

Siren Publishing

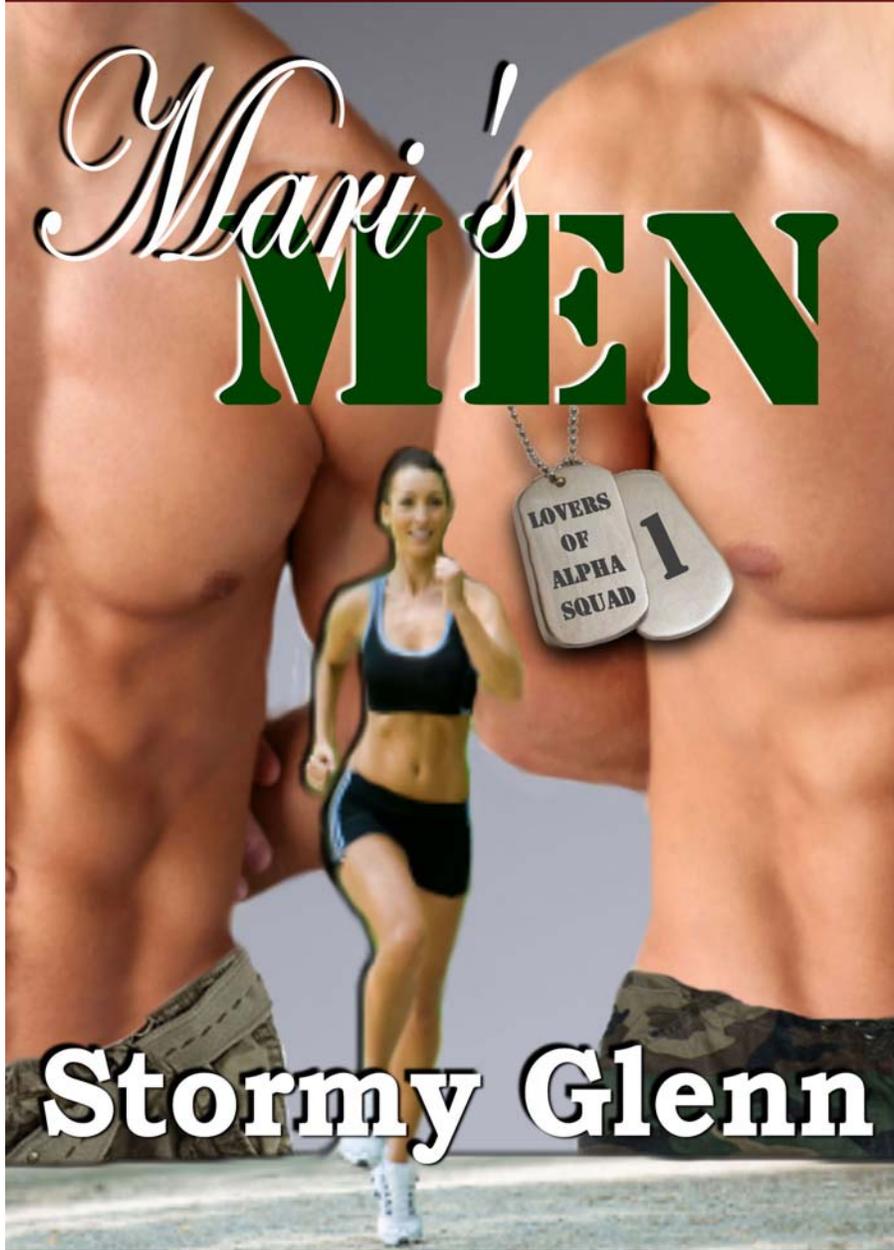
Ménage Amour

Mari's
MEN

LOVERS
OF
ALPHA
SQUAD

1

Stormy Glenn



MARI'S MEN

Lovers of Alpha Squad 1

Stormy Glenn

MENAGE AMOUR



Siren Publishing, Inc.
www.SirenPublishing.com

ABOUT THE E-BOOK YOU HAVE PURCHASED:

Your non-refundable purchase of this e-book allows you to **one LEGAL** copy for your own personal use. It is **ILLEGAL** to send your copy to anyone else. This book cannot be copied in any format, sold, or otherwise transferred from your computer to another through upload to a file sharing peer to peer program, for free or for a fee, or as a prize in any contest. Such action is illegal and in violation of the U.S. Copyright Law. Distribution of this e-book, in whole or in part, online, offline, in print or in any way or any other method currently known or yet to be invented, is forbidden without the prior written permission of both the publisher and the copyright owner of this book. When you no longer want this book, it must be deleted from your computer.

A SIREN PUBLISHING BOOK

IMPRINT: Ménage Amour

MARI'S MEN

Copyright © 2009 by Stormy Glenn

E-book ISBN: 1-60601-397-1

First E-book Publication: February 2009

Cover design by Jinger Heaston

All cover art and logo copyright © 2009 by Siren Publishing, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED: This literary work may not be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, including electronic or photographic reproduction, in whole or in part, without express written permission.

All characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead is strictly coincidental.

PUBLISHER

Siren Publishing, Inc.

www.SirenPublishing.com

DEDICATION

To Judie, thanks for helping me with this series!

MARI'S MEN

Lovers of Alpha Squad 1

STORMY GLENN

Copyright © 2009

Chapter 1

The hike through the thick forest of the Cascade Mountains had been a long one. But they had finally reached their goal; a small encampment set in a clearing on the edge of the trees. Five battle-hardened warriors slowly inched their way toward the edge of the trees north of the small clearing. They made no sound, not even a rustle in the leaves. Theirs was a mission of secrecy.

“Well, would you look at that,” Sam whispered to Cole, indicating the people standing around the firelight in the encampment. “I thought they only had the boy. Who’s the girl?”

Cole stared at the young woman who seemed to be talking to the largest man in the group around the fire. He felt his body harden in response to the vision before him.

He knew immediately deep down in the depths of his soul that she belonged to him, that she was made for him. The tightening of his body told him that she belonged to him as no other woman ever had. She was his mate, the other part of his soul.

“She’s a brave little thing,” Sam stated as he watched the woman push the small boy behind her for protection.

“She’s magnificent!” Cole said, a small hitch in his voice. Cole shook himself free of his lust induced trance at Sam’s words and focused again on what was happening in the small clearing.

The woman seemed to be arguing with the leader of the group. The leader that Cole knew well. It was Yuri Nirov, one of the men on their crime watch list. The man was a thug. He belonged to no specific crime syndicate, except whoever paid the highest price. Yuri’s only cause was his own greed.

As he glanced around to the other two men surrounding the campfire he recognized the others as well, Yuri’s two brothers, Oni and Sten. They were all in this together. They had kidnapped the son of a high placed diplomat who was working in Seattle, Washington with the United States government on a highly secretive peace initiative. And, it would seem the woman also.

Cole concentrated on the conversation between Yuri and the woman but they were too far away to hear what was being said, but Cole didn’t think it could be good. The dark haired leader seemed to be angry with whatever the woman was saying. His arms were motioning furiously as she spoke.

Cole felt a deadly rage race through his body as the man backhanded the woman, nearly throwing her to the ground. The woman turned her head back to the leader, wiping her lips by the back of her hand. She glanced down at the trail of blood on her hand and then to the leader. A smile began to form on her lips as she said something else to him.

“He dies!” Cole hissed out between clenched teeth.

“Well, duh!” Sam replied, a little confused as to why that was even an issue. Seeing the rigid posture of Cole’s body as he glanced over at him, a thought suddenly occurred to him. “What about the woman?” he asked.

“She’s mine.” Cole growled.

“So, that’s the way it is, huh,” Sam said thoughtfully, amusement clearly ringing in his voice.

Cole turned his head to scowl at Sam. “Do you have a problem with this?” Cole snarled, beyond irritated.

“Hell no, take the woman. But have you discussed this with Bear?” Sam laughed.

Cole looked at the smirk on Sam’s face. “He knows.” And Cole meant it. Bear was in the same lust filled condition. Cole could feel it even across the field from where his brother was positioned, no doubt watching the woman as intently as he was.

“There’s movement below,” whispered a man laying flat to the ground beside Cole and Sam. Both swung their gaze back to the scene in the clearing.

“I don’t like this,” stated Sam, “I don’t like this at all.”

They watched as the leader grabbed the young woman by her arm and began walking away from the campfire toward a small grouping of large rocks to the south of where they were hiding. The leader was quite a bit taller than the woman and was nearly dragging her behind him. Her ankle length skirt seemed to be tangling in her legs with every step she took.

Cole took in the situation in a glance. “Sam, Caleb, Nick, get the boy. Bear, come with me.” Knowing his words would be followed precisely, Cole and Bear began to slowly make their way south of the camp, following the man and woman.

Cole could feel several emotions surge through his body as he quietly made his way through the underbrush. There was rage at the man for hitting the woman, and a sure knowledge that he would enjoy feeling the man’s last breath leave his body. There was fear that he would not be in time to save the woman destined to be his. And there was still an overwhelming sense of hunger for the woman.

Cole and Bear silently worked their way through the underbrush following the pair through the dense forest trees. As they crept forward they could see Yuri and the woman standing in a small clearing a few yards ahead. Yuri was holding a large knife in his

hands, pointing it at the woman. The evil smirk on Yuri's face sent a cold shiver down Cole's back.

"Do you agree that she is ours?" Cole asked Bear.

"Do we have a choice? You know she is the one as much as I do."

"No, I guess not," Cole sadly shook his head, *"But if we take her, you know how it will be for us, for her."*

Bear was silent for a moment as he contemplated the situation and what it might mean to all of them. *"Do you think she will agree to what we need? Most women would not."*

"Hell, Bear, I don't know. But with the way we are both feeling right now, I'm not sure we have a choice."

Feeling his hard erection pressing almost angrily against his zipper, Bear agreed with Cole. *"We can't hurt her, Cole."* It was the thought of bringing pain to such a beautiful young woman that he couldn't stomach.

"Hell, I know that, but it won't be easy for her, not with us. You know what we need."

Bear knew what Cole was thinking. He was thinking the very same things. She was a forever kind of woman. That he didn't have a problem with because he was more than ready to become a forever kind of man.

"Cole?" Bear asked, interrupting Cole's thoughts. Bear knew deep down that he was being irrational, but every time he looked at the woman and her beautiful body the uncertainty intensified.

"Yeah?" Cole answered. Bear was silent for a moment.

"Are you sure about this, about her?" Bear could feel the sadness saturating Cole as he answered.

"Yeah Bear, I am. We need her, maybe more than we've ever needed anyone in our lives."

Cole motioned for Bear to circle around to the other side of the small clearing, never taking his eyes off the knife in Yuri's hand as he silently climbed into the limbs of a tree overhanging Yuri's position.

It was pure hell for him to sit silently, not moving, while a manic held a knife on the woman he was sure was their future.

It was all Cole could do to sit there and wait for Bear to move into position. Yuri was waving the knife closer and closer to the woman, yelling at her. Cole only hoped they were able to get to her before Yuri did something stupid. There was no telling the monsters Yuri would release on the world if he hurt this woman.

“Bear, damn it, hurry the hell up!” Cole was getting more agitated as he sat there waiting for Bear to get into position.

“Keep your pantyhose on. I’m moving as fast as I can.”

Cole almost snorted. *“Well, move faster, damn it.”* Cole knew Bear was crawling his way toward the small bunch of bushes closest to their prey. Once Bear was close enough, Cole knew he’d take Yuri out. It seemed to take forever before Bear told him he was ready.

“Okay, I’m in place. How do you want this to play out?” Bear inquired.

“We can’t do anything that might endanger the girl,” Cole asserted.

“Well, duh, Bro. Any ideas on how we can avoid that?” Bear almost wished Cole were within strangling distance.

Cole thought for a moment. *“We need some sort of distraction.”*

Bear laughed, *“Well, that would be great. However, barring a marching band walking through the forest, we’re kind of screwed here.”*

Cole silently glared at Bear. *“Don’t you think I know that? Just give me a moment to think here.”*

“Well, to use one of your idiotic phrases...hurry the hell up, damn it!” Bear laughed again.

Cole wanted to laugh at his brother’s attempt to defuse the stressful situation but he was too wound up. *“I’m working on it. You’re not helping.”*

Cole almost fell out of the tree branches he was sitting in when a sweet voice entered the private mental link he shared with his twin brother.

“Would the two of you just shut the hell up and tell me how big of a distraction you want?”

Cole could feel similar shock rocking Bear through their mental link. She could not only hear them talking telepathically, but talk back to them. A myriad of emotions swept through Cole—shock, disbelief, joy, and a kernel of fear.

No, the fear was coming from Bear. The joy was all Cole's. Cole was ecstatic that the woman they had chosen as their own could talk to them through the link that only the two of them had shared from birth. Maybe this would work after all.

Mari had known someone was there for quite some time. She felt like she was being watched. When Yuri had told one of his brothers to patrol she knew she had to act. She had to keep their attention on her. Of course, that little rebellion had gotten her a fat lip. One little hiking trip into the mountains by herself and look how she ends up. *This really sucked.*

When Yuri had dragged her away from the others, Mari had prayed that they would reach her in time, or at least before Yuri did too much damage, but she wasn't sure they would. Mari knew she had never been more scared.

Then, the buzzing had started. Well, at first, it had been just a buzzing in her head, but after awhile, the buzzing had started to form into words. At first she assumed she was hearing someone's radio. Then she realized that the words were in her head. Then she had become really scared. She was obviously losing her mind.

When she finally started to figure things out she had realized that there were two men and they were arguing. Now, normally, anyone who knew Mari knew that she was a sweet tempered girl and hardly ever got mad, but things were not normal, and she was pissed.

“I’m waiting here. Could you hurry the hell up? This guy is not going to wait much longer and I would really prefer to keep my clothes on!” Mari said.

She was a spitfire. Cole was captivated by the girl already, and he had yet to even feel her silky smooth skin. This did not bode well for him but it sure was going to be fun. *“Just a little distraction, baby, would be greatly appreciated.”*

“Will this do?”

Cole nearly swallowed his tongue as he watched the girl slowly begin to pull her white tank top up over head, leaving her dressed only in a white bra. A bra, of which Cole quickly noticed, was barely containing her generous breasts.

“Huh, yeah, that’ll do,” Cole groaned, his cock getting harder than he could ever remember it getting. He watched as she ran her fingers through the silky auburn tendrils of hair that had come loose from her braid and caressed the side of her face, mesmerizing him.

As she slowly worked her patchwork skirt down her waist and he got his first glimpse of her full rounded hips, Cole realized that this was no girl. She was every sexual fantasy Cole could think of all rolled into one little woman.

“Oh man, Bear, we are in so much trouble,” Cole groaned. Yep, she had trouble written all over every curve she had. And she had curves everywhere. That woman was built like a wet dream.

Cole thought his eyes would roll back into his head when she finally dropped her skirt on the ground and stood there, defiantly, in nothing but her bra and the skimpiest pair of underwear he had ever seen. His cock was waging a war with the waistband of his pants for freedom.

She was breathtaking. She had a gentle look to her with her long auburn hair restrained down her back by a single braid. A few strands of hair had come loose and floated around her face, seemingly caressing her cheeks.

She was not bone thin like many of the woman other men preferred, but had curves in all the right places. Cole liked his women curvy and with some meat on their bones. Those tiny, dainty women scared the hell out of him. He was always afraid he would break them, was always afraid to really let himself go.

Cole had always been a breast man and the immense proportions of her breasts told him he had been a very good boy. As big as his hands were, those breasts just might fill them to capacity. But he wasn't positive. It might take some investigation on his part, and he was more than willing to put in the work to find out.

She looked like she would spill right on out of her bra if she took a breath. Cole could feel his mouth watering just looking at them, imaging wrapping his tongue around the pale pink nipples peaking out the tops of her bra cups.

She stood maybe five foot six. She'd barely reach his chest, which was just fine with him. Her legs were long and well-built, just right to wrap around his hips as he plunged into her warm depths. And he could see her rounded abdomen just above her panty line.

As far as Cole was concerned, she was perfect. And he couldn't wait to touch her, to feel her softness held against his, her body wrapped around his. But first he and Bear had to rescue her.

Bear crouched in the bushes, inching his way closer to Yuri as he watched Cole crawl out on a low hanging tree branch. He stopped at the edge of the brush, taking several deep breaths to slow his speeding heart. He just couldn't seem to get a hold of the calm, cool detachment he usually had during a mission.

Bear's emotions were overwhelming. He was filled with happiness because he and his brother had found their mate, apprehension because he didn't know if she would accept them or the things they needed from her, fear because he didn't know if she would accept him, and almost uncontrollable lust for this girl.

Bear tensed as he watched Cole slowly begin hanging upside down from the tree limb right above Yuri's head. What the hell was

he doing? Bear watched in astonishment as Cole lowered his body down until he was completely upside down hanging directly over Yuri's head.

"Okay, baby, just one more small distraction." Cole lowered his hands slowly, reaching for Yuri's head.

"Oh hell, so much for keeping my clothes on," the woman griped.

Cole mouth dropped open as he watched the woman reach for the front clasp of her bra and snapped it open, dropping it slowly down her arms, revealing her massive breasts in all their naked glory. The air rushed from Cole's lungs in a huge whoosh as he caught a look at her succulent breasts with their rosy pink areolas.

It was enough noise to alert Yuri to his presence above him. Just as Cole regained his composure, Yuri jumped forward and grabbed the girl wrapping his arm around her neck and pressing her body back against his.

"Uh, uh, uh. I don't think so." Yuri held the knife across the girl's neck, pressing just deep enough to draw up a drop of blood.

Cole flipped over and dropped to the ground, landing on his feet and stood up to face Yuri. His lips tightened at the drop of blood trailing down the girl's neck. Just one more thing to make Yuri pay for. *"Don't do anything stupid, Yuri."*

Cole held his hands up in a position of surrender. His gaze briefly swept down to her naked breasts against his will. His cock instantly jumped to attention. Inwardly Cole groaned. What he wouldn't give right there and then to be anywhere else where he could wrap his tongue around those sweet looking nipples. Oh yeah, he could make a meal of those beauties.

A small squeak quickly brought Cole back to the present and away from his musings. He cringed in shame at the fear he saw on her face. He couldn't believe he was standing there having erotic fantasies of the girl while she had a madman with a knife at her throat.

"Oh man, what kind of monster am I?" Cole asked.

"Focus man. Keep your mind on the game," Bear admonished.

"To hell with focusing and to hell with the game. Get me out of this and you can fantasize about my breasts all you want!" spouted a furious feminine voice.

Cole's eyebrows rose almost to his hairline when he looked down at the little spitfire and saw that they were filled with anger and not the fear. He tried to quell the small smile at the edges of his lips at her outrage. *"Yes, ma'am."*

Cole raised his eyes back to Yuri. He could see Bear creeping up behind him. They had to play this out just right if they wanted to keep the girl from being harmed. *"Faint," Cole directed to the girl.*

Her eyes nearly popped out of her head. *"What?"* Had he actually told her to faint? That was *so* not going to happen.

Cole repeated himself, trying to keep a smile from forming on his lips. *"Faint!"*

"I'm not going to faint. What the hell are you talking about?" This man was nuts. First he wanted her to take her clothes off and now he wanted her to faint? *"You've obviously lost your ever-loving mind."*

Cole nearly rolled his eyes. *"Just do it."*

"Don't take that tone with me." There was only so much a girl could handle before losing her composure. Mari didn't think anyone would begrudge her a small temper tantrum considering the circumstances. *"And stop telling me what to do."*

Cole could see the anger spitting from her eyes. Damn, she sure was pretty when she was ticked. *"Do you argue with everyone or just me?"* He'd have to remember that.

"Just you!" she yelled.

"Oh hell, just do it."

She cocked her head slightly to one side. *"Say please,"* she glared at him.

"What?" Cole could see the laughter in Bear's eyes as he glanced briefly past Yuri from below his eyelashes.

“*Say please,*” she repeated, a small self-satisfied smirk on her lips.

Cole swore to himself right there and then that he was going to paddle her ass the first chance he got. “*Please!*” he gritted out, jaw clenched.

Cole wasn’t sure who was more surprised, him or Yuri, when Mari gave a little whimper and collapsed. He sprang forward to grab the knife when Yuri lowered it from her neck to catch the falling girl.

He wrestled briefly with Yuri as Bear stepped forward and grabbed him by the head. A sickening crunch was all the noise that Yuri made before he slumped to the ground, his neck obviously broken.

Cole glanced briefly at his twin before nodding and turning toward the girl. He knew Bear hated killing. He was more of a peacemaker. But they both knew Yuri was a dead man the second he put a finger on their girl.

“Would you mind too terribly much getting the dead body off of me so I can get some damn clothes on?”

Cole’s cock thumped against his zipper, hard and thick. Damn, she was still pissed and still as sexy as hell. He crouched down next to the girl as Bear dragged Yuri’s body away to the bushes. No sense scaring her anymore than she already was.

“I don’t know, baby,” he said as he let his fingers trail through the silky hair curling around her face. “You look pretty good right where you are.” He suddenly found himself staring into the most beautiful sage colored eyes he had ever seen. She just stared at him, not moving.

“What’s your name, sweetness?” He gently rubbed his hand down her cheek to her lips, absently rubbing his thumb over her full bottom lips as he gazed into her eyes. Cole couldn’t remember ever seeing that particular shade of green before.

“Mari.” She could barely breathe let alone speak. The most beautiful man she had ever seen in her life was smiling down at her, and it looked as if he liked what he saw.

He was kneeling so Mari couldn't tell how tall he was but even crouched his body was huge. He had short, sandy blond hair that was cut tight to his head. There was a hint of a five o'clock shadow on his square jaw, topped with a light brown mustache. His eyes were the most beautiful slate gray she had ever seen.

The black shirt he wore was stretched tight across his chest and his black pants looked as if they were painted on his mammoth legs. His shoulders were so wide that they filled Mari's vision.

