giving her a hard shake. “Get it for me, bitch.”

She must have tossed her purse a little too hard this morning—she’d been in such a hurry. It was way at the back of the trunk, and she’d have to crawl halfway inside to get it. Every instinct she had warned her not to do so. “Look, there’s some cash in my purse, and I can write you a check.” She tried to sound reasonable, tried to keep her voice level, calm. “You can take the car too. I’m locked out of the clinic, and I’d have a long walk to town from here, so you’d get away, no problem.”

“Shut up and get the fuckin’ purse.” He brought the knife close again, and she nodded quickly. He shoved her back as he finally released her shirt.

In one movement, Morgan threw the keys at his face, spun, and took off running with everything she had. She ran straight for the road that linked the industrial park with the highway leading into town. She’d hoped her assailant would focus on the purse, maybe the car, but instead, he was right on her heels.

Omigod, omigod, omigod

...She hadn’t done any sprinting since high school, but fear gave her adrenaline. Still, she could hear the man close behind her, yelling, swearing. Morgan ran for her life,

praying that someone would drive by and see her, but there wasn't a car in sight. She ran on and on, her lungs beginning to burn. Suddenly, she slid on a chunk of gravel and went down hard. The man was on her in a split second, the knife a gleaming arc—

It didn't connect. With a blood-curdling roar, a massive black shape crashed into her assailant, knocking him away from her. Morgan scrambled to get to her feet as the pair grappled—the man screaming shrilly and stabbing at the dark fury that was trying to get at his throat.

It was a dog—
the
dog—but...but...

The red splatter on the pavement slapped her astonished brain back into reality. One of the man's arms was already torn and useless. In another few seconds, the animal would surely kill him, and so she had to make a fast decision. It went against all common sense and reason, it contradicted all her training, and it was terribly dangerous, perhaps even deadly. But in her heart, Morgan Edwards believed she had to interrupt the dog's attack. She forced herself to approach the savage animal and slapped his muscled flank as hard as she could. "No!" She threw every bit of authority she could muster into her voice. "Stop it. Stop it now. Get off him." She reached over the broad back with a courage she didn't know she had, closed her hands over the ornate metal collar, and pulled it with all her strength.

For a moment, nothing happened. She half expected the mastiff to turn on her, and there would be nothing she could do about it. This close, the creature seemed big enough to bite her in half. Then the massive dog yielded and began to back away from the man. Morgan kept both hands on the wide, heavy collar, focusing all her attention on the dog, watching for signals in his body language, knowing he might decide to attack her at any moment. "That-a-boy. Good dog, good boy. Come away from him. That's the way."

She didn't see the wildly swinging knife until it was buried hilt deep in the dog's side. A horrible gurgling bellow rang in her ears, and the animal spun toward his assailant, nearly yanking Morgan off her feet.

The man crab-scuttled backward, torn and bloody with his ruined arm tucked tight against his chest. He was wild-eyed and gibbered incoherently as the big dog snarled and snapped at him. "Stay with me, buddy," she whispered. Morgan knew she couldn't hold the creature back if he lunged, but she held on just the same.

Surprisingly, the dog didn't move. The man did, however. He staggered to his feet and tried to walk backward, then turned and ran unsteadily toward the highway. Morgan's hands were cramped from gripping the collar, but she waited until the man was gone before letting go.

The dog seemed to have been waiting too. As soon as his enemy was out of sight, the great creature sank to the pavement with a deep moan.

Morgan peeled off the bloodied green scrubs and threw them into the clinic laundry basket. She put her jeans and T-shirt on reluctantly—at three in the morning, they felt like cardboard. She was dead tired, and all she really wanted was to crawl into bed. Any bed. If she had to stay up much longer, the table in the staff room was going to look really appealing.

Still, it was a privilege to
be

tired. She thanked her lucky stars, Jesus, Buddha, her guardian angel, karma, the universe—anyone and anything that might be responsible for sending the big dog to save her. And for sending Jay Browning to help her save the dog. As the youngest member of her practice, he didn't look like a veterinarian, not with the long ponytail, the crystals and charms around his neck, and the T-shirts that promoted UFO conventions. But his unorthodox appearance—and interests—couldn't hide the fact that he was clever, capable, and talented. He had been driving back to the clinic to finish up a pharmaceutical order. Instead, he'd found Morgan kneeling over the massive canine in the middle of the road, tearing up her cotton jacket to make pressure bandages. Jay had called the police on his cell, then pitched in.

They'd applied the bandages to reduce the bleeding, then carefully rolled the dog onto a tarp. By then, no less than three patrol cars had arrived. Two teams went in search of the attacker. The remaining two officers ended up interviewing Morgan while helping the vets heft the dog into the back of Jay's pickup. At the clinic, it again took all four of them to muscle the unconscious animal onto a stainless steel table.

