I had planned to call Mackey first thing in the morning, but I was still at the breakfast table when I heard his heavy knock on the door. When I opened it he stood there speechless, rubbing his ear. Don’s speechless moments are few and far between, so I let this one last.

I waved him in, sat him down at the table and poured him a cup of coffee. “Let me guess,” I said after he’d had some time to soak in Brook’s decorations, “Kyle told you where I was.”

“I’ve been looking all over the last couple days.”

I waited.

“How the hell’d you land here, Charles? You going to fill me in?”

“Answered an invitation.”

“From the gal who let me in? She’s invited me here a couple of times too.” He smiled. “I wish I’d known what she had in mind.”

It would have been easy to set him straight, but it was also easy not to.

“Seriously, Charles, are you and she...?”

“Shacked up?”

“That’s what it looks like. You haven’t been home in several days. And now here you are at the zoo gal’s place...” He glanced over his shoulder at Brook’s collection of evidence. “...pouring coffee for me at the kitchen table. I know what it looks like.”

“Sometimes things are as they seem,” I said, “and sometimes they’re not.”

I watched the muscles of his face move as he tried to read me right. “Anyway,” he said after a minute, “you think I could drag
you away from the love nest a while? Ever since the Bee printed
that story about the goat kill, they’re running me ragged.”

“They’ll settle down soon enough.”

“They will when we bring in a mountain lion.”

“Haven’t caught the goat killer, eh?”

He explained to me that that wasn’t likely to happen. They
couldn’t use dogs in such a developed area, and the trap they’d set
up in the pasture where the goat went down had been disabled by
a saboteur the last two nights.

I snapped my fingers. “What was his name again? Cory, wasn’t
it?”

Don glowered. “Sneaky bastard.”

“Looks like you’re out of luck.”

“Maybe not.”

“Oh?”

Don sipped at his coffee a moment. “You hear about the kid
who disappeared down by the river? Little boy. It was on the radio
this morning.”

“It looks like a cougar kill, then?”

“Haven’t heard the details yet. I’m headed over to the depart-
ment now. Why don’t you come with me. Should be a lot going
on.”

“Sorry,” I said. “Promised I’d help out around here today. Big
fundraiser tonight, lots to do.”

Don winked, the color rising in his face. “I get you.”

“But keep me posted,” I said. “Let me know what’s going
on.”