“Mari,” Cole whispered. His hand moved away from her lip and down her jaw to her throat. He lightly caressed the soft contours of her throat as his gaze reluctantly moved away from her eyes and traveled down her body.

Mari was lying on her back, arms down at her sides. Her breasts lay gently on her chest, the nipples tightening to hard little pearls as he watched. They were perfect. They were not small by any means, which made them just right for his large hands.

Cole's hungry gaze traveled past her breasts to the slight round of her stomach, pausing briefly to admire the smooth slope of her abdomen where it met her panty line. No curls protruded beyond the edge of the skimpy material suggesting that she might be bare. Oh God, Cole hoped so. A bare woman was a thing to behold. And he had every intention of finding out for himself if she was.

Further down, past the apex of her thighs and her softly round hips, her knees were slightly bent, showing the long length of her legs. Hell, even her feet were sexy, her toenails painted a bright red.

“Such a beautiful name for such a beautiful lady. But it hardly does you justice.” He ran his hand slowly down her chest, resisting the urge to touch the tight little nubs of her nipples, and down past her stomach. He rested his hand briefly on the slight rise of her stomach before moving down to caress the rounded curve of her hip.

“Oh baby, you’re everything I could ever want rolled into one hot little body,” he whispered as he leaned in to kiss her. Cole suddenly found himself sitting back on his butt as his little spitfire pushed him away and jumped to her feet. She was stronger than she looked.

He laughed as he looked up at her. She had taken a warrior’s stance, feet slightly apart, hands on her hips, head thrown back in defiance. She was a goddess.

“Who the hell are you?”

“Ah, hell, honey, I’m the answer to your dreams.”

Mari reached down and grabbed her tank top and pulled it over her head. Then, grabbing her skirt off the ground she glared at Cole. “More like my worst nightmare.”

Mari whirled around to escape and ran straight into Bear’s waiting arms. His large hands grabbed her to steady her, covering almost all of the bare flesh between her shoulders and elbows. Mari’s hands landed flat on Bear’s muscular chest, feeling every rigid line beneath his black shirt.

Her head looked up and up until it was almost tilted straight back when she finally met his eyes. She inhaled sharply when she saw the deep, smoky, gray eyes staring back at her. “I was wrong. You’re my worst nightmare,” she whispered as she slipped into complete darkness.

Cole could barely stand to see the suffering in Bear’s eyes as he caught the unconscious Mari in his arms. He didn’t know whether to be hurt by the anguish coursing through his twin at Mari’s words, or to be angry that she had spoken them at all. How could she call Bear a nightmare? He was large, yes, even huge by many standards, but he was no monster.

Cole was nearly as angry with Mari for hurting Bear as he had been at Yuri for hurting her. Mari was supposed to be the answer to their dreams, their hope for the future. Not this...this...nightmare.

“Cole,” Bear interrupted what was sure to be an impressive rage by slowly lying Mari in Cole’s arms. “It’s okay.”

“No, it’s not. She’s supposed to belong to both of us,” Cole complained.

Bear looked Cole directly in the eyes. “We both knew this might happen.”

“That doesn’t make it right, Bear.”

Bear shrugged his massive shoulders. “Apparently it wasn’t meant to be,” Bear said as he gently caressed Mari’s cheek, his hand covering nearly all of her face. “At least one of us will have her.”

“Both of us will have her,” Cole replied confidently, “Bear, I won’t do this without you.”

Bear nodded his head. “Yes, you will. You have to.” He glanced back at Cole. “Please, for me.”

Cole closed his eyes against the tears brimming in Bear’s eyes. “Benjamin.”

“Please, Coleman, I’ve never asked you for anything.”

“I know you haven’t, but you can’t ask this of me.” Cole knew he couldn’t do this without Bear. He opened his eyes to look over at his brother. “I’ll do anything you want. You know that, but please, don’t ask me for this.”

“I *am* asking this, Cole.” Bear gazed back down at Mari. “You know she’s the one. We both do.” Bear buried his pain and looked back at Cole, the determination showing in his eyes. “If you don’t take her now you could lose her. And then we would both be without her.”

“I don’t want to lose you because of this.”

Bear patted Cole on the shoulder. “I will always have your back, bro.”

Cole glanced down at Mari before looking back up to Bear. “Are you sure about this, Bear? You’re going to have to see her day in and day out. You’ll know whenever—damn it, Bear, you will *know* everything.” He took a step toward Bear, wanting him to know what would happen if he did this. “Can you live with that?”

Cole was saddened to hear the bitter laugh escape Bear's clenched jaw. "Yeah, I guess I will be living vicariously through you." Bear patted Cole's shoulder one last time before turning to walk away. "So, don't fuck this up!"

Cole watched Bear until he disappeared into the darkness. Half of his heart lay in the hands of the woman in his arms. The other half was with his grieving brother. How could Bear survive it? Looking down at Mari, Cole shifted her closer to his body as his arms tightened around her. How could he give her up? How could he not?

Cole began the long trek back to their drop point, following Bear. "Damn, life just sucks sometimes."

Chapter 2

Mari opened her eyes slowly. She knew she wasn't in her own bed because her mattress was not this soft. But damned if she knew whose bed she was in. She briefly remembered being rescued in the woods by two of the sexiest men she had ever met but it has been so unreal, she wondered if it had all been a dream.

If the strange room she was in was any indication, maybe not. However, that still didn't explain where she was, whose room this was, and where those two gorgeous men were. Mari would have been a lot happier waking up with one, or both, of them in the bed with her.

Propping herself up on her elbows she looked around the room. It was a simple room by most standards, with just a few pieces of furniture and some small knick-knacks. A couple of oak dressers graced the wall across from the bed, one on each side of a big river rock fireplace. Two light brown suede chairs sat in front of the fireplace, a single small oak table between them. The only other piece of furniture was an old pirate-looking chest sitting in the corner.

Other than that, there was only the bed Mari was sitting on and it was enormous. Mari couldn't remember ever seeing a bed this big. But it was beautiful with white rod-iron bed rails at the foot and head of the bed.

The bed itself was covered in a huge white goose down quilt and pure white cotton sheets. Between the enormous bed, the quilt, and all the pillows behind her head, Mari felt like she was two years old again, playing in her mother's bed. This bed made even her feel small. Yep, the room was absolutely perfect.

Wrapping the quilt around her naked body Mari padded over to the beautiful oak framed French doors to the left of the bed. Beyond the clear panes of glass she saw another picturesque sight. Fenced pastures filled with livestock, colorful fields, a huge blue lake, and green forests surrounding it all. Beyond that, tall snow capped mountains, surrounding the little valley as if protecting it from the world.

The sight was breath taking. It was a picture that would have made any artist itch to grab canvas and paintbrush. It was everything she had always dreamed of for her home when she had been a child. Except it wasn't her home. So, whose was it?

Mari turned away from the windows and walked to one of the other two doors in the room. Behind door number one was a bathroom, although Mari was pretty sure her entire bedroom at home would easily fit into this personal spa. Double sinks, large walk in shower with at least six showerheads, and the world's largest sunken tub surrounded by a white tiled landing. That left door number two.

Closing the bathroom door Mari took a step toward the last door when it suddenly opened and one of the biggest men Mari had ever seen stepped into the room, shutting the door behind him. Mari instantly recognized him as one of the men that had rescued her.

She didn't know whether to be afraid of his size or aroused. If the wetness gathering between her legs was anything to go by, her body definitely had an opinion. Just looking at him made her libido jump up and down screaming, "yippee!"

He was gorgeous. Every muscular inch of his darkly tanned six foot three frame proclaimed his sensuality. Mari just itched to find out if he was hiding tan lines behind the faded denim jeans plastered to thick powerful thighs, or if he sunbathed in the nude. A white shirt was stretched tightly across his sinewy chest and his shoulders were easily twice the width of hers.

His facial features were finely sculpted like a roman gladiator with a hint of morning stubble gracing his square jaw. And his sandy

brown hair was short but not so short that Mari couldn't grab a handful while dragging him into a long, bone-clenching kiss, which sounded like a perfect idea to Mari.

She knew she had to be dreaming when she felt his momentary surprise as her lips met his before his arms wrapped around her, pulling her closer. Oh yeah, he was hard all over, especially that long hard part of him pressed against her stomach. As his tongue swept inside of her mouth, Mari's body broke out into a hallelujah chorus. His large hands were everywhere, down her back, in her hair, past the curve of her hip.

When he reached her naked butt Mari felt a shudder rake through his body before he picked her up in his arms, centering his hard erection against her heated center and wrapping her legs around his waist. This was heaven.

Every touch of his hands left an inferno in their wake. Mari was on fire and had no intention of putting out the flames. No one had ever wanted her like this. She certainly wasn't going to say no when the man of her dreams couldn't seem to keep his hands off of her. She'd had wanted to touch him since the moment she had seen him in the forest. If this was a dream, she hoped she never woke up.

Cole nearly leapt to the bed to deposit the little fireball in his arms onto the bed. With one hand wrapped in her hair he used the other to unbutton his jeans and push them out of the way, freeing his aching cock before following her down onto the bed. As small as Mari was compared to him, he still seemed to fit perfectly between her thighs.

Feeling the slick heat of her caress, his cock Cole knew he had to be inside of her immediately or he would die. There was no time for foreplay. He wouldn't survive it.

Cole pulled his lips from hers long enough to gaze into her passion filled ones. While foreplay was out of the question at this stage, he had to have her acceptance before he could take her like he wanted to. "Mari, baby—"

Mari's only response was to wrap her legs around his waist, pulling his body even closer, if that was even possible.

He groaned as he felt himself sink into her heated folds. She was all fire and silk, wrapping tightly around his burning cock. Oh God, she was so tight. He was damn glad she wasn't a virgin. He didn't have the strength to take things slow.

"You feel so good." Cole grabbed Mari's hip, holding her in place as he began to slowly thrust into the tight grip of her body.

Cole tried to go slow, to take her easily, but as her body began to tremble as she climaxed, he knew he was lost. "Oh yeah, baby, just like that." He was in heaven.

"Oh, fuck, Mari." Grabbing both of her hips, Cole gave up all sense of control and thrust into her over and over again until fireworks exploded behind his eyes and he spilled his seed into her womb.

Cole vaguely noted that Mari had reached another climax as he continued pumping into her for several moments. She felt so good wrapped around his cock, he never wanted it to end. He buried his face in her sweet smelling hair until he could bring himself to stop.

Pulling from her pliant body he picked Mari up and carried her into the bathroom. Bracing Mari on his leg and holding her in place with his arm wrapped around her, he turned on the water and waited for it to heat up. Once the water was at an acceptable temperature, he added bath salts and then lowered Mari into the tub. Grabbing a clean washcloth, he began to wash Mari.

As he slowly rubbed the washcloth over Mari's flushed body he suddenly remembered the bond he had with his brother. He reached out to him, finding him breathing heavily. "Bear?" Cole knew Bear had found release right along with him and Mari. "Are you okay?"

Bear chuckled, "Yeah, but maybe you could give me a little warning next time." He laughed again remembering the hard on from hell he had suddenly had while grooming his horse and his mad dash

to find an empty private stall when he had felt the passion consuming his brother. *"That was a really close call."*

While he knew it had been his own hand wrapped around his aching cock it had felt like Mari. Every stroke, every push of his hips had made him almost feel like he was thrusting himself into Mari's luscious body.

Oh sure, he knew it wasn't the same but he still couldn't keep the satisfaction from filling his heart, or the sadness that he would never feel her sweet body for himself. *"I'll be fine, Cole. Just take care of our baby."*

Cole finished bathing Mari before lifting her from the tub and drying her off. Taking her back into the bedroom he carefully laid her in the bed, tucking the thick quilt around her shoulders. He went back to the bathroom to take a quick shower before drying himself off and climbing into the bed beside Mari, pulling her body close to his while wrapping his arms around her. Laying a small kiss on her head, he tucked her into his body.

He was a little worried that Mari had not opened her eyes or spoken a word to him. Was she regretting that they had made love? Had he been too rough with her? Did she see him as a monster like Bear?

Making love to Mari was heaven on earth, but just holding her was good, too. Cole never thought he would be happy just holding a woman. He was usually up and gone within minutes of finishing. He couldn't even remember ever actually sleeping with a woman all night long much less having one in his home. He always went to their house, or a cheap motel. He never brought a woman home.

But he felt at peace, content. He hadn't felt this peaceful since, well, he couldn't remember ever feeling at peace. *"Bear?"* He just had to share this feeling with his brother. It was unlike anything he had ever felt.

"I know, Cole, I know." Cole felt his brother send him the feelings of contentment but he wasn't sure if it was for Cole's benefit or his own.

"Don't be long, okay? This is still your home."

Bear laughed, *"I won't, bro. I'll be in soon."*

"Who are you?" Mari whispered, breaking the silence of the room, bringing Cole away from his conversation with his brother. She had realized that she was not dreaming about the time that Cole had lowered her into the tub. Up until that point, she had been living in a lust-induced haze of pleasure.

She had no idea where she was or who had just shaken her entire world. She had been afraid to say anything while he bathed her, afraid that any words would end the dream she was happily living in. Things like this just did not happen to her.

"I'm yours."

Mari turned her head to look back at him over her shoulder. "No, I mean, what's your name?"

Cole laughed, "Don't you think that you should have asked that before you let me sink my dick into that pretty little pussy of yours?"

Mari could feel herself blush all the way to her toes. "Oh, you're a real hoot. I'll bet you're a blast at parties, too." She turned back over and tried to scoot away but Cole was having none of that.

He quickly pulled her back to him, anchoring her in place with his powerful arms. "Cole. My name is Cole," he whispered into her ear.

"Cole?" She asked in a whisper of breath as he flipped her around to look into her eyes.

The sound of his name on her honeyed lips had sent a shiver of lust straight to his awakening cock. "Yes, ma'am, Coleman James Daniels, at your service."

"Where am I, Cole?"

His grin was evil as he replied, "My bed."

"Funny. Your sense of humor is just sweeping me off my feet. But I'll play along. Where's your bed?" Mari asked.

“My ranch,” he chuckled.

Mari rolled her eyes. “Okay, and where exactly is your ranch?”

Cole laughed. He could tell Mari was becoming exasperated with him. But he sure loved to see her when she was riled. “A little valley called Graves Creek.”

Mari let out a deep sigh, “And where is this valley located?”

Cole could hardly hold back his laughter. “Southern Oregon.”

“Cole!” she shouted as she punched him in the arm.

He could contain his laughter no more. Wrapping Mari tightly against him, Cole rolled until she was resting on his chest as his laughter rumbled. When he could finally regain his composure he laid a quick kiss on her lips before telling her of their midnight flight from the Cascade Mountains the night before where Yuri had kidnapped her and the young boy. He told her of the decision he made to bring her home to his ranch while she was unconscious.

“So,” Mari finally said, “how is it that I can hear you in my head and talk with you?”

Cole shrugged his shoulders. “I’m not real sure but I’m not complaining. I’ve only ever been able to talk to my brother.” Cole cocked his head to one side, his eyebrows drawn together in a frown. “Why? Does it bother you?”

“I haven’t decided. You have to admit, it’s a little weird,” Mari replied.

“Yeah, but it can be a lot of fun.” Cole grinned up at Mari. “Just think how much easier it’s going to be to tell me how much you like my tongue in your pussy when my cock’s in your mouth.”

Cole glanced up at Mari under his lashes to see how she was taking his words. His cock jumped at the sensuous little grin suddenly appearing on Mari’s lips.

“That’s right. Didn’t you saying something about being at my service?” Mari wrapped her arms around his broad shoulders and leaned down to press her lips to his.

Mari couldn't believe she was propositioning this man again. What must he be thinking of her? Granted, she was not a virgin, but she usually didn't drop into bed with a man at the drop of a hat, or the closing of a door, or something like that.

Her sexual expertise consisted of a teenage romp in the backseat of her high school boyfriend's car and a couple of one-night stands. She barely even dated. Things like this just did not happen to her.

But she sure wasn't going to look the gift sex god in the mouth. "Yep. Servicing sounds pretty good to me. So you'd better get started, cowboy."

Cole couldn't agree more. "Yes, ma'am."

* * * *

Mari woke a few hours later with a warm body pressed behind her, strong hands fondling her breasts, fingers squeezing her nipples, and a hard cock thrusting into her tight channel. She was a little sore after the four times she had been woken during the night in just the same way, but not enough to stop him.

She inhaled sharply when Cole leaned forward and pulled the quilt the rest of the way off her body. In one forward motion, Cole pulled himself from Mari and flipped her over onto her stomach. He pulled her back into his arms, resting his face against the smooth skin of her lower back. His hands ran up her back and down to caress her buttocks.

Cole inhaled Mari's sweet scent, his passion running rampant. "*Oh, baby,*" he whispered into Mari's head as he pressed his lips against her soft skin, "*you have no idea how much I want you.*"

Mari's answer was the rapid thud of her pulse, a quiver surging through her veins. Somewhere, in the back of her mind, Mari knew that she would be totally mortified tomorrow knowing she was practically throwing herself a virtual stranger. But for now, touching him was the only thing she wanted to think about.

The touch of Cole's lips on her butt cheek sent a shock wave through Mari's entire body. The blood pounded in her brain, leapt from her heart, and made her legs tremble.

Feeling Mari's body shiver, Cole wrapped his strong arms around Mari and pulled her back onto his lap, pulling her legs apart to straddle his thighs. The feel of Mari's bottom pressed against his thighs sent his senses reeling. His breathing became sharp and rapid as he felt Mari's fingers caress the strong tendons in the back of his neck.

Cole pushed Mari's body back beneath his on the bed. His hands explored the contoured lines of her back, her waist, and her hips. His lips explored the soft curve of her neck.

Cole pushed Mari's body down until she rested on arms, her legs still hugging his thighs. His hard cock stroked along Mari's wet folds, hitting just the right spot each time he thrust his hips. Mari desperately tried to get him to enter her by arching her hips but Cole had other plans.

He reached around the front of Mari, his hands caressing her swollen breasts. Instinctively, Mari's body arched toward his, her nipples firming under his touch. A small moan escaping her lips, Mari caressed the length of Cole's arms.

"Oh, yeah." Cole's tormented groan was all the warning Mari had before he fit himself to her and carried her away on a wave of ecstasy with one push of his hips. The world spun and careened on its axis and exploded in a downpour of fiery sensations.

Mari came to her senses slowly, feeling Cole's long fingers brush across her sensitive nipples. Her thoughts fragmented as Cole's hands and lips continued their slow exploration of her body. She was exhausted and her back ached between her shoulder blades. And she had never been more content.

Cole lifted his head from her back and let his lips brush hers, his kiss slow and thoughtful. He pushed himself off of her tired body and rolled onto his side, an arm wrapping around Mari and pulling her

with him, tucking her curves into his own contours. Mari fell asleep curled into Cole's side, his hands caressing the long lines in her back.

Cole thought of all he had been given in the last twenty-four hours. And all that had been taken from his brother. If there was some way, any way, he could help his brother, he would. But those were thoughts that could wait until the morning, after he had made love to Mari again, a least once, maybe twice. Yeah, he could get used to this.

Chapter 3

Cole walked out of the bathroom a week later, drying his still damp hair with a white towel. Mari glanced over at him and felt the rush of sexual tension at his appearance once again. This time his feet were bare, but he was once again dressed in faded denim jeans, and no shirt. Mainly because Mari had stolen his white shirt and was even now wearing it.

Cole glanced up when he heard Mari inhale. He sent her a very evil, very sexy grin. Damn she looked good standing there in nothing but his shirt. It barely came down to her knees, covering everything properly but leaving much to the imagination. He liked the thought of Mari dressed in his clothes, having something of his pressed against her naked skin.

Mari looked back out the window she was standing in front of, her gaze thoughtfully on something beyond his line of vision. "Who is he?"

Cole crossed the room to stand behind Mari and looked beyond her, wrapping his arms around her. "Who is who?"

"That man. He was the other one that rescued me, wasn't he?" Mari asked as she pointed out the window.

As soon as he saw Bear standing in the yard talking to their foreman he knew who she was talking about. Things between him and Mari had been going great since the moment he had opened the bedroom door a week ago. Better than he had expected. He didn't really want to talk about Bear, afraid it would destroy the peaceful camaraderie that had developed between them.

But, he also knew that he could never lie to Mari. That was definitely not how he wanted to start off their relationship. “My twin brother, Bear.”

“Bear? Was he the other one I was talking to in the woods?”

Cole nodded as he dropped his arms and walked to the bed. “Benjamin Jacob Daniels. But we’ve always called him Bear.” Cole sat on the side of the bed and finished dressing. Mari’s next words brought his head snapping around to look at her in shock.

“Why is he so sad?” Mari was still watching Bear out the window, so she didn’t see Cole’s jaw drop open or quickly snap back, his lips thinning into a tight line of anger and frustration.

“He lost someone he cared about recently.” Damn, how did he explain this?

“*Bear? Are you projecting?*” Cole asked his brother through their mental link.

“*I don’t think so. Why?*” Bear asked curiously.

“*Mari wanted to know why you were so sad.*” Cole watched Mari’s head suddenly snap up and her body went rigid.

“You’re talking to him right now, aren’t you? Just like you talked to me in the woods,” Mari said.

Cole finished pulling on his cowboy boots before turning to face Mari. “Why do you say that?”

Mari looked at Cole’s grim features then back out the window. “Because he’s standing there staring at me.” She pointed out the window to Bear again.

Cole glanced out the window and saw Bear staring in the window, a sad look on his otherwise straight face. “Yeah, I am.” Cole just shook his head and walked to a dresser to grab another shirt.

“Who did he lose?”

Cole could feel the blood in his veins freeze. He so did not want to go there. “Mari, I won’t discuss my brother with you.”

Mari laughed. It was not a kind laugh. "You won't discuss your brother with me? But I'm good enough to fuck! I guess that lets me know where I stand."

Mari started for the door but was stopped when Cole grabbed her by the shoulders and swung her around to face him. Mari could see that he was angry, very angry. His eyes had turned almost black.