The senior partner took his hat off and fanned himself with it, his face red with exertion. "That's not a dog; that's an Angus cow."

The younger officer lifted the dog's eyelid. "He doesn't look good. Are you sure he isn't dead?"

"He's alive," Morgan said. "And I plan to keep him that way."

She sounded more confident than she felt. Transporting him had used up many precious minutes. By the time she was ready to operate, the dog's gums were pale and his pulse thready—he'd lost a great deal of blood. Luckily Jay was a perfect partner for this dance. He ran the gas and started an IV, laid out instruments and sutures for her as she operated on the worst of the dog's injuries. The angle of the knife had caused it to nick other organs, including the heart, before coming to rest in a lung. It took every ounce of skill Morgan had, but she was determined and the dog was strong.

By the time she sutured the last of his wounds, she knew the dog would live.

She would live too because of the dog's heroism. Morgan had no illusions about what would have happened to her otherwise. But as much as she tried, she couldn't come up with a plausible explanation as to how or why the dog was there. The unusual collar proved to her that the animal was no look-alike. It was unmistakably the same black mastiff that had been following her throughout her trip to Wales.

No way was she going to reveal that detail to the police, however. It sounded crazy, even to her. Jay, however, would likely believe her.

Maybe I'll tell him later.

Jay chose that moment to come bouncing into the room, charms and ponytail bobbing. He bounced everywhere it seemed, even at ungodly hours of the morning. His wife always seemed high energy too. Maybe it was that organic food that Jay was always bringing for lunch...Whatever it was, Morgan wished she had some. "This guy's way too big for any of the recovery kennels," he said. "What do you think about putting him on a blanket and some foam in your office? We can close the door, and then he won't be in the way in the morning. He's going to be dozy for quite a while, so I don't think he'll make much of a mess in there."

"That'll work just fine. I can sleep on the couch and keep an eye on him." She rubbed both hands over her face and through her hair.

"Why don't you let me do that, Morgan?"

"It's okay, really. I'm way too tired to drive all the way to my place, and besides, you have a wife to go home to."

"Are you kidding? Starr would kill me if I let you sleep here alone after being attacked tonight. I'll call her again, and then I'll take the couch in the waiting room."

Morgan wanted to say no, it wasn't necessary. But she knew, deep down, she was running on the last dregs of her adrenaline. Once it wore off, it would be a toss-up to see which would claim her first: exhaustion or the cold fear that swam just beneath the surface. "Thanks for that and for showing up tonight too. I don't know what I would have done without you."

"Well, it would have been a helluva lot harder to get the dog into the clinic for one thing. When I drove up, it looked as if you were leaning over a moose calf, not a dog. He's humongous. And that collar's really something—straight out of *The Lord of the Rings* or something. Where did he come from?"

"I have no idea," she said honestly, as her heart made a decision she hoped her brain could live with. "But if no one claims him, I'm keeping him."

Morgan was certain she'd be too tired to dream, but no sooner had she closed her eyes than she found herself in a forest clearing by a fallen tree. Stars pinwheeled high above, and a group of horses milled about just within the trees. She could smell them, hear them as they stamped and snorted, making the sounds of animals settling for the night. She was far from settled. Instead she stood, naked, waiting, anticipating. Then she felt him standing behind her. He hadn't made a sound, but she was as aware of this man's presence as she was of her own.

She quivered as he nuzzled the back of her neck, planting kisses there. His broad, rough palms skimmed lightly over her shoulders and down her arms to her wrists and

back up to her shoulders to begin again. Down and up, barely touching her, down and up. It sensitized her skin until every part of her body was yearning to be touched. His strong hands glissed the length of her back, their power leashed. He traced intricate circles and symbols there with the same maddeningly gentle touch, as a soft, warm breeze flowed sensuously around her legs, her face, her breasts.

Gradually his hands circled lower, grazing softly over her bottom, round and round, back and forth until she wanted to scream from the sheer tension. She could barely stand still. Her breasts were tight, her insides clenching until she could feel the moisture collecting between her legs.

Touch me, damn it, please!

Suddenly he gave her just what she'd been craving—he cupped her buttocks and squeezed them hard, kneaded them with his broad hands. It electrified her. The pleasure jolted her body, prickling her already hard nipples and tingling her through her clit.

He pressed lightly on her upper back, bending her until she had to place her hands on the fallen tree. His other hand slid between her legs, and she parted them readily. She was aching to be rubbed and rubbed hard, but again, the broad fingers barely brushed over her tight wool and swollen lips. She tried to rub herself on his hand, but it eluded her, softly stroking her inner thighs instead until she trembled all over, nearly frantic with arousal and need.