"My brother is not a topic for discussion."

She was shocked by the rage in those words, and maybe even a little frightened. "Who did he lose?"

Cole shook Mari by the shoulders. "I will not discuss this with you." Cole let Mari go so fast that she almost fell to the floor. He stomped to the window and stared out at his brother.

Mari walked over and wrapped her arms around Cole, her hands barely touching across his chest. "Please, tell me."

Cole dropped his head back and looked at the ceiling, his hands coming to rest over Mari's smaller ones. "Why do you need to know?"

Mari shook her head and went to sit on the side of the bed. "Hell if I know, but I do." She could feel the driving need inside. She just had to know. "He was there in the woods. I could hear you two talking like you were standing right in front of me."

Cole took one last glance at his brother before turning to face Mari. He didn't want to do this. Something inside of him screamed that he might lose Mari if he didn't handle this just right.

"Please," she whispered, not even looking at him.

Running an agitated hand through his hair, Cole swore before coming to sit next to Mari. "You, okay? He lost you."

Shock was written all over Mari's face as she looked up at Cole. Boy, she sure could pick them, couldn't she? This man was crazy. She should have known. It had been too perfect. "What in the hell are you talking about?"

Cole could feel the anger grabbing his heart when he remembered what Mari had said to Bear when they met. “When we found you, you called him a nightmare, then fainted.”

“First of all, I never faint. I lose consciousness. Fainting is for sissies. Second, how in the hell does that mean he lost me? He never had me. I don’t even know him. Except for that time in the woods, I haven’t even seen him.”

Cole jumped to his feet and desperately began pacing the room. Explaining this little situation was going to take a lot of finesse, something Cole wasn’t sure he had much of right now. His mind was tumbling with emotions, thoughts, and fantasies. He couldn’t seem to settle on one.

He paced for several moments before coming to a stop before her. He ran a hand over his face in frustration before looking down at her. “Look, Mari, Bear and I both knew that you were meant for us the minute we saw you.” He felt like he was standing on the edge of a cliff, deciding whether to jump or not.

Mari’s look was one of complete confusion. “Meant for you? What does that mean?”

“I don’t know exactly how to explain it.”

Mari let out a little snort of disbelief. “From the beginning would be good.”

“Bear and I have always known that there would be a special woman out there created just for us. Meant just for us. A woman that would understand the unique bond that Bear and I have.”

“You mean the way you two can communicate with each other?” Mari asked.

“Yeah, something like that.” Taking a deep breath, Cole jumped off a cliff, hoping Mari would be there to catch him, “That, and the fact that we would be sharing her—sharing you.”

“Sharing me? What the hell does that mean?” Mari could feel her voice getting louder as her astonishment took reign of her emotions.

She also didn't think it was possible for a big strapping man to look flustered, but he did. It was actually kind of cute to see.

"Bear and I have a special bond. You experienced it when we rescued you from Yuri." He reminded her.

Mari nodded. "Yeah, I remember. You can talk telepathically."

"We've always had that bond, since birth we think. Well, there's an added dimension to our bond." He stopped, trying to gather his thoughts together to describe the bond he had with Bear without frightening Mari.

"Whatever one twin feels," he said, his voice very low, "the other one feels. It doesn't matter if you are just with me. Bear will feel me inside of you. He will feel you wrapped around my cock, feel the touch of your hands on my body."

Mari's eyes widened as Cole continued. "That's the bond we share, Mari. What I need, he needs. What I want, he wants. What I love, he will also love. And it's the same with him."

Cole waited for Mari to say something, to damn them to hell for the freaks that they were. When she didn't say anything for several moments he looked down at her bent head. Mari's fingers curled into the comforter. Her head bent so he couldn't see into her eyes, to see what she might be thinking. When she didn't say anything he continued. In for a penny, in for a pound.

"Because of this particular bond, we have always known that we would share a woman. We would never be able to have a woman alone. That wouldn't be fair to either of us, or to her."

Bear and Cole had known since they could walk that the bond they shared with each other would never allow either of them a traditional relationship with a woman. But the moment they had set eyes on Mari, both men had known instantly that she was the woman for them.

Whether she would agree to their unconventional relationship was another story. There was a lot for her to consider. She wouldn't have

one lover, but two, every day and every night, because she would be loved by both of them.

“And you think that I am this woman?” Mari whispered skeptically.

The look on Cole’s face when he looked at her sent Mari’s heart nearly into a tailspin. It was pure emotion. “Yeah, you are. I knew it the moment I saw you. Bear knew it too.”

“That’s why he is so sad, because he thinks he lost me?”

Cole nodded as he sat beside Mari again. “Yeah, when you made it clear you were scared of him, he gave you up. He gave you to me so that at least one of us would have you.”

“Have I come between you? Is that why he left?”

“Hell, I don’t know,” Cole replied, rubbing a hand down his face before folding his hands together in his lap. “He left because he had a—he had some business to take care of. But this has been hard for him, you know. He *feels* everything I do. That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you.”

Shock and maybe a little too much arousal swept through Mari. “Everything?”

“Yeah, that too,” Cole chuckled, referring to their earlier lovemaking.

“How is that possible?” Mari asked in astonishment.

Cole shook his head. “I don’t know. We’ve always been able to talk to each other, feel each other’s pain, each other’s pleasure.”

“So, in essence I made love to both of you?”

Shaking his head Cole said, “No, you made love to me and only me.”

“But he felt it? All of it?”

Cole thought about it. He hadn’t wanted to admit what a crappy deal Bear was getting out of this situation. But there it was. “Yeah, I guess.” He got up and began to pace again.

“You guess or you know? Which is it?”

Cole stopped pacing abruptly to glare at Mari, feeling his temper rise again. "Yeah, okay. He felt it all." Cole was furious now. "He felt every thrust of my dick, every brush of your lips, every caress of your hands on his body like it was really you."

He got right in Mari's face. "Is that what you wanted to hear? Do you want to hear about how much it hurts me to know that each time that I love you, each time I hold you in my arms, I'm afraid that I am destroying my brother, bit by bit? Does that make you happy?"

Mari clasped her hands together. Her shoulders slumped momentarily then she straightened them and looked up at Cole. "I think you'd better call Bear in here. We need to talk."

Mari probably could have told him she was an alien and it would not have surprised him as much as what she said. "Uh, okay."

"*Bear, can you come in here?*" Cole heard laughter in his brother's voice, but he knew it was false laughter.

"Need someone to hold your hand?"

He watched Mari rub a strip of material on the quilt. "*Mari wants to talk to you.*" For a moment Cole knew what it would be like if he didn't have his brother as nothing came through their shared bond. Then he nearly doubled over as he felt his brother panic.

"Why?" Bear asked.

"I don't know, but you had better come on in. She's pretty upset." Cole could see the tears in her eyes that she was trying to disguise from him. "*Please, Bear? She's crying.*"

"Did you hurt her?"

Cole shook his head in sharp denial even knowing Bear couldn't see him. "*Not the way you are thinking.*"

"Then what the hell happened? Why is she crying?" Bear demanded.

Cole shrugged. "*I told her about you.*"

A few moments later there was a hesitant knock at the door and then Bear walked in. His eyes immediately went to Mari sitting on the side of the bed. His eyes devoured her. Bear felt his heart pounding in

his chest when he saw Mari sitting on the edge of the bed dressed in Cole's shirt. Her long legs were bare from mid-thigh down. He so wanted to run his hands down those delectable legs as he wrapped them around his hips.

But he was scared to death. He would rather be facing a firing squad than facing Mari. He knew he was a freak. He was too large, too strong, and too sexually demanding. He wanted a woman that could take him whenever and wherever he wanted. And he didn't want to have to control himself when he did it. What woman would want that? Would want him?

Mari scooted to the head of the bed, tucking the quilt around her, and watched from under her eyelashes as each man sat on the end of the bed, leaning up against the footboard, staring intently at her. Waiting for her to say something, anything.

Drawing on every bit of courage she had Mari raised her eyes and looked first at Cole and then at Bear. "Cole said that you both knew when you saw me that I was the woman meant for both of you, that you planned on sharing me."

Cole and Bear nodded their heads hesitantly.

"You can do this? Share me without hating each other? Without being jealous?" Mari asked in disbelief.

Again they nodded.

"What about other men? Did you plan on sharing me with other men?" While she could see herself being with both Cole and Bear, the thought of other men made Mari's stomach turn. Mari was pretty sure that was not part of their plan the minute the words were out of her mouth just from the savage looks that came over both men.

"Us and only us!" Cole bit out through clenched teeth. "You belong to only us. There will be no other men. Ever!"

Cole was furious but Bear, being the diplomat that he was, tried a less hostile approach. "Mari, Cole and I have always known that we would share a woman since before we even knew what a woman was for. We just knew. It has never been a question for us."

“What if one of you wants someone else later?”

Bear looked at her in astonishment. “You don’t seem to understand, baby. What one of us wants, the other wants. You can have one of us without the other but because of our bond, you’re still getting both of us. In a sense, you can’t have one without the other. Once we found you, we knew we would never want or need another woman.”

Bear and Cole watched Mari for several moments as she considered their words. She seemed to be wrestling with something. Both men kept quiet as they watched her struggle.

Could she do this, have two big, strong, alpha males, wanting her, loving her, determined to have her? The thought that they both wanted her alarmed her. The thought that they both wanted her together, to be shared between them terrified her. Could she take that chance? Would losing one of them be any worse than losing both of them?

Finally she took a deep breath and looked up at them. “Okay.”

Cole glanced over at Bear’s stiff body before looking back at Mari. “Okay?”

Mari nodded. “Yeah, okay. Let’s do this.”

Mari could feel their shock as the words flowed out of her mouth, but why not? If they wanted her, who was she to say no? She’d be crazy to turn down the two sexiest men she had ever met, especially if they were telling the truth and wanted to share her.

Cole was afraid to look at Bear. He could feel the fear, confusion, and uncertainty running rampant through him. “What about your fear of Bear?” Yep, Bear heard that one. His body stiffened in denial.

“My fear of Bear? I’m not afraid of Bear.” A look of disbelief came from both men. “Oh sure, he’s big and bad, but I don’t think he would actually hurt me, not on purpose.”

Cole felt his eyes nearly pop out of his head in disbelief. “Then why the hell did you call him a nightmare?”

“That’s what this is all about? My calling Bear a nightmare?” At their combined nods Mari felt her temper erupting. She leaned forward to get right in their faces. “I’m only going to say this once so listen closely. I am not afraid of Bear.”

“Then why did you say you were?” Bear asked quietly.

Mari just shook her head, wondering if it was safe for the females of the world to procreate. “Think about the day that I had been through. I’d been kidnapped, held at knifepoint, beaten up, and nearly raped. With me so far?”

They nodded.

“Then I meet the sexiest man I have ever seen, and he’s interested in me. There is instant sexual chemistry. All I can think about is jumping his bones.” Cole gave Mari a conceited grin and started to say something but Mari held up her hand, stopping him.

The grin quickly fell from Cole’s face when Mari glared over at him. “Then he pisses me off. But, okay, I still want to have sex with him. I have never been that sexually attracted to anyone in my life. I’m all for a quick roll in the hay.”

Both men move a little closer to Mari but she wasn’t finished. “Then I suddenly come face to face with you, Bear.”

Bear grimaced as he remembered her reaction to the sight of him. He wasn’t so sure he wanted to rehash that.

“And now there are two gorgeous men, not just one, that I want to strip naked and lick from the tops of their heads to the bottoms of their feet, and everywhere in between. I would have spread my legs for you right then and there. And I didn’t even know who you were.”

Mari was highly embarrassed at her lewd behavior and totally aroused by the memory. “Hence, my nightmare.”

“That’s it?” Bear asked, astonished. “That’s why you called me a nightmare?”

Mari had the decency to look a little ashamed, but not much. “Yeah, that about covers it. It’s not my fault if you took it the wrong way.”

Bear began unbuttoning his shirt as he scowled at Mari. Throwing his shirt to the floor he crawled across bed and began working his way up to Mari, never taking his hungry eyes off of her.

Just as he reached for her Cole stopped him. "Bear, wait. She might be a little sore." He looked a little sheepish. "I haven't exactly been easy on her the last few days."

Bear glared at Cole. "No shit!"

Mari inhaled upon seeing the burning hunger in Bear's gray eyes as he looked back at her.

"I know every damn thing you did with her."

He watched Mari for several moments, devouring her with his eyes before hanging his head trying to reign in his emotions. Bear closed his eyes to remove Mari from his sight but it didn't help. She was burned into the backs of his eyelids.

"You need to go, Mari. And don't let me catch you alone until you're ready for me." He lifted his head and looked Mari deep in the eyes. "I need you too much right now." He had regret in his eyes as he looked at Mari. "I don't want to hurt you."

Bear dropped to the bed and rolled over on his back flinging his arm over his closed eyes. He nearly jumped off the bed when Mari climbed over him and began unbuttoning his jeans.

"How about an appetizer instead?" she asked with a little grin.

Mari pulled Bear's hard cock out of his pants, very impressed, and a little scared, of his sheer size. This man was big all over the place. She eagerly wrapped her lips around as much of him as she could and began sucking on his velvety flesh.

Bear was pretty sure he had died and gone to heaven at the first touch of her tongue. By the time Mari began running her mouth up and down his throbbing cock, he knew he was a goner. "Oh yeah, baby, that feels so good."

He reached down to grab Mari's hair enough to hold on and began a slow thrust in and out of her mouth. "Harder, baby, suck me harder," he growled.

Mari ran one hand up and down the length of him, just below her lips as the other hand gently caressed his sac. A few hard thrusts into her mouth and he erupted, a loud groan coming from him. “Oh god, Mari!”

Cole watched the two with tears in his eyes, and a fast hand around his own cock as he brought himself to climax. It was over quick, just a few thrusts into his hands. He had just watched, and felt, the love of his life bring his brother to climax, sucking down every last drop of him before reaching up to kiss Bear on the mouth. Yep, life was perfect.

Chapter 4

Mari woke up very hungry and very alone. She was a little surprised that she was alone in bed. In the three weeks since she had arrived at the ranch, she had yet to wake up alone. There was always at least one man in bed with her. Cole and Bear were attentive if nothing else. She was actually a little disappointed that they were gone.

The good news was that this time there were clothes at the foot of the bed waiting for her. There was a small red tank top and a long colorful skirt that reached her ankles, just the way she liked them. The bad news was that whoever had gotten the clothes for her had forgotten the bra and underwear.

Now, wearing such a long skirt, the no underwear thing wouldn't be much of a problem. However, anyone who looked at her would instantly know she wasn't wearing a bra. Not to say that Mari's breasts were saggy or anything. In fact she took great pride in the fact that she had reached the age of twenty-four with such perky breasts.

However, their size was another matter. While her breasts were firm, the large size of them tended to make them sway with every breath she took, or every step she took, or every time she turned. Whoever had forgotten to leave her a bra was certainly going to get a piece of her mind. And she was pretty certain she knew just who the two culprits were.

Mari dressed quickly before running a brush through her thick auburn hair and putting into a long braid. Mari inched open the bedroom door and peered through the crack. The door opened into a large living area like a great room. It was complete with a couple of

tan couches centered around a large river rock fireplace. She could see a dining area of to one side and stairs on the other.

Seeing no one around she quickly walked to the kitchen, opened the fridge, and grabbed the first thing she could see to eat. Shoving a piece of cheese in her mouth she began loading up her arms with the items to make a sandwich.

Bear walked into the house just in time to see Mari sneaking into the kitchen. Following her around the corner he was met with the sight of Mari bent over at the fridge. Damn, she had a mighty fine ass.

He silently walked up behind her and wrapped his arms around her stomach as he pressed her body back into his. "Morning, baby."

Mari screamed and dropped everything she had in her hands and started swinging. Bear quickly grabbed her hands and pinned them behind her, pressing her breasts against his chest. "Whoa there, honey. You're a little spitfire in the mornings, aren't you?"

Mari sagged with relief against Bear. "Oh God, Bear, you scared the crap out of me."

"I just wanted to say good morning to my baby." Bear leaned down and started nuzzling the side of Mari's neck. "I missed you."

Mari laughed "It's been what? A couple of hours since you had me?"

"Yeah, way too long." Bear lifted Mari up onto the counter and moved between her legs. He wrapped his hand in her braid and pulled her close for a long, passion filled kiss.

Mari was definitely up for saying good morning like this. She jumped a little when she felt Bear's hand sneak under her skirt and start to move up her thigh.

"Bear," she whispered, arching her head back to give Bear's lips better access to her neck. "Honey, we're in the kitchen. Anyone can see what we're doing."

"Let them," Bear growled as he continued to nibble on Mari's neck.

“Getting started a little early, aren’t you brother?” Cole grinned from the archway of the kitchen.

“It’s never too early to love our Mari,” Bear replied as he pulled Mari skirt up, baring her naked body to both of their gazes. “Besides, have you ever seen a prettier sight in your life?” He said as he stepped back and indicated Mari’s exposed dampened flesh.

Mari could feel herself turning several shades of red. “Bear!”

“I can’t say that I have, Bear. Maybe you’d better let me investigate that a little more just to be sure.” Cole walked over and dropped to his knees between Mari’s thighs as Bear stepped out of the way. He pulled her thighs apart wider and leaned in to flick his tongue over her flesh.

Mari cried out and tried to close her legs but the bulk of Cole’s body kept them separated just enough for him to see everything. “Cole,” she begged.

Not to be left out, Bear reached over and pulled Mari’s shirt up to her throat and began sucking on her nipples, alternating from one to the other.

Cole knew it wouldn’t be long when Mari’s entire body began to quiver and shake. He latched onto her with his lips and began running his tongue quickly over her clit.

Bear pulled away from Mari’s breasts long enough to slide his hand down under Cole’s head, he stopped briefly to slick up his fingers with Mari’s juices before heading even further back.

As Mari began to shake with her impending orgasm, Bear slowly inserted one, then two fingers inside of Mari’s little hole, and began pumping them in and out just as Cole was doing to Mari’s pussy. Bear quickly latched back onto her nipple, giving her small little bites.

The sensations were more than Mari could take. She arched up and screamed. Her whole body stiff for several moments before her hips began humping up and down, frenzied in their bid to absorb every last bit of gratification from the hands of the two men before her.

“One more, baby, give us one more,” Cole demanded as he thrust his fingers in and out even faster.

“No, I can’t. No more,” Mari cried out, her body still shaking from the last orgasm but feeling the next one creeping up on her.

“Yes, you can, baby. Come on,” Cole demanded again. “Just one more, baby, for me?” He bit down gently on her clit, rubbing his tongue over the tip before sucking the whole thing into his mouth.

Mari began to squirm with each push of his fingers. Her legs quivered as she rested them over Cole’s shoulders.

“Oh, god! Please!”

Bear and Cole were only too happy to submit to her demands. Bear pushed a third finger inside of Mari. He released her nipple from his mouth only to replace it with his other hand. And grabbed her lips up in a kiss, pushing his tongue past her lips to taste the inside of her mouth. God, she was so sweet.

“Come for us, baby!” Cole pleaded as he began ramming all three fingers into Mari harder.

Mari began moaning low in her chest. By the time her body reached new highs of pleasure she was screaming out their names.

Cole continued to lavish Mari’s quivering flesh for a few seconds as she slowly came back down to earth. He gave her one last long lick before standing to his shaking feet and leaning in to kiss Mari, sharing her sweet flavor between them.

Bear quickly walked to the sink and washed his hands before returning to Mari’s prone form. Bending down to swipe his tongue across her, he licked up some of her juices, making her quiver again, before also leaning in to kiss Mari.

“Morning, baby,” he whispered against her lips.

Both men helped Mari to her feet, pulling her shirt down and letting her skirt fall back against her legs. Mari was a little shaky on her feet so Cole wrapped his arm around her to hold her steady. He rested his chin on Mari’s head as he looked over at the huge bulge in Bear’s pants. It mirrored his swollen member.

“Yep, I do agree, Bear, Mari has the prettiest pussy I have ever seen.”

“Uh um,” the sound of someone clearing their throat came from around the corner, “If you’re through having your...uh...*morning snack*, the rest of us would like to get our breakfast.”

Mari felt herself turn several shades of red as she buried her face in Cole’s shirt. Oh man, she was so embarrassed. Cole on the other hand, seemed to find the whole thing very funny. She could feel his laughter in the shaking of his chest.

“Yeah, give us just a moment, Nick.” Cole laughed a little more as he grabbed Mari by the hair and pulled her face from his shirt.

“Baby,” he whispered into her ear, “There’s no need for you to be embarrassed. What we did was totally natural.”

Mari just shook her head and tried to bury it into his shirt again. “Do you think they heard me?”

Bear laughed as he patted Mari on the shoulder and leaned over to kiss her on the top of her head. “Honey, they heard you in the next county.” There was a little too much satisfaction in Bear’s voice for Mari’s comfort.

“Oh my god, I’m so going to die,” Mari groaned against Cole’s shirt.

Bear and Cole laughed. Mari could even hear muffled laughter coming from around the corner. Oh yeah, she was going to die. But not before she killed a couple of laughing imbeciles.

“I bring a peace offering,” came the voice from around the corner. A hand appeared with a large cup of gourmet coffee in it.

Mari saw the coffee and lunged, forgetting all of her previous embarrassment. “Oh my god, coffee.” She grabbed the cup in both hands and took a deep sniff. Oh yeah, vanilla mocha. Mari was in heaven.

“I don’t care who you are, you’re forgiven.” Mari took her cup of coffee and quickly went to sit at the dining table, inhaling the heavenly scent as she went. The first taste made her moan in ecstasy.

The second sip had her sliding down in her chair. By the third, the sounds coming from her mouth made a few of the men in the room hard in their pants.

“Well hell, Cole, if I had known that’s all it would take to make that girl happy I would have bought out the damn coffee station,” laughed Nick as he sat down across from Mari.

By the time Mari had downed half the cup, which admittedly hadn’t taken long, Cole and Bear were sitting on either side of her. The rest of the table was filled with men she had never seen.

Cole waited until Mari stopped drinking and started to realize that there was more to life than coffee before he introduced the men around the table.

“Honey, these are my friends, the guys I work with.” He indicated the men. “Sam isn’t here right now, but I’m sure you’ll meet him when he gets back. That there is Sky.” Cole indicated the man sitting next to Nick. “Besides being Sam’s brother, Sky is our driver and pilot. That man can drive a dishwasher.”

“This is Nick.” Mari looked up at the man who had offered the coffee to her, a grateful smile on her face. “He’s our resident mechanic. If he can’t fix it, it can’t be fixed.”

“Ah, the coffee god,” Mari moaned.

“Haha, the coffee god. I like that,” Nick laughed.

“Beside him is his brother, Jake. Jake is our electronics expert. He loves gadgets,” Cole continued.

Next Cole pointed out a quiet guy with overly long curly black hair. “That’s Rune. Rune is sort of in protection.” Mari nodded and offered a small smile.

“Next to him is his brother, Caleb. Stay away from him. He’s crazy. If he can’t eat it, shoot it, or screw it, he blows it up.” Caleb had short blue-black hair and eyes the color of dark moss. He was gorgeous.

“The last man on our list is Doc. Doc takes care of all our medical needs. If you’re hurt or not feeling well, Doc is the man to see.” Mari nodded at Doc.

“Doc’s sister, Jax, is our computer expert. She’s probably knee deep hacking into the IRS or something right now. And don’t let her wheelchair fool you. If she can’t research it, hack it, or create it, it can’t be done. Well, baby, that’s all of them. If you ever need anything and you can’t find Bear or myself, one of these guys can take care of you.” He glanced around the room, giving each man a little glare. “At least, most of your needs. Anything else and they will answer to me.” Each man nodded in understanding.

“They will also help us keep you safe,” Bear added. “However, if you feel threatened at all and can’t find us or one of the guys, there’s a Ruger .45 pistol in our nightstand.”

“I don’t know how to shoot a gun,” Mari squeaked.

“Not to worry, baby,” Bear said as he patted Mari on the leg. “Cole and I will teach you. We have an indoor shooting range downstairs in the basement.”

“Seriously? You have a shooting range in your basement?” Mari asked in astonishment as she looked around at the others sitting at the table. It was only then that she began to notice that each of them wore military dog tags. “You’re all in the service aren’t you?”

Cole nodded. “Yeah, something like that. That’s one of the reasons you need to learn to shoot a gun. We can be called away at any time. I don’t want you here by yourself, defenseless. While Doc and Jax are always here, it’s just better if you learn to protect yourself.”

“Do you get called away often?”

Cole shook his head. “No, not really, but we’re always on call in case we’re needed. You need to be prepared for that.”

Mari nodded, not sure if she understood exactly what they did but she decided to drop it for now. They didn’t seem to want to get into a deep discussion about it. Besides, Mari was starved.

As she began eating she watched the men around the table. She quickly began to lose her appetite. Hands reached over plates, food was gobbled down at the speed of light, and god forbid that they use a napkin. Mari hadn't seen people eat like this since she was a child.

Mari watched it all with a bit of awe. These were all grown men and they had the table manners of pre-schoolers. When one too many hands reached across Mari's plate, she had enough. She turned her fork over and stabbed the hand as it crossed her plate.

"Ouch!" Bear yelled, cradling his hand to his chest.

There was dead silence at the table. Mari continued eating as if nothing had happened. The next time a hand reached across her plate, she did it again. This time, stabbing Cole in the back of the hand.

"Damn, Mari, what'd you do that for?" Cole yelled.

Mari looked up at Cole, a totally innocent look on her face as she batted her eyelashes at him. "Oh, honey, I'm sorry. I didn't see your hand," her voice lowered sarcastically, "hovering over my plate."

The table was suddenly roaring with laughter.

"Oh man, Cole, you're not gonna be able to sweet-talk this one," laughed Nick.

Cole rubbed his hands as he glared down at Mari, trying to suppress the grin playing at the corner of his lips. Mari gave him one of her sweet smiles and went back to eating. Damn, she was sexy.

Eating resumed, but with a bit more manners than before. After breakfast everyone sat around the table and talked about plans for the day. Mari listened for awhile with interest but after awhile she was too tired to pay attention.

She leaned against Bear until he took the hint and lifted her onto his lap. Cole reached over and ruffled her hair before continuing with the discussion he was having with Sky over horse breeding schedules.

Mari cuddled into Bear's chest, her head resting on his neck. She couldn't believe how tired she was. Must be the late nights. She just closed her eyes and let the conversation flow around her.

Bear smiled down at Mari. She was all cuddled in his arms just where she should be. He kissed the top of her head lightly as he wrapped his arms around her, bringing her body closer to his. This was heaven, almost as good as having Mari naked in his arms.

Just thinking about Mari naked in his arms had him turning hard. He ran a hand down her leg under the table, and then back up it, under her skirt to her hip. He caressed her naked thigh as he listened to Cole arguing with Sky about horses or some such thing. He didn't really care. He had Mari in his arms.

Mari wiggled a little in Bear's lap. She was feeling a little hot. Must be the late morning sunlight heating up the room. Mari tried to get more comfortable but nothing seemed to work. When her stomach started knotting she decided it was time for her to go back to bed.

She patted Bear's arms to let him know she wanted up. "Bear, I want to go lie down. I'm not feeling so well."

"Maybe you shouldn't have stayed up so late then," he whispered into her ear as he set her on her feet. He swatted her butt as she walked by. "Go lie down. I'll be in to wake you up in a couple of hours."

Mari walked into the bedroom and pulled her skirt off. She started to pull her shirt over her head but it took too much effort. She leaned over to get in bed but lost her balance and slid down, unconscious before she hit the floor.

Bear watched Mari stumble into the bedroom and shut the door. She was really tired. Maybe they shouldn't have kept her up so late. It couldn't be good for her. He felt a little ashamed. Poor Mari was just one woman and she was satisfying the intimate needs of two very big, very sexual men. Maybe they should go a little easier on her.

Cole could feel the worry sweeping through Bear. He too knew that they might have been a little hard on Mari. She was so small compared to them.

"*Just let her sleep, Bear. She'll be okay after a nap,*" Cole sent to his brother.

“I know, she just a little thing. Maybe we should lay off for a while?” Bear asked back.

“Yeah, we have been going at her pretty hard.”

Bear nodded, throwing a worried gaze at the bedroom door. He felt like the monster that Mari had named him. His obsession with getting her pregnant could be affecting her health. Were his desires more important than her health?

“Bear, knock it off. We didn’t hurt her. She’ll be fine after she has a nap.”

Bear looked at Cole, the need for reassurance clear in his eyes.

“Why don’t you go check on her if it will make you feel better?” Cole asked.

Bear nodded as he stood up from the table. That sounded like a good idea to him. It would just make him feel better.

Cole grabbed his arm as he passed by. “Let me know if she needs anything.”

Bear nodded as he passed.

“And, Bear, let the girl sleep,” Cole laughed.

Bear flipped him off as he walked away, making Cole laugh even more.

He opened the bedroom door and felt his heart stop when he spotted Mari unconscious on the floor. He quickly knelt next to her still body as he checked her pulse. She was still breathing but it seemed labored.

“Cole, get in here! And bring Doc,” Bear cried.

Cole felt fear seize his heart as he suddenly jumped up and ran for the bedroom yelling for Doc as he ran, leaving everyone at the table staring after him.

“What’s wrong?” Cole asked Bear even as he raced into the bedroom. His body froze as he stopped in the doorway upon seeing Bear sitting on the floor holding an unresponsive Mari in his arms. Fear swept through his body. “Bear?” he asked quietly, afraid to hear the answer.

"I don't know," Bear whispered as he lifted his tear filled eyes to meet Cole's. "She won't wake up."

Cole knelt down next Bear, his hand shaking as he reached down to rub it against her cheek. "She's so hot," he whispered. "What happened?"

Bear shook his head as he lifted Mari onto the bed. Cole reached over and pulled a blanket over her and tucked it around her shoulders.

"I don't know. I came in and she was just lying there on the floor," Bear said, his voice shaky.

Both of them looked up as Doc quickly walked in carrying his little black bag. He immediately walked to the bed and began checking Mari's vitals.

"Tell me what happened," Doc said as he grabbed Mari's wrist and began checking her pulse.

"We were all sitting around table and she said that she was tired and wanted to go lie down. She looked a little shaky so I decided to check on her. When I came in, she was collapsed on the floor."

"Hmmm...has she been complaining of any pains or headaches?" Doc asked.

Bear looked at Cole inquisitively, who shook his head. "No, not really," Bear said.

"Has she complained of any cramping? Had any bleeding?"

Both men looked confused for a moment before shaking their head no.

"Has there been any...*unusual activity* between you?" Doc looked up at the brothers, one eyebrow raised in query.

Cole felt himself blush with embarrassment as soon as he realized what Doc was referring to—their sexual activities. "Define unusual, Doc," he demanded.

Doc looked totally uncomfortable and Cole didn't feel a bit sorry for him. "Have you done anything that could have been too much for the girl?"

“Doc!” Bear exclaimed, shocked that the Doc would think they would do anything to hurt Mari.

“Look guys, I have to know these things. It’s not pleasant, believe me, but I need to know if she could have some type of internal injury.”

Cole felt his anger at Doc slip away and be replaced by the fear that he could have hurt Mari during one of their sexual encounters. “We haven’t done anything...unusual...but we have been going at it quite a bit.”

“Both of you?” Doc asked in astonishment.

Cole and Bear both looked a little sheepish as they nodded.

“Hmmm...” Doc nodded as he checked Mari’s ears, then her nose.

He stopped suddenly as he checked her mouth. He grabbed a scope and looked down her throat, then grabbed her fingers and looked at her fingernails. “Do you know if she has any allergies?”

Cole and Bear shook their heads.

“Has she eaten anything strange? Anything different than you?” Doc asked in a hurried voice.

Cole and Bear again shook their heads, wondering where Doc was headed with his train of thought.

“We need to get her down to the infirmary, now,” Doc ordered as he got to his feet and grabbed his bag.

Bear immediately picked Mari up and began walking out of the room.

Cole grabbed Doc by the arm to stop him as he began walking out of the bedroom. “Doc, what’s wrong with her? Did we do this?”

Doc looked a little apprehensive before looking Cole in the eyes. “No, I don’t think so. I’ll have to do some more tests to be sure, but I think she’s been poisoned.”

“Poisoned? How? Why?”

Doc patted Cole on the shoulder. "Walk me through her day. Is there anything strange that may have happened? Anything at all, no matter how insignificant."

"I don't know. She was in the kitchen when I came in from the corral. Bear was with her," Cole replied.

Doc looked thoughtful for a moment, then went on. "Did she eat anything you didn't?"

"I don't know. We had left her sleeping a couple of hours earlier." Cole ran a frustrated hand through his hair. "Like I said, she was already in the kitchen when I got there."

"Was she eating anything then?"

"Not exactly." Cole looked a little embarrassed.

"Did she drink anything?" Doc asked.

"I have no idea."

"Coffee," said a voice from the door.

Cole's head whipped around to see Nick standing in the doorway. "Coffee?" he asked skeptically.

Nick nodded, "Yeah, I gave her coffee this morning, remember?"

Cole thought for a moment as he tried to remember the coffee Mari had drunk. Another thought quickly came to his mind. "Why did you get her coffee? You didn't even know if she liked it."

Nick just shook his head. "I didn't get the coffee for her. I got it for me at that little coffee station that I always go to when I'm in town."

"Then why did you give it to her?" Cole asked.

Nick flushed, "She was so embarrassed. I wanted to make her feel better."

"So, you gave her poisoned coffee?" Cole realized that his voice was beginning to rise but he couldn't seem to help it. Something was wrong with Mari and he felt powerless to stop it.

"Hey now, Cole, we don't know if the coffee was poisoned or not. This could just be an allergic reaction," Doc tried to intervene.

Cole looked back over to the Doc. "Then find out, damn it!" He pushed past Doc and Nick and headed for the kitchen to find Mari's coffee cup.

"Bear, keep an eye on our baby. I'm going to find out what happened to her," Cole sent out.

"I won't leave her side until she opens her eyes," Bear promised.

"See that you don't. And keep your guard up."

"Why?" Bear asked cautiously.

"Doc thinks she might have been poisoned." Cole hated to have to tell Bear that but he needed to know. Cole wanted Bear to know how important it was that Mari be protected at all times. *"Poisoned? Who would poison Mari? She's so sweet. Why would anyone want to hurt her?"* Bear asked, his voice sounding strained to Cole.

"I don't know, but I plan to find out."

Bear watched Doc put an IV in Mari's arm before taking her free hand and clutching it in his, his thumb rubbing over her hand trying to comfort Mari and let her know he was there. "Do you really think someone could have poisoned her, Doc?"

"I don't know, Bear, it could be an allergic reaction, too. We won't know until I do some tests," The doctor replied as he continued putting the IV in Mari's arm.

"I think she said she has a sister named Camilla. She might know if Mari is allergic to anything," Bear supplied.

"Then I suggest you contact her right away and find out."

"Cole, Doc wants us to contact Mari's sister and find out if she has any allergies."

"I'll call Jax and have her get on that. I'm on my way down to the Coffee Station right now."

"Cole's calling Jax. She can track down Camilla," Bear told Doc.

Doc nodded, "If Jax can't track her down, no one can." Doc had a lot of confidence in his sister Jax's computer skills. The magic she could work with a computer was almost spooky.

Bear pulled up a chair and sat down next to Mari's bed. He watched Doc draw a vial of blood before checking Mari's IV one last time. "Is she going to be okay, Doc?"

"Yeah, I think so. But only time will tell."

Bear gently caressed Mari's hand. He wanted her to know she was not alone, that someone was there that cared about her. He watched the slow intake of each breath she took. Her breathing, at least, looked a little better. And she was not nearly as hot as she had been before. Bear still wasn't satisfied with her color. She was too pale. There was none of the usual rosy color in her cheeks.

"Hey, Bear," Doc asked as he came to stand next to Mari's bed, looking across to where Bear was sitting, "Can I ask you something?"

"Sure, Doc."

"Well, it's kind of personal." Doc hedged, clearly nervous.

Bear turned to look across at Doc. Doc's face was flushed red. Bear couldn't remember ever seeing Doc look quite so uncomfortable. "So, ask already."

"How does this thing work between you and Cole?"

"How does what work?" Bear asked, not quite sure what he was referring to but getting the idea as Doc turned even redder.

"Well, this...this...I mean how do you...well..." Doc stammered, the embarrassment clear in his voice.

Bear gave a small little laugh as he continued to caress Mari's hand. "We love her."

"Well, that part was obvious. But how do you...you know," Doc said as he kind of nodded his head and wiggled his eyebrows at the same time.

"Being a doctor I'm pretty sure you know more about that than I do," Bear chuckled lightly.

"No, I mean, well, yeah, how do you share her? That is what you're doing, right? Sharing her?"

Bear grinned as he nodded his head. "Yeah, we share her."

"But how?"

Bear finally turned his gaze up to Doc. “What exactly do you want to know, Doc?”

“Do you hate your brother because he’s with Mari?”

“God, no! Whatever gave you that idea?”

“Well,” Doc started, “how can you let him be with Mari then?”

“We both care about Mari.”

“I got that part. What I can’t figure out is how you can both share her and not be angry with each other,” Doc said.

“It’s not a competition, Doc. We both care for Mari. The more love we give her, the more love she gives us,” Bear said.

“And that works for you?” The Doc looked really confused to Bear.

“Why exactly do you want to know?” Bear’s curiosity over Doc’s questions was getting the better of him.

Doc looked at Bear for several moments before he continued. “I recently found someone I care about, very much. But, if I were to be with this person, I might have to share. I’m not sure I can do that.”

Bear suddenly understood. Doc was in love and the person he was in love with cared about someone else. In order to have this love, he might have to share, just like Cole and Bear shared Mari. “Sharing is not for everyone, Doc.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” Doc grumbled.

“For us, sharing Mari comes naturally to us. Cole and I knew from nearly the beginning that we would share a woman. So, when Mari came along, and she wasn’t against it, it worked for us.”

“I’m just not sure I could do that.”

“Well, like I said, it’s not for everyone. It takes a special kind of person to share a loved one. I guess half of it is knowing that Mari doesn’t care for Cole more than she cares for me, and vice versa. She cares for us both equally but in different ways.”

“Different ways?”

“Well sure. Cole and I are twins but we’re not the same person. We each bring something different to this relationship, to our caring of Mari.”

Doc nodded his head thoughtfully as Bear continued his explanation.

“As for the loving part of it, we know that we can give more to Mari together than we can separately. And we make it all about her, not us. That makes it easier, too.”

“And that works?” Doc looked skeptical.

“Yeah, it works,” Bear replied quietly as he looked lovingly back down at Mari. “Mari is a gift from heaven,” he said softly. “Watching Cole bring her pleasure, and knowing that I can touch her in the same way, bring her the same pleasure, but add to it,” He looked back up at Doc, “It’s like nothing on this earth.”

Doc nodded but Bear wasn’t sure he really understood what he was saying. It was pretty hard for Bear to understand it, let alone someone who wasn’t in a relationship like his.

Doc started out of the room, his thoughts clearly on his own problems when Bear stopped him.

“Hey Doc, if you really care about this person, and I mean really care about them, and you think you can do this, it can be wonderful. But don’t do it if you have even a single doubt. It could destroy you.”

Doc didn’t turn his head but nodded as he continued out of the room. Could he share? Was it as easy as Bear suggested? Or was it as hard? Doc knew that only time would tell but it was something to think about.

Putting thoughts of his love life aside, he headed toward the lab to complete the tests on Mari. Time to find out if Mari had been poisoned or if it had just been an allergic reaction. Doc was guessing poison, which would open a whole new can of worms.

Chapter 5

Bear walked into the infirmary four days later to see Cole sitting next to Mari's bed, one hand wrapped around Mari's frail one, the other resting over her thighs. His head was resting on the bed next to Mari.

Bear knew Cole was exhausted not only by the investigation into Mari's illness, but also by his worry about Mari. She had been asleep for nearly four days now. This had concerned even Doc.

Doc had performed a toxicology analysis that had proven that Mari had been given poison, and it had come from the coffee. How it got into the coffee, no one had been able to figure out.

Cole had questioned everyone at the Coffee Station and had cleared them of any wrong doing. No one had seen anything. But the poison hadn't gotten into the coffee by itself, someone had put it there. But were they after Mari or one of the team members?

Bear wasn't sure Cole had slept a single moment since Mari had gotten ill. First he had questioned the people at the Coffee Station, then he had questioned others.

He had been on the phone for hours, and had even taken a short trip out of town to get some information on Mari's sister, who they had yet to find. In between his investigation, he had sat with Mari for hours. He didn't want her left alone for a second.

Bear quietly walked to the bed, his breath catching when he saw Mari's hand gently combing through Cole's hair. His eyes quickly flew to her face. Her eyes were open and she was watching Cole sleep. Her affection for him was clear in her eyes.

He leaned over and kissed her on the head before looking into her eyes. "Hi, baby, have a nice nap?" he whispered.

Mari nodded. She brought her hand up to tenderly caress his cheek before placing a gentle kiss on his lips. "Hi," she whispered back, her voice a little hoarse from inactivity. "Have I been here long?"

Bear nodded his head, "About four days."

"Four days? What happened?" Mari asked as Bear pulled up a chair and sat down next to the bed.

"We're still working on that. But you're okay and that's all that really matters." Bear was so happy he felt almost giddy. The world was suddenly a better place to be in with Mari there.

"Kiss me and let's wake Cole up." Mari giggled as Bear placed his lips on hers his tongue grazing inside to explore. He was immediately swept away by the softness of her lips, the sweetness of her taste.

He knew the moment Cole woke up by quick gasp of air he took. Cole felt the reawakening of passion just as Bear did.

"Mari? What—" Cole jumped to his feet and leaned over Mari to check her over. He ran his hands over her hair, down her face, her arms, almost as if she had been in a car accident instead of merely asleep.

"How do you feel, baby? Do you hurt anywhere?" Cole's voice shook with emotion as he realized that Mari was awake.

"I feel great, like I've had a good long nap," Mari replied.

Cole laughed roughly, "You have."

Bear untangled himself from Mari's arms and walked to the phone on the wall to call Doc while Cole continued to check Mari over.

When Doc came in, it was all he could do to get Cole to release Mari long enough to let him check her out.

"How are you feeling, Mari?" The doc asked as he pushed passed Cole to reach her.

“I feel okay. Can you tell me what happened?” Mari asked, looking from Cole to the doctor.

Doc’s eyes briefly glanced between Bear and Cole before lowering back to Mari. “We’re not sure yet, but it looks like you may have been poisoned,” he said at the warning look Bear and Cole gave him.

“Poisoned?” She asked incredulously.

Doc nodded his head. “At first we thought it might be an allergic reaction.”

“But I’m not allergic to anything,” Mari insisted.

“Yeah, we figured that. The toxicology report says it was some sort of poison. I’m still trying to identify it but we think it was in the coffee you drank.”

“Coffee? The coffee Nick gave me?” When Doc nodded, Mari started to get frantic. “But why would Nick poison me? I barely know him.”

“Oh no, honey,” Cole interjected, “Nick would never hurt you.”

“Then who did?” Mari asked.

Cole just shook his head. “We have no idea. But we’re looking into it. Until then, one of us will be with you at all times, okay? We’ll keep you safe, I promise.”

Mari knew that Cole felt bad but what could he do? It wasn’t his fault. There were some really sick people out there. It could have been anyone. “Cole, it’s okay. I’m fine.”

Cole shook his head. “This time, maybe.” But what if there was a next time? “We’ll keep you safe,” he whispered against her hair as he kissed her.

Doc cleared his throat as he looked at the two forlorn men leaning over Mari. They seemed to really care about her. In the five years he had worked with them he had never seen them take an interest in a woman.

He had assumed they were gay, like him. But then, he had never seen them with a man either. To see these two strong, alpha male

soldiers nearly in tears over this tiny little woman made him wonder if love was really worth the heartache that seemed to come with it.

“Now that you know she’s going to be okay, why don’t you let the little lady sleep? You can come back in a couple of hours.” Doc nodded toward the door. He had one more thing to talk to Mari about and he would prefer to do it without Bear and Cole hovering over her.

Bear and Cole both sent Doc an angry glare before kissing Mari on the lips and reluctantly leaving. Doc walked over and closed the door before returning to Mari’s side.

“Mari, there is one more thing I need to discuss with you.”

Mari glanced up at Doc questioningly. “What’s wrong?”

“There’s nothing wrong exactly.”

“Then what?” Mari asked quickly.

“Well,” Doc began nervously, “How long have you been with Bear and Cole?”

“You know I’ve been with both of them?” Mari’s eyes widened in astonishment, her face heating up with embarrassment.

“Yeah, honey, I do.”

“Does everyone know?” Mari asked uncomfortably.

Doc laughed softly as he patted Mari on the shoulder. “I’m afraid so. It’s kind of hard to hide anything from anyone when those two big guys are involved, especially when they are in love with someone.”

Mari shook her head. “Oh, they don’t love me.”

“I beg to differ. They do love you, very much in fact.”

Mari looked up Doc quizzically, “You think?”

“Yeah, I think,” he grinned. “Now, back to you. How long have you all been together?”

“I don’t know... a few weeks. Why?”

“You’re pregnant.” He stated it so simply Mari couldn’t absorb his words for several seconds, so she just stared at him.

“Pregnant?” She whispered, overwhelmed.

“Yeah. Now, don’t take this the wrong way, but do you know who the father is?”

Mari's eyes were glazed over as she thought about the ramifications of that question. "Father?"

"Mari, honey, this will go a lot easier for both of us if you would answer me with more than single word sentences."

"Huh?"

"Mari, snap out of it, honey." Doc wanted to laugh but felt it would be very bad manners. Mari looked so dazed and confused he felt bad that he had even brought it up, but someone had to. Since he was the doctor, that detail fell to him.

"Mari, you're pregnant. Do you know who the father is?"

"No, I mean, I assume it's either Cole or Bear, but how can I be pregnant?"

"Well, I assume by the usual means, but knowing Bear and Cole, I could be wrong," Doc laughed.

Mari blushed. "No, I mean how can you know so soon? I've only been with them for a few weeks. Doesn't it take longer than that?"

"Well, normally that would be true. But during the course of my toxicology tests, I noticed that your hCG levels were elevated, so I did further testing."

At Mari's look of total confusion, Doc explained further.

"This hCG, or Human Chorionic Gonadotropin, can be detected in urine or blood after implantation, which occurs six to twelve days after fertilization. You are definitely pregnant, but just barely."

"Oh." Guess there was no arguing with science.

"Yeah, oh." Doc chuckled again.

Mari rubbed her hand over her abdomen. There was barely even a curve there, and that had been there before she had even met Bear and Cole. What would it look like when she was really showing?

Dread rocked through Mari as a sudden thought swept through her. "Doc, is the baby okay? I mean, if I was poisoned, did it hurt the baby?"

"I don't know. I don't think so but in a few more weeks I can run some test to be sure."

“Please don’t say anything to Bear or Cole until we know, okay?”

“Honey, you know they will love this baby, no matter what.”

“I know, but I just want to be sure that there is nothing wrong when I tell them. Please?” She begged the doctor.

“Okay, I won’t say anything for now. But we take those tests as soon as possible. I don’t like keeping secrets from them.”

“I don’t either, but I don’t want to give them hope just to snatch it away.”

Doc nodded his head in understanding. He agreed that it would not be a good thing. “One more thing, Mari. When I test for any abnormalities, do you want to know who the father is?”

Mari immediately shook her head, there was no question in her mind. “No. I don’t need to know that. It doesn’t matter which one of them is the father, they will both love this baby equally.”

“Are you so sure of that?” Doc couldn’t understand how Mari could be so calm about being pregnant and not knowing who the father was, when she was involved with two men, brothers at that.

“Oh yeah, it won’t matter to either of them. It will still be their baby.”

Doc watched Mari several moments before moving about the room, keeping his hands busy putting stock away in the cabinets. He was somewhat confused by the attitude of the three of them.

Neither Bear, Cole, nor Mari seemed to have issue with the fact that they were all in a sexual relationship together. And Mari seemed to be pretty sure that neither Bear nor Cole would care who the father was, but would in fact just be thrilled that Mari was pregnant.

“Go ahead and ask, Doc. You know you want to.” Mari had been watching Doc move about the room and had seen the curiosity and confusion in his face.

Doc froze as the flush worked its way up his face. Busted! He passed an uncomfortable glance over to Mari. He hadn’t realized that he had shown his curiosity quite so much. He was a little embarrassed that he had been caught.

He walked over to Mari and sat in the chair Bear had vacated earlier. He watched his clasped hands for several pensive moments before looking at Mari. "How do you do it? I mean, how do you share yourself with two men without them feeling, I don't know, jealous?"

Mari often wondered that herself. "I don't know exactly. I guess it just happened. Not that I don't think it could come up at some point, because I do. How could it not? But Bear and Cole both care about me. According to you, they love me. If they both want me, and they're willing to share, why shouldn't I keep them both?"

"Is that what you want? To have two men?"

"If you had asked me that a month ago, I would have said no. Oh, sure, women always fantasize about having two men, just like men fantasize about having two women."

Mari smiled at Doc's quiet chuckle. "But after being with both Bear and Cole, and seeing their ability to share, to love me equally and not make me feel like I am betraying the other one when I have sex with one of them, I couldn't imagine anything else."

Mari watched the doctor as he thought over her words. This was a subject that obviously concerned Doc a great deal. "Why do you ask, Doc? Have you fallen in love with someone that wants to be in this sort of relationship?"

Doc's head jerked up, his mouth dropping open in shock before snapping shut. Mari's heart hurt for him as she saw the sadness in his eyes before he lowered them back down to his hands. "Not exactly."

She laid her hand on his and patted him. "Tell me, Doc. Sometimes it's better to talk about it."

The Doc took several long breaths before talking, trying to gather his thoughts enough to explain to Mari the hell he was living with.

"I've recently become aware of...feelings for someone. Someone I have always been attracted to but until now, that's all it's been, an attraction. Over the last few weeks this attraction has grown into something more."

"Does he know?"

“How did you know it’s a *he*? Was I that obvious?”

Mari laughed, “Oh Doc, it would have to be someone you’re with on a daily basis for strong feelings to develop. Other than your sister, I’m the only woman here, and I know you’re not in love with me. So, by process of elimination, it has to be one of the guys.”

Doc flushed again. He was a little unnerved knowing that Mari could put things together so easily. Had anyone else put it together?

“No, Doc, I don’t think anyone else knows.”

“Damn, woman, can you read minds?”

“No. Although I seem to be able to talk to Bear and Cole that way, I don’t think it works with anyone else,” Mari laughed again, patting Doc’s hand to reassure him. “But, I know panic when I see it.”

Doc nodded. “Yeah, those two have always been a little unusual.”

“So, tell me about him.”

“I hardly know where to start. I’ve known him for years and I’ve been attracted to him from the moment I saw him. He’s just so, I don’t know, alpha male I guess. It can be sort of overwhelming sometimes.”

“I know the feeling.”

“I’ve spent a lot more time than normal around him recently and found myself looking forward to our time together, wanting our time together. I had hoped that he felt the same way, but I don’t think he does.”

“Why not?”

“He likes women.”

“Are you sure? I mean could there be a possibility you’re wrong?”

Doc shook his head. “No, I don’t think so. I’ve seen him with women. And he definitely likes them.”

“Could he be hiding it? A lot of people do, you know. Afraid to come out of the closet and all that.”

“I don’t know, I guess he could be. I mean, there have been casual touches and such. And occasionally I catch him looking at me with

that look. You know what I mean, that look of someone who is attracted to someone else?”

“Yeah? Sounds promising so far. So what seems to be the problem?”

“What if he’s not gay? What if he’s straight? I could ruin a good friendship if I cross that line, you know?”

“What if he’s both?”

Doc gave Mari the first smile she had seen in several moments. “That’s what I’m hoping. But that comes with its own set of problems.”

“And that’s why you want to know about sharing.”

“Yeah, I guess. I think I would do almost anything if he felt for me what I feel for him.”

“Doc, sharing is great but it’s not for everyone. You have to be really sure that’s what you want before you do something like that.”

“You know, that’s exactly what Bear said to me.”

“Well, it’s the truth. If you are going to share someone you love with another person, you need to be damn sure you can do it or jealousy will eat you alive. So, think about it long and hard before you do it. But don’t worry, things have a way of working themselves out.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

“You know I am. Jealousy can destroy a relationship.”

As Mari said the words she realized that Bear and Cole wouldn’t be able to share her forever. At some point, one of them would get jealous of the other one. And then the anger and resentment would start. She could be what someday destroyed their close relationship.

That was still assuming they even wanted a relationship with her. While it had only been a few weeks since they met, way too short of a time to know one another that deeply, both Bear and Cole had said they wanted Mari. But nothing was set in stone as far as she was concerned.

They had talked about wanting to start a family right away and Mari had been a big part of that conversation. And apparently they

had gotten their wish if Doc's words were true. It was just hard to believe them. Mari felt like the world was being handed to her on a silver platter. She kept waiting for the other shoe to drop and something to go wrong.

"Mari?" Doc asked, "You okay?"

Mari nodded her head as she patted Doc's hand again.

"Yeah, I'll be fine. This is just a little hard to take in all at once. My life seemed so simple a couple of months ago. I worked in a bookstore, dated occasionally, had a few friends, just basic life stuff. Now I'm in love with twins, pregnant by one of them but we don't know which one, and someone tried to kill me." She gave a weak, almost desperate laugh. "My life has become a little more complicated over the last few weeks."

This time it was Doc patting Mari's hand in reassurance. "It'll be okay, isn't that what you told me? That things will work themselves out? Now you just close your eyes and get some sleep. You both need your rest."

"Yeah, I guess." Mari snuggled down into her blankets and let herself fade into sleep, thoughts of Bear and Cole filling her mind.

Chapter 6

Mari woke up and reached for Cole and Bear. Nope, the bed was empty except for her. Looking around the room she realized that she was the only one there. That in it self was a little unusual. They had barely left her side the last two weeks, and if they did, it was for no more than a few moments. Maybe long enough to visit the bathroom and retrieve food.

Cole and Bear had both taken turns feeding her with their hands. What usually started out as a meal had quickly turned into a sensual exercise in torture. To be honest, the last couple of weeks as a whole had been aggravating for all of them. With Mari being so sick, no one had been able to enjoy what was sure to be another explosive encounter between the three of them.

It had been all Mari could do not to jump one, if not both of the sexy men and demand that they fuck the daylights out of her. But each time she had reached for one of them they would remind her that they had to wait until she was physically capable of handling them. Mari had thought they would wait a couple days, but the “guys” had decided to give Mari more time to heal, and give them all time to get to know each other.

Mari was pretty sure she had been capable within a few days. Or maybe she was just that sexually excited. But they had denied her every time she had tried to initiate anything more than a little foreplay.

That doesn't mean they hadn't seen to her needs in other ways. Mari was pretty sure they had mapped out every inch of her body,

inside and out. She had been sexually satisfied in ways she never knew were even possible. Bear and Cole had quite the imagination.

And apparently Mari had quite the responsive body, too. One or both of them barely had to touch her and she was going up in flames. It was a little embarrassing how easily they had brought her to climax time and time again.

All in all, it had been a wonderful time for Mari, and she hoped, for Bear and Cole also. They had spent a lot of time, in-between loving each other, talking and learning about all of their hopes and dreams.

And while they hadn't specifically mentioned the long term, they had both given Mari the impression that she was the woman of their dreams. Mari hoped so because she couldn't imagine being with anyone else again. Not after being with these two.

Mari still wasn't too sure about the whole "sharing" thing, but that didn't stop her from enjoying them both. What woman wouldn't? It was fantasy come to life.

There didn't seem to be any jealousy between them. Mari wondered if it was just a matter of time before the green monster reared his ugly head or if they truly meant that they could share her. And how exactly was that supposed to work? Did they get married? If so, which one of them did she marry? And if she married one of them, did that mean she belonged more to him than she did to the other one?

Mari knew they wanted children because that subject had come up in conversation several times. They had both seemed excited at the prospect of being fathers. Not that they knew she was pregnant, but it they had made sure that Mari knew they had that in mind. All in all, Mari was very confused at the state of things.

Mari was hungry and it didn't look like Bear or Cole would be back anytime soon. She hadn't eaten since the night before. She grinned at the memory of where that had led. She had been sucking the juice of an orange wedge off of Cole's finger when he had

suddenly groaned. Grabbing a handful of her hair he had pushed her head over his straining cock.

The sight of Mari sucking Cole had apparently sent Bear over the edge too, because the next thing Mari knew, Bear was lying on his back with his head between Mari's legs with a can of whipped cream. Dessert had been better than the actual dinner after that.

Mari jumped out of bed and found one of Cole's shirts to wear. She was a little distressed that the shirt barely reached her knees and she had no underwear on. Apparently her clothes had gotten lost somewhere between the bedroom and the laundry room again. Both Bear and Cole denied having anything to do with the disappearance of her clothing. Mari thought they both just wanted to keep her naked.

Mari inched open the bedroom door. Seeing no one around, she quietly slipped past the bedroom door and walked to the kitchen.

Ah yes, food. Mari opened the fridge and was thrilled to find it full with lots of different kinds of food. Just as she reached for a bunch of grapes she felt a large hand slap her on her butt. Whirling around she came face to face with a man she had never seen before. He was nearly as large as Cole, but he definitely was not Cole.

"Well, hello darling," The tall man placed both of his hands on either side of her, trapping her against the wall. He leaned down to look right in her face, pressing his body against hers. "Come out to play, have you?"

Mari tried to duck under his arm but he was having none of that. He wrapped his arms around her and held her against his body, his hard erection pressing into her stomach. "I'd like to play, too."

Mari was momentarily shocked at his forward behavior. But then reason flew right out the window when he had the gall to wiggle his cock against her suggestively. She probably would regret losing her temper with a man that was nearly a foot taller and a good hundred pounds bigger than her, but damn, she was mad.

How dare he touch her like this? Who in the hell did he think he was? Because he certainly wasn't Cole or Bear and as far as she could

remember, they were the only two guys she had given permission to touch her in any form what so ever.

Mari softened her facial features and her body while plastering a sensual smile on her lips. He must have taken this as acceptance and loosened his grip on her body, letting his hands slide around to the front of her body.

Just as he reached for her breasts Mari brought her knee up and thrust it into his privates. "Oh, damn, what'd ya do that for?" he groaned as he grabbed his injured flesh and folded like a deck of cards.

Mari ran...right into a furious Bear. Bear carefully looked Mari over quickly before shoving her behind him and advancing on the man. Bear wrapped his hand around his throat, holding him at least a foot off the ground. The man was turning blue.

Mari found herself in the interesting position of defending the man who had groped her from being strangled by Bear.

"Now Bear, put him down." At first she tried to be diplomatic but the darker blue he turned the louder she got. "Damn it, Bear, put him down."

"He hurt you, Mari."

"He didn't hurt me, Bear, he just touched me." Okay, maybe that wasn't a good thing to point out. Bear had growled at that. Mari was trying to diffuse the situation when doors opened from several sides and Cole and Bear's friends came running in.

"Bear, man, let Sam go."

Mari suddenly found herself surrounded by several really huge men. A few of them were pushing Mari behind them and the others were grabbing Bear and trying to break his hold on Sam's throat. But moving Bear when he didn't want to be moved was like trying to pull a car down a road...sideways. It just wasn't going to happen.

Mari tried to push her way to the front of the group to get to Bear but they all seemed to want to keep her where she was. The men were

all yelling for Bear to let go Sam and trying to pull Bear off of him. There was a lot of commotion for such a stupid situation.

Mari tried to push her way to the front of the pack again but was pushed back by more hands. Finally she had had enough. Grabbing a wooden spoon off of the counter she began swatting at the hands holding her back. Several yelps and some considerable swearing later she finally reached Bear.

Placing her hands on her hips she got as close to Bear as she could and yelled, "Damn it, Bear, put him down right now."

Getting no reaction from Bear but plenty from the hands trying to pull her away from him she tried again. "Bear, if you don't put him down right this minute I won't have sex with you for an entire week!"

You could have heard a pin drop as all noise in the room stopped at her words. Mari cringed as she realized everyone had heard her.

Bear finally seemed to come out of the trance he was in to turn his head slowly and look down at Mari. "A whole week, Mari?" He asked skeptically.

"You heard me. A whole week." She smiled as Bear slowly began to lower Sam to the floor. "Besides, I don't like that particular shade of blue." As Bear released the coughing man Mari scooted over between him and Bear, placing all of Bear's attention on her.

Bear picked Mari up into his arms and hugged her body tight against his. When he had seen Sam holding Mari in his arms, then Mari kneeling him, he had become enraged. No one was supposed to touch Mari except him or Cole. And that meant even the guys he trusted more than anyone on the face of the earth.

He had just seen red. The next thing he had known Mari was trying to talk him down and Sam was turning blue. Then the others of his unit had come running in and that had just sent his temper soaring even more. They had tried to keep Mari away from him, also putting their hands on her.

Bear was the gentle one, the calm diplomat, the peacemaker. He wasn't supposed to get mad like this. He just couldn't seem to help it.

Bear couldn't stand it when Mari hurt. It shattered something inside of him.

Holding Mari in his arms helped a lot. At least there he knew she was safe. As he rubbed his hands up and down her back her threat came back to him. He placed his lips against Mari's ears to whisper to her, "A whole week, Mari? I'd never survive it."

Mari giggled at Bear. Like she could go a whole week without him. "*It worked, didn't it?*" Mari whispered back through the mental bond they had.

Bear whispered in Mari's ear again. Mari laughed out loud as she grabbed Bear's face in her hands and leaned in to kiss him. "Yes, Bear, I'll still have sex with you."

She didn't realize that everyone had heard her until the people in the room behind her began laughing. She flushed from the top of her head to the tips of her toes. She was so embarrassed.

Mari tapped Bear on his shoulders to get him to put her down but he seemed too engrossed in kissing her along the side of her neck and grabbing her butt with his hands. "*Bear, please.*"

Bear was having none of it. He was too interested in the small little pulse in the side of her neck that sped up every time he licked her soft skin. "*Damn, you taste so good,*" Bear whispered back.

Mari thumped Bear on the shoulders a little harder. "Bear, put me down," Mari said, out loud this time.

Bear's only response was a grunt and the tightening of his arms around her legs.

"Damn it, Bear, put me down right now." Mari smacked him on the shoulder with the wooden spoon she still held.

Bear reluctantly let Mari slide to the floor but kept his arms around her as he glanced up to the guys behind her. Bear was pretty sure Mari was pissed again when she placed her hands on her hips and stomped her foot.

"I am not a toy." Yep, she was pissed. "When I say put me down, you damn well better put me down."

Sam, who was sitting slouched in a chair behind Mari, still trying to catch his breath, laughed. He immediately regretted making any sound when Mari turned her angry gaze on him. “And you! Who the hell do you think you are?”

Sam had the good sense to be embarrassed by his behavior. “Oh hell, I didn’t know you belonged to Bear. I never would have touched you if I had known.”

“And that makes it okay?”

Sam squirmed under Mari’s livid glare.

“Well, no, I just...well, you were standing there and I thought...you had on just that little shirt and...Oh hell, I don’t know what I thought.” Sam bowed his head over his clasped hands. He had screwed up and he knew it.

Mari was far from done though. “Do you just go up and grab any woman you please? And you think that’s okay? What if you knew for a fact that I didn’t belong to Bear? Would you have flung me over the table and done more?”

Sam turned red as he stammered out his denial. “No, I wouldn’t have done that.”

“Just remember that. You don’t have the right to touch any woman unless she gives you permission. What if I had been your sister?”

“That’s just gross,” Sam replied as his face screwed up in distaste.

“You know what I mean. How would you feel if someone had done that to your sister? Would that have been okay?” Mari yelled.

“Hell no!” Sam exclaimed.

“Then it’s not okay to do that to me. I might be somebody’s sister.”

Sam realized finally what Mari was trying to tell him and he was mortified. He had really crossed the line, and damned if he knew how to make it right. Just as Sam began to try and offer an apology to Mari, he was interrupted by Cole’s loud yell.

“Mari!” Cole came stomping into the house to stand directly in front of Mari, glaring down at her. “What the hell do you think you are doing?”

Cole had been walking toward the house, his thoughts on the precious bundle he had left tucked into his bed and how he wanted to wake her when he had heard yelling. As he had gotten closer he had realized that it was Mari shouting.

When he opened the front door and had seen Mari yelling at Sam, he had grown enraged. She was standing in a room full of hungry, lust filled men, and she was yelling at them, a group of overly aggressive, battle hardened Navy Seals. She could be killed, or worse.

Then he had realized that Mari was wearing nothing, and he did mean nothing, but his shirt. He had seen the edge of her butt cheek beneath the shirt as she was yelling at Sam. And he had immediately lost all reason or control. And Cole prided himself on his control.

Mari just stared at Cole, her mouth hanging open in shock as he grabbed her and pulled her to the back porch, slamming the French doors behind him. He grabbed Mari by the shoulders and began shaking her as he yelled.

“What the hell do you think you were doing?” Cole snarled at her.

“I...I...” Mari tried to answer but Cole interrupted before she could.

“You are never to talk to those men like that again. Do you understand me?” Cole could feel the panic welling up inside at the thought of what could have happened.

“But, Cole—”

“Never, Mari. Do I make myself clear?” He had to keep her safe. He trusted these men with his life but Mari was his heart. Without her he was nothing. He had to make her understand.

“But you don’t understand—” Mari began again.

“I understand plenty. You came prancing out nearly naked and then you take offense when someone takes you up on what you are so

obviously offering?" Cole knew he had used the wrong words the second they left his lips but he couldn't seem to stop himself.

Mari felt the horror sweep through her body a second later when she saw the red handprint on Cole's cheek. She had slapped him. She was so ashamed. She never reacted in anger this way. "Oh Cole, I'm so sorry," she whispered. She raised her hands to cover her lips.

Cole stood as tall as his height would let him and glared down at the tears forming in Mari's eyes. "You will go inside and apologize. Now!"

Mari shook her head in denial. She hadn't done anything wrong. "I most certainly will not."

Cole could feel himself shaking. Whether it was anger or fear he had no idea. He couldn't believe that this little slip of a girl was defying him. "Are you going to apologize?" He asked again, his voice not so loud now.

"No, Cole, I will not. I haven't done anything wrong that I need to apologize for." Mari tried to keep the tremble out of her voice but she knew she hadn't done a very good job.

"Fine. Then go to the room and stay there until you're ready to apologize."

"Cole, I'm not a child. You can't send me to my room." This was so not going well.

"Watch me." Cole picked up a struggling Mari and threw her over his shoulder. He slapped her butt as he walked through the French doors of the bedroom and dropped Mari into the middle of the bed.

It was not fair that he used his strength and size to get what he wanted. And he had slapped her on the butt. Mari hadn't been slapped on the butt in, well, forever. Not including Sam slapping her on the butt in the kitchen. Why did big men think they could just slap her on the butt whenever they wanted to? Did she look like she was two years old?

Mari quickly climbed to her feet and stood on the edge of the bed, her hands on hips and her face leaning toward Cole. "I am not a child, so stop treating me like one."

Cole could feel the beginning of a smile curling at the corner of his lips. Standing on the edge of the bed, Mari could just barely meet him eye to eye. Damn, she was cute when she was pissed.

"Then stop acting like one."

"Grrr." Cole's eyes widened at the growl that came out of Mari's mouth. He wasn't sure he had ever heard a sound quite like that before. It made his cock stand up and beg for more.

"You're a moron," Mari said through clenched teeth.

"And you're a child," Cole said tersely.

"Do I look like a child?" Mari pulled her shirt off and threw it across the room, standing completely naked in front of the suddenly panting Cole.

"Oh, hell." Cole wasn't sure how it had happened but he knew he had lost this argument. He grabbed Mari and tossed her into the middle of the bed, following her down to cover her body with his. He wrapped his hands in her long hair and pulled her closer to his hardened body.

He looked down into her lovely face. "*Damn you, Mari.*" Cole took Mari's lips with his in a crushing kiss. It was heated and passionate and totally out of control, much like Cole at that moment.

In-between running his tongue down Mari's neck and ravaging her lips he ran one hand down her body, the other tightening in her hair, holding her right where he wanted her.

Mari's hands were busy too. Grabbing the edges of his shirt she pulled, buttons flying in every direction. Cole groaned as Mari's hands spanned the firm ridges of his chest. His breath hitched when her fingers circled his nipples. "Oh, hell, Mari, you feel so good."

Cole thought he had died and gone to heaven when Mari separated her thighs and let his body sink in-between them, his raging hard on

settling against her heated center, separated by only the straining denim of his jeans.

“Cole, please,” Mari cried as she tugged his head down to her aching breasts.

Cole immediately latched his lips onto one rigid nipple, swirling around the tiny little bud with his tongue and drawing a deep moan from Mari.

“You taste so good,” Cole growled around her nipple. “Like summer rain and strawberries. I love strawberries.”

Mari’s response was to wrap her legs around his waist, using their strength to pull him as close as she could. She began moving her hips up and down, rubbing Cole’s rock hard erection against her tender flesh through his jeans.

Cole sucked Mari’s nipple into his mouth again as he used his other hand to tweak her other one. The added stimulation of Cole at her sensitive nipples plus his hardness rubbing against her sensitive clit had Mari climaxing within seconds.

He felt Mari’s entire body tense. Hearing her low cry of release as she arched her body into his, Cole almost came himself. “Oh yeah, baby, come for me. Just like that.”

God, she was so responsive. He loved that about her. Cole quickly reached down to caress her swollen clit between his fingers, wrestling another climax out of her.

Cole didn’t want to stop but he knew he had to get inside Mari in the next few seconds. He was ready to blow now and it was all he could do to hold himself back. He quickly pushed his boots off with his feet as he reached for the buttons of his jeans, shoving them down his long legs.

As his jeans hit the floor he laid himself back against Mari, his hard cock settling against her silky folds. She was so wet that he slid along her tender folds, the head of his cock catching gently on her tender nub. It felt so good that Cole did it again several times. Each time he moved his hips he slid along her delicate flesh, arousing Mari

until she arched into him again, moaning out her pleasure as yet another orgasm swept through her body.

God, this woman climaxed at the drop of a hat. Cole found that to be so exhilarating. He always knew when he was making her feel good. She just couldn't seem to help letting him know. It just made him harder.

Cole grabbed Mari's leg with his arm, pulling her hips up. He drove into her in one quick lunge until he felt his balls slap against her ass. She was so tight Cole thought his head would explode.

Mari's hands braced themselves on his shoulders as her head swung back and forth on the bed. Her cries growing louder by the second as Cole drove into her silky sheath over and over again.

Mari suddenly felt another set of hands on her shoulders, rubbing along her neck to her breasts, pinching her nipples lightly. She knew it wasn't Cole because he had both hands holding her hips anchored in place.

Looking back over her head she found Bear standing by the side of the bed, his shirt gone and his jeans unbuttoned, showing a good handful of his hard cock protruding out the top of his pants.

"Bear," she whispered as she reached for him.

Bear's eyes were half closed with arousal. He was so turned on by the sight and feel of Cole pumping his cock in and out of Mari's tender flesh that it was all he could do not to come right there and then. He could feel the pre-cum on the head of his cock.

He had been standing in the kitchen listening to others argue over the fight they had witnessed on the back porch when he had suddenly had the hard on from hell. He immediately knew what Cole and Mari were doing. He couldn't get to the bedroom fast enough.

Opening the door he had been greeted by a most beautiful sight. Mari arching off the bed as she reached what was obviously another climax. Having played with Mari's very responsive body for the better part of two weeks, he knew that she could reach an orgasm very

easily. He also knew that by the time her body was flushed as it was now, she was no longer on her first orgasm.

Silently closing the door behind him, he had pulled his shirt off over his head and unbuttoned his jeans to free his throbbing cock. He grabbed for Mari just as she turned her passion filled eyes up to his. An aroused Mari was such a beautiful sight.

Bear grabbed both of Mari's breasts in his large hands as he leaned down to kiss her, pinching her nipples between his shaking fingers. Mari reached over her head to grab Bear's jeans and yank them down his thighs, releasing his cock to her hungry gaze. She wrapped her hands as far around him as her fingers would reach and started stroking him, matching her strokes to Cole's.

Cole glanced up to see his brother's trembling body standing by the edge of the bed. "Bear," he whispered when he could catch his breath again. He nodded toward Mari. Bear raised his eyes to Cole's and nodded his head in understanding. Cole reluctantly pulled himself from Mari and flipped her body over so that she was on her knees, facing Bear.

Mari was too intoxicated on lust to care which way she was taken as long as she was taken. Seeing the hard cock in front of her face she took it between her lips, moaning as Cole sank into her moistened depths again. She ran her tongue over the tip, paying special attention to the small drops of pre-cum on the top before sucking as much of him as she could into her mouth.

Bear reached under Mari to grab her breasts once again, alternating between massaging the large globes and pulling down on her nipples, ringing a low moan from Mari.

Cole grasped Mari's hips with almost bruising force as he thrust in and out as hard and as fast as he could. He could feel each and every little quiver of Mari tightening around his throbbing cock as he pounded into her. He knew she was on the verge of another orgasm.

He could also feel Mari's lips wrapped around Bear's cock. It was very erotic to feel himself pushing inside of Mari and at the same time

feeling Mari's lips on his cock. It elevated the sensations to heights he never thought he'd reach.

He knew Bear was enjoying the same pleasure by the way he timed his plunge into Mari's mouth with each of Cole's thrusts into her body. He brushed his hand up the curve of her hip to the small pucker of her butt and carefully slid a finger in, hoping she would enjoy this particular pleasure.

Yep, she did. Mari went wild. Her hips started rapidly moving back and forth, forcing Cole's finger in and out of her small hole as he pressed a second finger inside, then a third. God, she was tight here, too. But not so tight that she wouldn't be able to take either him or Bear in the near future.

As Mari arched back and let out a loud scream around Bear's plunging hardness, Cole felt the head of his cock explode. He hammered into Mari several more times as he released his seed as deep inside of Mari as he could before slumping over Mari's collapsed body.

Cole was brought out of his lust-induced trance by Bear's agonized cry. "Mari, baby, turn around." Cole could see that Mari was in no condition to lift her head, let alone turn around. Bear was pumping his abandoned cock with his hand as he stared down at Mari in desperation.

Cole quickly pulled himself from Mari and sat back on his knees, pulling Mari's body with him so that her head rested on his stomach. Releasing his aching cock Bear grabbed Mari's legs and pulled them out in front of her so that Mari was on her back, leaning into Cole.

Holding onto her thighs, Bear carefully separated them, feasting his hungry eyes on her tender flesh, wet with her own juices and Cole's seed. Bear's hips bucked involuntarily at the sight in front of him, Mari spread for his pleasure. Bear wasn't sure there was a more beautiful sight in the entire world.

Kneeling on the bed between her thighs, he quickly positioned himself and rammed all ten inches of his hard cock into her silky depths as far as she would take him.

“I’m sorry, Mari, I can’t take this slow. I need this. I need you,” Bear groaned regrettably as he began to move inside of Mari. She felt exquisite. He had been fantasizing about making love to Mari for the last two weeks.

He felt his cock grow even bigger at the sight of Cole’s hand caressing Mari’s breasts, pulling up on her nipples. It was so erotic knowing that Cole was giving pleasure to Mari just as he was. The two of them could drive her to distraction, creating more pleasure for Mari together, than either one of them could alone.

As he leaned forward Cole squeezed one of her breasts, offering the delectable mound up for Bear’s mouth. With his other hand Cole reached down to rub his fingers over Mari’s engorged clit. His stimulation combined with the feeling of Bear thrusting into her tender well sent her into another summit of pleasure.

The deep shuddering of Mari’s slick pussy wrapped around Bear’s cock sent him into a tailspin of sensual pleasure. With each burst of his climax, his seed filled her. “Oh damn, baby,” he roared out as he came with such intensity that his knees buckled and he sank to the bed as he continued to come.

Cole rubbed Mari’s sweat soaked hair back from her face as he rained little kisses up and down her throat. “My sweet little Mari, what a treasure you are.”

He rubbed his hands lightly down her throat, caressing her breasts before moving down her stomach, coming to a stop on the soft mound of her abdomen. “With all the loving we plan to give you, it won’t be long before you have a little treasure in here for us.”

Bear sat up with a big grin on his face as Cole’s words. He loved the thought of Mari carrying his baby, or even Cole’s baby, just as long as it was theirs. Thoughts of watching Mari grow big with their baby made him hard, again.

Leaning over to caress Mari's sensitive nipple with his tongue, Bear began to slowly move his hips back and forth, drawing a low moan from Mari.

"Are you going to breast feed our baby, Mari?" He asked in a muffled whisper.

Mari lifted her drowsy eyes to look into Bear's very satisfied ones. Using what energy she had left Mari wrapped one hand around Bear's head as he laid it on her breasts and the other hand to circle around Cole's neck, pulling him closer to her.

"*Whatever you want. I'm all yours,*" Mari whispered to both men silently, not quite willing to share her big news with them yet.

Both men stilled.

"*Both of us, Mari? Forever?*" Bear asked against her glowing skin in a silent whisper, afraid to speak out loud in case she said no.

Both men's heart seemed to stop beating while they waited for her reply. Mari didn't know it, but she held both of their hearts in her hands. She could crush them with a single word.

Without even hesitating Mari answered them. "*Forever sounds good.*" It wasn't quite a yes but it wasn't a no, either.

"Mari, look at me, baby." Cole grabbed Mari by the chin and forced her head up to his. "Do you really know what you are saying?" Cole had to know she knew what she was saying, that she wasn't in some sort of post lust filled stupor, agreeing to stay with them because they had just made love. "If you say yes, we will never let you go, Mari, ever."

"You will belong to us, both of us, together, for all time, Mari." Bear added, bringing Mari's attention down to his.

Mari opened her eyes wider, understanding that they were asking more than for her to stick around for awhile and have sex with them. "Is that what you want? Both of you?" She couldn't believe they were talking about forever.

“Mari,” Cole began, “We want you in our lives, in our home, in our arms, for as long as you want to be there, for as long as you will allow us to have you.”

Bear nodded his head in agreement as he ran his hand to join with Cole’s, caressing the curve of her abdomen.

“We want babies with you, Mari.” He stared intensely into Mari’s green eyes, watching them fill with tears. “We want to see you grow round with our baby, hold you when you need comforting, laugh with you when you’re happy, and love you each and every day.”

“But, what if—” Mari knew she had to tell them she was pregnant. As eager as they seemed, they would be pissed if they found she had withheld anything from them, especially this.

“No buts, Mari. Either you want to be with us or you don’t. It’s all or nothing,” Cole said harshly.

“*Cole!*” Bear scolded through their bond. He was afraid Mari would get scared at the ultimatum Cole was giving her, that it could cost them the woman they wanted.

“No, Bear, she has to understand,” Cole said vehemently. “She has to understand that this is all or nothing,” he said more quietly, “If she agrees to give herself to us, I want it all. I want her love and affection. I want babies with her. I want her to give us everything she has to give.”

Mari was astonished at how strongly Cole felt about this. He seemed almost angry. “Forever is a long time. What if you get tired of me?”

Mari didn’t like the lustful grin that crossed over Cole’s lips as he reached down past her abdomen to caress her clit, rubbing up against Bear’s hardening cock.

“Do you think I could ever get tired of this, Mari?” He lightly pinched her swollen nub between his fingers, causing Mari to groan. “Of how responsive you are to my touch?” Cole watched Mari squirm as he caressed her, bringing her close to another orgasm.

“Say you want this, that you want both of us, sweetness. Say you want to stay with us forever.” Cole added just enough pressure to bring Mari to the edge before backing off, dragging out the torture.

“Please, Cole,” Mari begged as she lifted her arms above her head and wrapped them around Cole, hanging on for all she was worth.

“Say yes and I will give you what you need,” Cole growled as he brought her to the edge again, only to pull back at the last moment.

Bear watched the emotions playing across Mari's face. He could feel her wrap around his cock like a tight fist of warm silk as he began to stroke himself in and out of her. “*Say yes, Mari,*” Bear whispered telepathically as he captured her nipple in his lips once again. “*Say you want us forever.*” He kissed and nipped and stroked until all she could do was thrash and make soft pleas.

“Yes, yes, yes!” Mari screamed as Cole's fingers caressed her until she reared back, back arched, thighs clamped around Bear and screamed her climax.

The sensation of Mari's muscles clamping down on him made Bear orgasm on the spot. He rammed in and out of Mari so fast that he added another level to Mari's orgasm before he released his seed deep inside Mari's womb, knowing had made a good start on one of those promises.

Cole, not to be left out, pushed his hard cock along the crease of Mari's ass cheeks. They were saturated with sweat, Mari's sweet juices, and both his and Bear's semen. Grabbing Mari's hips he held her down to him as he pushed along her cheeks, the head of his penis catching on the little cleft in her ass, increasing both his and Mari's pleasure.

Cole moved his hands down to grab both of Mari's cheeks, pulling them apart as he pushed against her yet again, then pushed her cheeks together, wrapping them around his inflamed cock.

Knowing he was minutes from pouring his seed all over Mari he begged Bear, “Don't stop, Bear.” He wanted Mari to come one more

time. He wanted to burn their love making into her so far that she could never get them out. “Harder, fuck her harder, damn it.”

Even though he had come just moments before, Bear started slamming into Mari as he lavished her breasts with his tongue.

“It’s too much, too much,” Mari cried. There were tears streaming down her face. But they were tears of extreme pleasure, not pain.

“Not enough, baby, not nearly enough. I want you to come for us again. Just one more time, sweetness, just one more time,” Cole demanded. Cole knew they were all mere seconds away from release but he had to have more. He had to have Mari’s complete surrender.

“I need more, Mari,” he groaned as he coated his cock with Mari’s juices before pushing himself against Mari’s ass and placed the head of his cock at her rear entrance. “Do you understand, baby?”

Mari stilled for a brief second as Cole began to slowly breach her virgin opening. “Cole?” she cried uncertainly.

“It’s okay, baby, I won’t hurt you. I promise.”

Bear stilled as he felt Cole slowly enter Mari from behind, inch by inch. Reaching down to her clit her began caressing her, drawing her frightened mind away from Cole’s invasion and back to her pleasure.

“Oh damn, baby, you’re so tight here,” Cole groaned, “so perfect.” He slowly pushed in until he was seated to the balls. She was so tight he knew he wouldn’t last more than a few seconds.

As soon as Bear felt Cole fit completely inside of Mari, he began moving again, slowly pumping his hard cock into her small entrance. His hand became a frenzy of movement as he stroked her clit faster and faster. “Come for us, baby, come for us.”

Mari had never been this full. With Cole pumping faster and faster into her from behind and Bear into her front she was filled too compactly. The added stimulation of Bear’s fingers on her clit sent Mari into a plunge of sensuous feeling unlike anything she had ever felt before. Mari exploded with a scream and plunged into darkness as her body gave up the last of her energy.

Bear and Cole came seconds after Mari's body collapsed between them.

Cole's head went back and a bellow of her name ripped from his lips as he pumped his seed into her until he fell back on the bed, his cock still pulsing inside of Mari.

Bear cried out Mari's name as he too came, his seed saturating Mari. Not wanting to waste a drop, Bear tilted her hips back slightly as he collapsed on top of Mari's still form. "Oh god, I think I just died."

Cole felt his chest rumble as he began laughing. "Yeah, I can see that."

Bear and Cole lied there for several moments, relishing in the feeling of being inside of Mari. She was so sweet and so giving. They both knew that they were going to hold Mari to her acceptance of them, even if it had been wrung out of her in the heat of passion. They were never going to let her go.

Cole sat up and slowly pulled himself from Mari, wincing at the small pleasure of feeling her rub over him. He watched as Bear pulled his semi-hard cock out of Mari and let her legs fall back together. "Poor baby."

Bear snorted, "That poor baby just took the two of us on separately and then together. We may be in serious trouble here."

"Oh, I have no doubt we're in trouble. Especially when she figures out that she fainted again. That woman hates to faint."

Laughing in agreement, Bear stood up beside the bed and looked lovingly at the sleeping beauty on the bed. Her flushed body was covered in sweat and cum, nearly from head to toe. And she never looked more beautiful to him.

There was a touch of fear in his eyes as he looked over at Cole. "We have to get her pregnant as fast as we can."

Cole laughed again as he smoothed the hair back from Mari's face. "And you think we didn't just do that?"

"I mean it, Cole, every chance we get until she's pregnant."

Cole nodded in agreement. He too felt that it would cement their relationship if Mari were pregnant with their child. And he knew Bear agreed with him that it didn't matter which one of them was the biological father, it would be *their* baby.

"So, you agree?" Bear asked Cole as he slowly lifted Mari in his arms and walked into the bathroom. "We take her whenever and wherever we can? Both of us together or separately, until she's pregnant, right?"

"You honestly think we will stop once she's expecting? We can barely keep our hands off of her now," Cole replied as he turned on the tub water and held his hand under the water until it was warm enough for Mari. He added some bath salts and watched as Bear slowly lowered Mari into the tub.

"Hell, at this rate, the girl is likely to be pregnant for the next ten years." He glanced briefly at Bear with a small smile on his face. "Hope you planned on a large family."

Bear grinned. He liked that idea. She would be so beautiful all swollen with the proof of their love. "Sounds like a plan to me."

Mari didn't make more than a small protest as she was lowered into the water. She was exhausted from their love making session. She would probably sleep the entire night away.

Bear and Cole took turns washing Mari clean as the other one took a quick shower. Once Mari was out of the tub and all of them were dried off they headed back into the bedroom.

Cole held the sleeping Mari in his arms as Bear changed the dirty sheets before placing her in the center of the big bed and covering her with the thick white comforter.

Bear and Cole quietly dressed again in jeans and T-shirts. They both stopped at the end of the bed to look down at their sleeping baby.

"We're gonna love her, aren't we?" Bear asked in whisper.

"We already do, Benjamin, we already do." Cole said as he patted Bear on the back. "We never had a chance."

Bear wrapped his arm around Cole's shoulders and gave him a slight squeeze before turning toward the door. "Come on, our baby needs her rest if she's gonna be ready for us again anytime soon."

Cole leaned down to place a light kiss on Mari's lips, seeing her smile in her sleep. Damn, she was beautiful. "Sleep well, baby." He followed Bear out the door, closing it quietly behind him.

Chapter 7

Bear watched Mari walk past the office door as he sat talking with Jax. He felt the anger and frustration of the last couple of weeks fill him. It had been over a month since Mari had been poisoned and they were no closer to figuring out what had happened than they had been then.

To make matters worse, Mari had gotten a stomach bug a couple of weeks after recovering and he hadn't been able to touch her since. He felt like he was going out of his mind. If he didn't get some relief soon, he just might kill someone.

Cole was pretty much in the same boat. Both of them were so horny they could hardly sit down properly, but they'd cut off their right arm before hurting Mari. She had seemed to recover from the poisoning pretty well but then she had gotten some sort of flu bug, as the Doc had described it. Nothing major, he had said. But Mari seemed to be getting sick a lot.

Bear had thought briefly she might have been pregnant but had quickly dismissed that idea after talking with the Doc. Doc reassured him it was just a passing thing and Mari would be feeling better soon, but soon couldn't come quick enough for Bear.

"So, I went through all my usual contacts and there is no sign of the girl," Jax said, bringing Bear out of his musing.

"No sign of her? How can that be?" Bear asked.

"Well, up until a few weeks ago she was working as a kindergarten teacher in Spokane, but then she just fell off the grid," Jax explained.

“What do you mean she fell off the grid? There has to be some sign of her.” Bear slammed the papers in his hands down on the table as he glared across at Jax. There just had to be some sign of Camilla.

“That’s just it, there’s not. A few weeks ago she took a personal leave from work, cleaned out her bank account, and just disappeared. There’s absolutely no sign of her, anywhere.”

“None?” Bear asked, astonished. How could she simply disappear?

“No bank activity, no phone calls to friends, no nothing. It’s like she just ceased to exist.”

Bear shook his head, feeling the weight of the world settle on his shoulders. “How in the hell am I going to tell Mari?” He wondered. Mari was just now getting over her illness and he had to tell her that her sister was missing. *Just peachy!*

“Tell me what?” Mari asked as she stopped in the doorway.

Bear’s head whipped around to stare at Mari, wishing he were anywhere except where he was. “Hi, baby, how are you feeling?” He stalled.

“I feel great,” Mari said as she walked into the room, around the desk and plopped herself down in Bear’s lap.

“Hi, Jax, how’s tricks?” She asked as she flashed Jax a bright friendly smile. Mari had been thrilled to find out there was another woman at the ranch beside herself. Living with a bunch of men was sort of like living in a football locker room. The testosterone could overpower a girl if she wasn’t careful.

“I’m good, Mari, thanks for asking.” Jax began pushing her wheelchair across the room. “I’m gonna head out. I’ll do a little more research and get back to you, Bear.” She wheeled herself through the doorway, sticking her head back in to look at Mari.

“Hey, Mari, if you need anything, come find me. Okay?” Jax said.

“Sure,” Mari nodded, “Hey, you get a license for that thing yet?” She asked nodding toward Jax’s wheelchair.

“Nah, but I like to live dangerously,” Jax laughed as she wheeled herself away.

Bear picked Mari up and sat her on the desk in front of him, scooting his chair in so that his body was sitting between her legs. As tall as he was, even sitting, his head was above hers.

“So, baby, you feeling better?” Bear asked, his voice husky with desire. When she nodded he brushed his lips over her soft neck. “God, I’ve missed you, girl,” he whispered tenderly as he rubbed his head against hers. His lips nibbled her ear before moving across her cheek to devour her lips.

Bear’s hands were not idle either. He ran his hands up under her skirt and along her legs, coming to a stop at the apex of her thighs. He gently caressed the silky flesh there with his thumbs, surprised to find just smooth skin.

Bear leaned back in his chair and pushed her skirt up around her waist.

“Damn, you’re naked,” he growled quietly as he bared her to his hungry gaze. His tongue nearly fell out of his mouth when Mari parted her thighs even more, spreading her legs as far apart as they would go.

Bear appreciated the view for several seconds before he could stand it no more. He pushed Mari back until she was lying back against the desk, her legs spread wide by the width of Bear’s shoulders.

Leaning down he swept his tongue through her dewy depths, growling as he felt his balls tighten up and his cock harden to steel at the sweet taste of her.

“*You taste so damn good, baby!*” Bear said through their bond as he took another long swipe with his tongue. “*And it’s been so damn long.*” He reached his tongue as far inside of Mari as he could before circling her clit. He would never get enough of her taste.

Bear spread her pussy with his fingers. He inserted one finger, moved it around coating her with her wetness before quickly moving

two fingers into her. Bear continued with two fingers and sucked her clit into his mouth. Mari stiffened and screamed, her orgasm drenching his fingers with her sweetness.

“*God, I’ve missed you, Mari,*” Bear whispered as he nibbled on her nipple through her shirt.

“I missed you, too.”

Bear stood and pulled Mari up. As she began to sit up and push her skirt down he stopped her with a hand on her thigh. “Uh, you might want to wait a minute before you do that, Mari. Cole’s on his way in and he’s gonna be mighty worked up by the time he gets here.”

“Well, hell, I might as well get ready for him then.” Mari stood up as Bear moved across the room and quickly pulled her tank top over her head and threw it across the room. Next came her skirt, landing on the floor by the window.

She had just sat back down on the desk when the office door flew open, banging against the wall. In the doorway stood six foot three inches of steel hard body. Cole’s hands were clenched in fists, hanging loosely at his sides. His chest was moving heavily up and down with each harsh breath he took.

Cole didn’t even look at Bear as he pulled his shirt over his head and dropped it to the floor. He had eyes only for Mari. His eyes devoured her as his jeans and boots joined his shirt on the floor.

Mari felt like a deer being stalked by a hunter as Cole began walking across the room toward her. She jumped off the desk and began backing away from him. Instinctively Mari knew that Cole wouldn’t ever hurt her but he looked so fierce, as if he were going to eat her alive.

She turned to run but strong hands caught her from behind and wrapped around her, pulling her back against Cole’s hard muscled chest. His hard cock pressed against her back.

“Don’t run from me, baby, don’t ever run from me,” he growled into her ear, his voice so low Mari felt it rumble down her back and straight into her quivering clit.

Mari looked over at Bear for assistance only to find him stripping off his own clothes and dropping them to the floor before locking the office door and coming to stand in front of her. It was clear to Mari by the look in his eyes that they were going to show her no mercy this time.

She whimpered as she realized that this time, when they took her, they were going to hold nothing back. Their control was already shattered. It was going to be raw, primitive, and totally erotic. Mari couldn’t wait.

Mari groaned as Bear’s hand slid down her stomach, his fingers stroking her enlarged clit and tracing the wetness of her slit. Cole’s fingers encircled her nipples before grabbing her entire breasts, gently squeezing the large globes, then headed back to pull on her swollen nipples.

Bear leaned down to tug on the nipple Cole offered up to him, first one, then the other, before kneeling on the floor between Mari’s legs. “You’re so beautiful here, Mari, all pink and luscious.”

He leaned in, his tongue stroking against the seam of her tender lips. His lips grazed her clit before gently tugging on it, causing Mari to cry out. Her legs collapsed beneath her. Only Cole’s arms holding her up kept her from hitting the floor.

“Come for us, baby,” Cole growled into Mari’s ear.

Mari was on fire, burning with hunger, wanting to be taken by the two men she loved. Near painful pleasure attacked her senses as Bear and Cole touched her, tasted her, consumed her resistance in flaming arousal.

They showed no mercy as one orgasm rocked through her burning flesh after another, until Mari didn’t know where one ended and another began. And still they weren’t done with her.

Mari shifted between the two men, imploring them for release, for them to take her, "Please, I need you. I need to feel you in me," she begged. Mari wasn't sure which one of them she was begging for, or if it was both. She just knew she needed to feel them, to feel their hard cocks filling her until she felt nothing else.

Bear and Cole were nothing if not obliging. Cole lifted Mari up in Bear's arms. Bear grabbed her legs and wrapped them around his waist. He groaned as he immediately plunged into Mari's wet pussy.

Cole opened a drawer and pulled out a small bottle of lube before squeezing a small amount into his hand. He worked it over his throbbing cock before spreading some on the crease of Mari's ass, paying special attention to the small puckered bud in between.

He placed his cock at her entrance and began to push inside, each thrust of Bear's cock in Mari's pussy pushing him in deeper until he was in to the root. "God, Mari, you're so perfect, so tight."

Cole wrapped his arms around Mari and pulled her back to lean against him as he began thrusting into Mari. Soon Bear and Cole worked out a rhythm that had them both filling Mari at the same time.

Bear and Cole both thrust in her only to retreat and thrust again. Cole was nibbling on her neck as Bear alternated between caressing her breasts and tweaking her nipples.

Mari was on fire, her mind a haze of sensual pleasure. All she could do was hold on for the ride as they filled her. The intense sensation of both of them filling her was almost more than she could take. Her body went limp with exhaustion as she felt herself cresting on another climax.

"*Now, Bear,*" growled Cole as he increased his tempo, plunging into Mari as hard as he could. He felt Bear swell even more as the top of his cock exploded. He roared his release, drenching Mari in his seed. One more thrust from Bear and he too exploded, yelling Mari's name as shot his seed deep inside of her.

Both men leaned against her limp body pressed between them, as they took long drags of air into their lungs. Finally Cole pulled

himself free from Mari and went to the bathroom to the side of the room to clean up. On his way back he grabbed a damp washcloth to clean Mari up.

Walking back into the room, he found Bear standing there, holding Mari in his arms, her head resting on his shoulder. Bear didn't seem to have any plans on setting her down.

"Bear, you need to put her down so I can clean her up." Cole just shook his head at the hopeless look in Bear's eyes. Okay, maybe he didn't have to put her down. "She's gonna be pissed at us for making her faint again."

Bear nodded his head. Yeah, Mari hated fainting.

Cole pulled Mari's legs apart and gently cleaned her before returning the cloth to the bathroom. Mari didn't even stir.

Back in the office he got dressed then went in search of a blanket to cover Mari. They would have to wake her up to get her redressed and there didn't seem much point since they would just undress her again once they got to the bedroom.

Grabbing a quilt off the back of the couch he walked back into the office and helped Bear cover her up. Bear didn't even seem to remember that he was also naked as he walked out the office door and headed for the bedroom.

Cole chuckled as he grabbed their clothes off the floor and followed them to the bedroom, softly shutting the door behind him. He watched Bear gently lay Mari in the middle of the bed before climbing in and pulling the covers over them both.

He stripped off his own clothes and dropped them all in the laundry hamper before climbing into the bed on the other side of Mari and pulling the covers over himself. He nestled up close to Mari and wrapped an arm around her, watching as Bear gently caressed her face with his fingers.

"She's so precious, Cole, I don't think I could stand it if she left us." Cole winced at the tears he saw in Bear's eyes as he looked at him.

“I know, Bear, I know,” he murmured quietly as to not wake the sleeping beauty before him. “She has no reason to leave us, though,” he tried to reassure Bear, even though part of him was scared as well. “She’s not gonna leave us. Hell, she knows how we feel about her.”

Bear shook his head. “Does she? Sometimes I wonder.”

Chapter 8

A week later, Mari hummed along with the music on the radio as she danced a little jig between the stove and the counter, her butt swaying back and forth to the beat of the music. She felt great and when she was feeling great, she cooked.

She loved to cook anything and everything. Normally she cooked for just herself, but now she had a whole crew of tall, strong, and very hungry men to cook for. Mari was in cooking heaven.

“Well, now, isn’t that one of the prettiest sights I ever did see?”

Mari swung around hearing a voice from the doorway. She was still a little jumpy, considering someone had tried to kill her. Seeing that it was Cole, she smiled and danced her way over to him.

Standing before him she curtsied and reached for him. Cole grabbed Mari in his arms and began dancing her around the kitchen. The differences in their height didn’t seem to bother them. Mari just rested her head on Cole’s chest as he held her tightly and danced her around the room.

Cole swung Mari around and around to the music, bending her over his arm at the end of the tune in a dip so deep Mari’s loose hair brushed against the floor. As he swung her back into his arms Mari laughed for the sheer joy of it, grabbing Cole by his shirt and kissing him, putting all of her love and joy into one sweet kiss.

It rocked Cole to his very toes. He didn’t know someone could put so much emotion into a kiss. But Mari did it. Her lips pressed against his, her tongue caressed the inside of his mouth, and it was the most erotic thing he had ever felt. And at the same time, the most innocent.

Mari wasn't trying to turn Cole on. She was conveying all of her feelings of love for him, the joy of being with him, through one little kiss. And Cole was hearing everything she had to say. "*Ah, baby, you are so precious to me,*" he whispered telepathically. "*You make everything right in the world.*"

"Cole," Mari murmured softly.

"*I don't know what I'd do if anything ever happened to you.*" Cole still felt the terror he had gone through when Mari had been poisoned. She had come so close to dying. He had come so close to losing her. It wasn't something he ever wanted to experience again.

"Promise me you'll never leave me, Mari," he begged out loud, burying his face in her sweet smelling hair, his arms wrapping around her in a tight embrace. "Promise me!"

Mari wrapped her arms around Cole, feeling him tremble with emotion in her arms. She laid a light kiss on his chest, not being able to reach his lips on her own. "Cole," she began, wanting to reassure him, "I don't want to leave you, ever." Mari tried to pull Cole's head out of her shoulder but he just held onto her tighter. "Cole, honey, look at me."

"No."

"No?" Mari laughed. "Why not?"

Cole just shook his head. He was afraid. He was supposed to be a big, strong, alpha male warrior and he was afraid of a little woman that didn't even reach his chin. But if he looked at Mari, actually looked her in the eyes, he wouldn't be able to tell himself that she wasn't lying, that she wasn't telling him what she thought he wanted to hear.

"Please, Cole, look at me," Mari asked as she grabbed his hair and pulled, trying to bring his head up so she could look at him.

Finally, reluctantly, Cole lifted his head. He still avoided her eyes with his, looking at her hair, her lips, anything but her eyes.

Mari started getting annoyed as he avoided her. “Let’s go sit down or something. I’m getting tired of breaking my neck trying to look up at you.”

Cole’s answer was to pick Mari up in his arms, one arm braced under her butt, the other wrapped around her.

“Okay, this works too,” she laughed as she wrapped her arm around his neck, her hand grabbing his hair. With her other hand she captured his chin, forcing him to look at her.

“Cole, look at me.”

Cole still refused to raise his eyes to hers. Mari could feel his body trembling.

“*Cole*,” she tried again, tenderly through their bond, “*please look at me.*”

Cole slowly raised his eyelashes, baring eyes filled with fear and apprehension, afraid he was going to be rejected.

“Honey, I have no plans to leave you. Do you believe that?”

“I guess.”

“Then believe this, I love you.” She marveled at the almost instantaneous change in Cole. His eyes showed disbelief for a brief second before happiness unlike anything Mari had ever seen began to fill his face.

“Do you mean that, Mari? Really mean it?”

“I love you, Cole, with everything in me. I want the world with you,” she spoke very softly as she brushed her lips tenderly across his. “I’ll never leave you. I promise.”

“And me?” asked a quiet voice behind them. They both turned to see Bear standing in the doorway. He had an uncertain look on his face.

Mari reached out her hand to him. Bear walked slowly across the floor, taking Mari’s hand and letting her draw him into the circle of her arms. “My understanding from the very beginning was that you two were a package deal, take one and you have to take the other.” She looked from man to the other. “Am I right?”

Cole and Bear both hesitantly nodded their heads.

“Well, I have one little problem with that. I don’t want to *have* to take one if I take the other.” Mari saw Bear’s face drop, tears forming at the corners of his eyes. Cole’s eyes were filled with pain and anger.

Bear started to step back, obviously thinking that Mari was rejecting him in favor of Cole, but Mari stopped him with her next words. “I want both of you because I love you both.” She leaned in to kiss Cole, then turned to kiss Bear.

“I want you both because of who you are, not because I have to take Bear if I want you, Cole,” Mari whispered against Cole’s lips. “Or you Benjamin,” she said firmly. “I don’t want to have to have Cole in my life in order to have you in my life.”

Mari ran her hand down Bear’s whiskered face, wiping the tears from his eyes. A look of hope was beginning to form in his smoky gray eyes. “I don’t want one of you without the other one but I don’t want either of you if I have to take the other one. I want you only if you want me, individually, but together.” Mari looked between them. “Do you understand what I am saying?”

Cole cleared his tear-clogged throat. “I think so. You love us both but you don’t want to have either of us if we don’t love you in the same way, if we don’t want you alone, for ourselves, but also together.” He looked down at Mari, letting the tears fall down his face, unashamed that a big strong Navy Seal was letting his feelings show so clearly. “Am I right?”

Mari enthusiastically nodded her head, the smile shining on her face. “I love you both so much and I want you both, together forever. I know you’re twins and have a special bond but to me, you’re both so different.”

She reached over to gently caress Cole’s cheek, running her hand down his face before leaning in for a quick kiss. “Cole, you’re so powerful, so protective. I know when I’m with you that nothing will ever hurt me. Every night when I go to sleep in your arms I know that nothing and no one can harm me. And you’re such a dominant man,

and as much as we seem to butt heads, you never use your strength against me, no matter how angry I make you.”

She turned to Bear, leaning in to give him a small kiss also. “And you, Bear, you’re so huge, so strong. I’ve never seen a man as big as you.”

Bear gave her a slightly embarrassed look.

“But you’re so very sweet. I don’t think people see that in you. They just see your size and automatically assume you’re some big bad ass. You’re not. You like to plant flowers and cuddle. You’re one of the sweetest, kindest men I have ever met and I’m glad that you’re mine.”

Mari pulled them both closer, their three heads pressed together. “I love you both and want you both. I do admit that I love the fact that I can love Cole and you will feel it, Bear. Or that Cole can feel me love you. That’s a very powerful feeling.” She smiled in remembrance of their passion filled days and nights.

“So, I hope you were serious when you both said you wanted me forever,” she said, the question clear in her eyes.

Cole reached up to fold a loose strand of hair behind her ear. His voice, usually sensual and arousing, was tender and gentle with his overwhelming feelings. “Every word,” he whispered, “Both of us, Mari, always.”

Bear nodded his head, too emotional to speak aloud. He looked to Cole for assistance, then back at Mari. “*We love you, Mari, both of us. We want you with us forever, we want you to marry us.*”

Mari closed her eyes as joy filled her heart. They were talking about forever. They both wanted her forever. “But how—” Mari opened her eyes as she cleared her throat. “How can we do that? I can’t marry both of you. That’s against the law.” She looked at Cole, then Bear, despair in her eyes. “But I don’t want to choose between you. I can’t,” she cried.

Cole and Bear passed a knowing smile between them. "When we decided we wanted you with us forever, we took care of that little problem."

Mari passed a confused look between them. "How?"

"Before we answer that we need to know one thing. If you could, would you marry us, Mari?" Cole asked, holding his breath.

"Both of us, Mari? Would you be our wife? Have our babies? Be with us forever? Both of us?" Bear asked quietly. He knew he was asking a lot from Mari, but like Cole had said in the beginning, it was all or nothing.

"Yes," Mari replied without hesitation. She would gladly marry both of them, spend the rest of her life loving them, if given the chance. Since Mari knew she was already pregnant, that part of their request had already been fulfilled. She just needed to tell them.

Cole and Bear both hugged Mari between them, their arms holding her tight, their lips caressing each cheek. Bear stepped back and followed Cole as he walked into the living room, sitting on the couch, holding out his arms to Mari as Cole lowered her into them. Cole knelt on the floor next them. He grabbed Mari's hands in his and took a deep breath before looking at Mari.

Mari could see the seriousness in his face. Bear's too. She was frightened by it. What did they have to tell her that was so important that they would look as they did? Did they not want to marry her?

Bear kissed the top of Mari's head before starting the conversation. "Mari, what we're about to tell you is top secret. The only reason we're telling you is because you agreed to marry us, and as our wife, you have a right to know what you're getting into."

"Do you remember when we first met," Cole began, "when we rescued you from Yuri?"

Mari nodded, still feeling apprehensive but wondering what that had to do with marriage.

"Have you ever wondered what we were doing there?"

Mari thought about it then shook her head. “No, I just assumed you were soldiers on some sort of rescue mission. You are soldiers, right? Isn’t that what you said?”

“Yes, but we’re not exactly normal soldiers,” Cole said.

“Not normal soldiers? What are you then?”

Cole hesitated briefly before continuing. What he was about to tell Mari was top secret. Only a few people in the world knew. “We work for the president as a special ops team called the Alpha Squad.”

Mari looked at Cole for several moments, then Bear. “And that means what?”

“Before I get into that I need to tell you how we got that way,” Cole said, almost hesitantly.

“Okay.”

“Bear and I have been in the service for a long time, since we were eighteen years old. We were always very good at what we did, mostly because of our telepathy. A few years ago we were approached by some brass wanting us to join a special program, a government program for soldiers with exceptional abilities, like Bear and I have. With me so far?”

When Mari nodded he continued. “During the course of this program we underwent certain...special training.”

“What type of training?” Mari asked, suddenly fearing for her unborn child.

“I don’t know the exact terminology. Doc could explain it more to you, he was one of the doctors that worked with us. But suffice to say it changed us. We became faster, strong, and unfortunately, more aggressive. We became a problem for our handlers.”

“Handlers?” she asked in confusion. “What the hell is a handler?”

“Hold on, baby. He’s gonna get to that,” Bear said as he patted her thigh.

“Our handlers were the scientists and people in charge of the program. They decided that we needed to be neutralized or at the very least, locked up for the rest of our lives.”

Mari couldn't contain the cry of dismay that escaped her mouth.

"It's okay, Doc saved us. He didn't think it was right for them to use us then lock us up when their experiments didn't go the way they wanted. So he helped us escape."

Mari had always liked Doc, but now he meant the world to her. He had saved the two men she loved and gave them their freedom. In the back of her mind was the thought that she would do everything she could to help Doc get the man he loved for giving her the men she loved.

"So, then, how did you become special ops?"

"I'm getting to that." Cole smiled. "Do you remember a few years ago when the president's daughter was kidnapped? Well, Doc got a message to someone close to the president, who then got that message to the president. In essence, we would have her back within a few hours, safe and sound, if the president would give Doc one hour of his time to talk to him about a team of soldiers he knew."

"And he agreed?"

"Wouldn't you if it were your daughter?"

Mari knew she would. She would do anything if her child was kidnapped and someone said they could get her back safe and sound. "Yeah, okay, so you guys went in and saved her. Then Doc talked to the president. Then what?"

"Well, first off, the president was pissed."

"To say the least," Bear interjected, chuckling.

"The president was pissed," Cole continued, "that someone in his army would conduct such an experiment without his knowledge. But he also realized that he had a useful tool on his hands."

"So," Bear began again, "he created a special branch of service through executive order, and made us into a special ops team. We are still part of the military with all the access to the military that any other soldier would have except that we only answer to the president."

"Okay, so you go on special missions for the president but you don't answer to a commander, or general, or whatever? Right?"

“True, in a sense. Cole is our commander,” Bear said.

“Cole?”

“Yeah, we all worked together for many years as a seal team before we became special ops. Cole has always been our commander. It just made sense to keep him as our commander.”

“Do you have any questions so far?” Cole asked.

“Well, if you are special ops, what’s with the ranch? I mean, it is a working ranch, isn’t it?”

“Oh sure, it’s a regular ranch, with cows and horses and everything. And we work hard to make it a success. But we have a foreman that keeps the place running for us. We never know when we might be called away.”

“Is that why I didn’t meet the rest of the team for so long? Were they on a mission?”

“Yeah, but it was a small mission that didn’t need us. There will be times when we do get called away, though, on the spur of the moment, like we said. Can you deal with that?”

Mari squeezed their big hands in her little ones. “I just don’t want anything to happen to you. I would die if something happened to you, either of you.”

“We’re really good at what we do, baby, and we’ve been doing this a long time,” Cole said, trying to reassure Mari. “And don’t forget, we have been specially trained. We are faster and stronger. And each one of us on the team has something extra special that we bring to the team.”

“Like what?”

“Well, we’ll talk about that later,” Cole said. “What’s important is that you know we have something extra special about us that makes us very good at our job. And we don’t ever take chances.”

“Okay, so that still doesn’t explain why you live on a ranch out in the middle on nowhere,” Mari said.

“Well, remember that aggression thing I mentioned?” Cole asked. “Sometimes it can be a problem, so we stay out here during our

downtime, away from potential problems. It's easier on us and safer for others."

"Are you all overly aggressive?" Mari asked skeptically.

"Yeah, all of us. Why?" Cole answered.

"Well, except for that stupid stunt with Sam, I've never seen any of you be overly aggressive. You all seem to get along so well."

Cole shook his head. "We are, all of us, but for some reason we aren't with each other. Doc doesn't know if it's because we all worked together before the program, or if it's because we all went through the experiments together, or just because we are friends. For whatever reason, we don't feel aggression between us."

"Really?" Mari stated glaring at Bear, remembering his near strangling of Sam.

Bear flushed, "I don't know what to tell you, Mari. I've never been aggressive with anyone on my team before. I just couldn't stand to see his hands on you. I just lost it."

Mari patted his hand. "Will that be a problem in the future?"

"Not at all," he laughed turning slightly red in the face, "as long as Sam keeps his hands off of you."

Mari and Cole laughed as Bear turned even redder. Mari laid her head on Bear's chest. This was a lot to ingest. Cole and Bear and the entire squad were genetically enhanced super soldiers that worked directly for the president as a special ops team.

Cole and Bear just watched Mari, giving her time to come to grips with everything they had told her. They hoped that it wouldn't be more than she could handle. Mari was a strong woman, but was she this strong?

"Mari, there's something else," Cole began, hesitating to break into Mari's thoughts but needing to tell her everything.

Mari lifted her head from Bear's chest and looked at Cole. "More?"

"Because of our unique relationship with the president, I got him to sign a special order, just for us." Cole kissed the tops of both of

Mari's hands before handing one over to Bear to hold. "If you agree, this order will allow us to be married, all of us."

"I don't understand."

"You would be our wife, both of ours, legally," Bear added.

"You mean I can marry both of you?" she asked skeptically.

"Yep, you'll be married to both of us, legally."

"He can do that? Make it so I can marry you both? Is that legal?"

"He's the president but he still has to follow our laws like anyone else. However, in this case, he does have that power. Besides, it would be signed by the president—very hard to change."

Mari felt joy begin to grow in her heart for the first time since they sat her down to talk to her. Maybe, just maybe, all of her dreams could come true.

"So, will you marry us, Mari? Will you be our wife?" Cole asked, his heart in his eyes for Mari to see, to accept or crush.

Not to be left out, Bear turned Mari's face up to his. "We love you, Mari. We want to be with you always, raise a family with you, grow old with you, both of us."

Mari looked at Bear for several moments before glancing over at Cole. They both waited, wanting her to hurry and make a decision but knowing she needed time. "This is what you both want, to have me for your wife? Both of you?"

Mari laughed at how exuberantly they both nodded their heads. Okay, apparently they did. "Then yes, I want very much to marry both of you." She jumped at the shouts of joy coming from both Cole and Bear as they threw their arms around her and began raining kisses all over her.

"Oh, God, we love you so much. We'll make you happy, we promise," Bear cried as he buried his face in Mari's hair.

Mari suddenly sat up. "I have to call my sister. She'll need to arrange for a sub to cover for her while she comes down for the wedding. Speaking of which," she said as she glanced at both Bear and Cole, "when are we going to have the wedding?"

Bear glanced cautiously over at Cole. "Um, why don't you let me get a hold of your sister? You just concentrate on making wedding plans."

"Yeah," Cole agreed, "You'll have your hands full making wedding plans. We could have the wedding, say, a month from Saturday? Besides, we want you to have the wedding of your dreams. Anything you want, money is no problem."

"A month from Saturday? That isn't much time to plan a wedding. How about two months from Saturday?" Mari seem to be considering things for several moments. "And, what about you guys? Don't you want to have input on the wedding?"

"Honey, as long as you are there to walk down the aisle, I don't care if we get married in a pigpen wearing gunnysacks."

Mari laughed at the image of them all wearing gunnysacks. "Be careful what you say, my loves." Mari stood up with the intention of tracking down Jax. She had a lot of planning to do. "I still need to talk to my sister, though. I can't get married without her here. She's the only family I have."

Bear seemed to consider his words before he spoke. "Okay, how about this? You work on the wedding plans and we will contact your sister. As soon as we do, we will fly her down so she can help you finish the wedding plans."

"Besides, wouldn't it be easier to explain our relationship to her in person? How's she going to feel about you getting married to two men?" Cole interjected.

"Oh yeah, I forgot about that. It might be better to explain that face to face." Some of the happiness seemed to leave Mari's face at the thought of her sister's reaction to Mari's new relationship. "Do you think she will understand?"

Cole immediately felt guilty for giving Mari doubts. He had wanted to direct the conversation away from Mari's sister, not make her feel bad. "If she loves you, I am sure she will understand."

“Yeah, I guess you are right,” Mari said quietly. “Well, I’m gonna go find Jax and get started planning.”

Cole and Bear watched Mari walk out of the room, her shoulders slightly slumped. Bear waited until Mari had left the room completely before turning to Cole. “We have to find Mari’s sister. She will be very upset if we don’t.”

“I know. She’s never gonna forgive us for keeping this from her. You’ve seen that girl when she’s pissed. As cute as it is, I don’t want her hurt by this.”

Cole ran a hand through his curly hair, dragging it down his face. “Okay, let’s send Nick up to Spokane to see if he can track her down. Meanwhile, let’s keep Jax tracking her. There has to be some sign of this girl somewhere.”

Bear nodded, his face still worried. “Damn, Cole, Mari’s gonna kill us if she finds out we’ve hidden this from her.”

Chapter 9

Three weeks later, Mari walked into the office and grabbed the phone. Punching in her sister's phone number she waited for the phone to ring.

Both Cole and Bear had said that they were trying to contact her but as of yet there had been no word. Mari was getting tired of waiting. She knew Cole and Bear were hiding something from her but she didn't know what.

Mari was afraid that they had already talked to her and Camilla had been offended by their unusual relationship and refused to come. Was that what they were keeping from her? Maybe if she talked to Camilla she could change her mind.

She had tried several times to talk to Cole and Bear about it over the last couple of weeks, but they had both quickly changed the subject, usually to the wedding plans. And it seemed that everyone was trying to keep her away from the phone.

Every time she tried to make a phone call someone had interrupted her or needed her for something. When everyone thought she was taking a nap, Mari waited until they had all left the house before sneaking into the office to get to the phone.

Camilla's phone just rang and rang until the answering machine came on. Mari left a message and hung up. She chewed on her lower lip for several moments before picking up the phone again and dialing Camilla's work number.

When the school secretary answered Mari asked for Camilla.

"I'm sorry, Ms. Johnson is not available at this time. Can I take a message?"

“Yeah, this is Camilla’s sister, Mari. Could you have her call me as soon as you see her?”

“Oh Mari, hello, this is Jeannie.”

“Hey Jeannie, how are you?” Mari asked.

“I’m good, thanks.”

“Look, could you make sure that Camilla gets my message as soon as possible? I haven’t heard from her in a little while and I’m starting to get worried.”

“Oh, I thought you knew,” Jeannie replied.

“Knew what?” Mari could feel her heart start to speed up. She could hear the hesitation in Jeannie’s voice. Something was wrong.

“Camilla took a leave of absence a couple of months ago. I would have thought she told you,” Jeannie replied.

“No, she didn’t tell me, but I’ve been out of town for quite awhile,” Mari said, her mind suddenly filled with chaotic thoughts of something bad happening to her sister.

“Oh, well, have you tried her at home?” Jeannie asked.

“Yeah, no answer.” Mari was getting more worried by the second. “Hey look, I’m sure she’s fine. She probably just needed some time off and couldn’t get a hold of me. I’ll keep trying her at home. But if you see her could you please tell her I called?”

Once Jeannie agreed Mari said her good-byes and hung up. She tried Camilla’s number one more time before hanging up. She stared at the phone for several moments, the worry for Camilla clouded every thought in her head. Where was she? Had something happened to her? Mari felt her heart clench at the thought that Camilla could be in trouble. She had to find Bear and Cole. They could help.

Mari walked out of the office and headed out the front door for the barn. She remembered both Cole and Bear saying that they would be in the barn today working when she had gone to lie down for her nap.

Walking into the barn she started looking around for her guys. She could hear voices coming from the tack room so she headed there. The closer she got the slower her steps became. The conversation

going on in the room started to make sense to her, and it made her heart drop into her stomach.

“Oh hell, of course we can't tell Mari. Don't even say such a thing.”

“I know that!” Cole nearly yelled. “But if we tell her, you know she won't go through with the wedding.”

Mari felt cold all over. What were they talking about?

“What do you think Mari's gonna do when she finds out how we tricked her? And what if she does get pregnant? Then what?”

“I know it's complicated. I just don't know what to do about it,” Cole sighed.

“I know we both agreed that we wanted a baby. But I changed my mind. I don't want one, not like that,” Bear replied.

Mari felt nauseous. They didn't want her. They didn't even want her baby. It was all a trick. She should have known it was too good to be true. Why would strong sexy men like Cole and Bear want her—a frumpy, overweight, bookstore clerk—when they could have anyone they wanted.

Cole's next words felt like nails in Mari's coffin. She was sure her heart had stopped beating.

“Cole, you know this isn't exactly legal.”

“But she doesn't need to know that,” Cole replied. Mari could hear a bit of satisfaction in his voice. “Look, all we have to do is keep this up until after the wedding. Once that happens, the rest will just fall into place.”

“You know it's not legal, Cole. None of this is legal. How do you think Mari will feel when she finds out? She'll hate us.”

“Then we just better hope she never finds out.”

Mari could hear them walking toward the door so she quickly hid in one of the empty stalls. Her heart was breaking. She knew eventually this would all come to an end and she knew it was going to hurt. She just hadn't thought it would hurt quite so much. Mari didn't know if she would ever recover.

She held a hand over her mouth to keep from crying out loud as she watched Cole and Bear walk out of the barn. Nothing could stop the tears from falling down her face.

Once they had both shut the barn door behind them Mari curled into a ball and let her sobs take her. She cried for all the dreams she had had for them that had been crushed by their words. She knew it had been foolish to dream that they could all be together. But she had wanted it so much that she had looked the other way. It was her own fault for believing everything they had dished out to her.

Mari laid curled in the empty stall for a long time before she sat up and wiped the tears from her eyes. Okay, time to pull her self together. She had to figure out what to do from here. Staying on the ranch was not an option. She wouldn't stay where she wasn't wanted, no matter how much she loved Cole and Bear.

She had a baby to think of. Mari never thought she would be a single mother but now that was a very real possibility. Neither Cole nor Bear seemed to want a baby, at least not with her. Maybe that had been their plan all along, get her pregnant and then take the baby from her when she was no longer needed. Mari was so confused.

She brushed bits of straw off her shirt as she stood up. She had to appear calm and normal in order to get back into the house and gather some things before she could leave. A coat would be a good start.

Mari wiped as much of the tears from her face and eyes as she could before walking back to the house. Plastering a small smile on her face she opened the front door and walked in. She headed straight to the bedroom.

She could hear the guys laughing in the dining room. She wondered if they were laughing at her. Probably. And how many of them were in on Bear and Cole's little joke? All of them? As close as they all were, Mari didn't see how they couldn't be. Mari almost hated them all in that moment.

Mari had just reached the bedroom door when Cole's voice stopped her. "Hey, baby, where have you been?"

She gripped the doorframe to hold herself up as she replied without turning around. "I was out walking. I thought I'd take a little nap."

"Are you okay?" Cole asked from right behind her. Mari could feel his breath on her neck as his hands circled her waist.

Mari closed her eyes as she leaned her head back into Cole's chest. "Yeah, I'm fine. I'm just a little tired."

"Want some company?" Cole asked as he nuzzled Mari's neck. A shudder ran through Mari's body. No matter what had happened she still loved him, she still wanted him. She wanted desperately to say yes but she couldn't. She knew she couldn't. Even one more time in Cole's arms and she knew she wouldn't have the strength to leave.

"No, I just need to lie down for awhile," she whispered quietly as she pulled away from Cole and walked into the bedroom.

"Oh, okay. Well, if you need anything just let me know."

Cole watched Mari as she got undressed and crawled into bed to sleep. Something was wrong with her but he had no idea what. Maybe she was upset that he hadn't been able bring Camilla to the ranch yet.

He knew the wedding plans were coming along okay. Mari had been planning and ordering stuff online like it was going out of style. But obviously Mari was upset about something. He knew something was wrong. He just couldn't put his finger on it.

Cole watched Mari for a few more moments before shutting the door to let her sleep. He'd figure out later what was wrong after Mari had taken a nap. Maybe he'd go talk to Bear about it.

Mari held her breath waiting for Cole to shut the door. It seemed to take forever. She waited for what seemed like hours after he did, waiting to be sure he wouldn't come back in.

Finally, when she was sure that she had waited a sufficient amount of time, she crawled out of bed and got redressed. Grabbing a jacket and a few changes of clothes, she put on her shoes and quietly walked out the French doors and off the porch, heading for the front gate. She had a long walk ahead of her to reach town.

* * * *

Cole leaned his head into the infirmary looking for Doc. He was sitting at his desk going over paperwork.

“Hey Doc, Mari just went to lie down to take a nap. She doesn’t look so hot. Could you go take a look at her? I think she may have a bit of that flu bug again.”

Doc looked up at Cole. “Sure. Just let me finish up here and I’ll go take a look at her.”

“Thanks, man.” Cole started toward the door when Doc stopped him.

“Hey, Cole?”

“Yeah?” he asked as he stuck his head back in the room.

“Has Mari talked to you yet?”

“About what?” he asked curiously.

“Nothing really,” Doc hedged, “just something we were discussing. I told her to talk to you about it.”

“Is she okay?” Cole asked, concern for Mari’s health filling him.

“Oh yeah, she’s fine. It was nothing really. Don’t worry about it.”

“Are you sure?” Cole was worried that Mari might not be recovered from her illness as she had said. Maybe she really was sick.

“No, it’s nothing, really.” Doc did not want to spoil Mari’s surprise. It was up to her to tell the guys they were going to be fathers. He had told Mari just a few days ago that the tests had all come back okay. What he hadn’t told her was that there was more. He was saving that little bit of information as a surprise for all of them on their wedding day.

He knew he should have told her. It was wrong to keep this information from any of them. But he also knew they would all be so thrilled with his news that he wanted to give it to all of them at the same time. The wedding seemed like the perfect opportunity.

Doc held his breath as he watched Cole. He was really hoping Cole wouldn't ask him for more. In the end, he would never be able to keep anything from him. So, if Cole asked him outright for the truth, he would have to tell him everything. Doc just hoped he wouldn't ask.

Doc didn't start breathing again until Cole nodded and left the room. Okay, dodged that bullet. Now he just needed to go check on Mari and make sure she was okay. Hopefully she was just tired. It took a lot of energy to be pregnant.

Cole tracked Bear down to the office. He was on the phone when he walked in so Cole sat in one of the black leather chairs in front of the desk and waited for Bear to finish his conversation.

Bear smiled at Cole and held up a finger to let Cole know he would be just a moment. "Great news!" Bear said as he hung up the phone. "Nick has Camilla and he's bringing her to the ranch in the morning. He said he'd explain what she's been up to and where's she's been when he got here but from what he did tell me, we're not going to like it. I think someone's after her."

Cole let out a long sigh, "Oh man, that's great. I mean, the part about Nick finding Camilla. Not the bad part," Cole replied, feeling his face heat up.

"Yeah," Bear said with a grin, "I can't wait to tell Mari. She's gonna be so happy."

Cole leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees, his hands clasped together. "Speaking of Mari, do you know if she's upset about anything? Has she mentioned any problems to you? Anything wrong with the wedding plans?"

"No, why?"

Cole sat back as he shook his head. "It's nothing I can really put my finger on, but she seems upset about something."

"Where is she?" Bear asked.

"She went to lie down and take a nap."

"But I thought she just took a nap," Bear replied.

“She did. I asked Doc to go take a look at her and make sure she’s okay. I’m really starting to get worried about her.”

Bear stood up and started walking around the desk. “I want to go see what Doc says.”

Cole nodded as he stood up to follow Bear out of the room.

Both Cole and Bear walked out of the office and headed toward their bedroom, only to be met by a worried looking Doc.

“I thought you said Mari was taking a nap?” Doc asked.

Cole pushed past Doc into the bedroom. “I did. I watched her lie down myself.”

Bear quickly followed Cole into the bedroom. It was empty. The bed had obviously been slept in but there was no sign of Mari.

“Where is she?” Bear asked, fear for Mari overcoming his calm nature.

Cole quickly checked the bathroom only to come back into the room looking frantic. “Call the guys. All of them,” he growled as he ran to the French doors to check the porch.

Bear ran out of the room flipping open his cell phone as he went.

Running back into the bedroom, Cole ran a shaking hand through his short hair. Where was she? “*Mari? Baby? Where are you?*” Cole asked as he tried to reach Mari mentally. He tried again, and again, when he received no answer, just dead air.

Continuing to call for Mari through their telepathic link, Cole went in search of Bear. He saw Doc running from room to room inside of the house, checking every nook and cranny he could find. Cole joined him, checking every bedroom, bathroom, and closet before heading back to the group of Navy Seals gathering at what had quickly become a command post in the dinning room.

Cole walked over to stand next to Bear, going over a map of the ranch. He could see Sam was gathering together several knapsacks with essential gear that each of them would take with them when they went to look for Mari. Sky and Jake were checking over walkie-talkie sets, making sure each of them worked properly. Caleb and Rune

were checking a stack of weapons and clips of ammo. Jax was on the phone. Everyone was doing their part as he knew they would.

Cole looked up at Doc. "Oh good, Doc, I'd like you to stay here and man the phones. I also want you here in case Mari comes back. Jax will coordinate with the local authorities and cover the town limits. Sky is going to take up the helicopter and search quadrant three."

He took a small breath and then continued. "Caleb and Rune, you take quadrant four. Sam, you take the road from the ranch into town. Check any areas that might look like a pull off point. Jake, you will have quadrant two. Bear and I will cover quadrant one. Does everyone know what to do?"

Everyone surrounding the table nodded their heads as they started loading up their equipment. Everyone started to head out but Doc stopped them. He knew he had to give them all of the information before they left.

"There is one more thing you need to know before you leave." Everyone turned to look at a very nervous looking Doc. Taking a deep breath, he spilled the beans. "Mari's pregnant." There was dead silence in the room as everyone stared at him, jaws dropped open.

"Pregnant?" Cole roared. "She's pregnant and you didn't tell us? What kind of doctor are you? Don't you think we had a right to know? I thought you were our friend!"

Doc winced at Cole's words. He knew Cole would be mad, but this mad? "Look Cole," Doc said when Cole finally wound down. "Mari wanted to surprise you. Besides, she's my patient, not you. I had to follow her wishes in this. And she wanted to tell you herself."

"How long has she known?" Bear asked quietly. He had been so quiet through Cole's tirade that Doc had all but forgotten he was there.

"Since she was poisoned. I found out when I was doing her toxicology tests."

"So, she's what? Three months along?" Bear asked.

Doc nodded. "Yeah, about that."

"And she's known all this time?" Bear asked, astonishment in his voice and written all over his face. "And she hasn't said anything to us? Why?"

Doc just shook his head. "I don't know, Bear. At first she was worried that something might be wrong because of the poisoning. I agreed to keep quiet until I could do some more tests and make sure nothing was wrong. She was cleared a few days ago."

"What? Did she think we wouldn't want the baby if something was wrong?" Cole asked, hurt to even have to say the words.

"Oh no," Doc tried to reassure Cole, "I wondered the same thing but Mari assured me that you two would love the baby no matter what. I think she just needed to know in her own mind before she told you. She wanted it to be a happy occasion."

Cole and Bear nodded their heads as they tried to keep their composure. Bear could feel the tears gathering in his eyes as he thought of his love out there in the cold, pregnant. He was terrified that something would happen to her or the baby before they had a chance to tell her how happy they were about the baby.

"We'll find her, Bear, I promise. And then we'll make sure she never leaves again," Cole promised.

"What if something happens to her before we can find her? I don't think I can live without her, Cole."

"I know, bro, me either. But we'll find her, and our baby."

"I haven't been able to reach her, Cole. Have you?" Bear asked.

Cole shook his head. *"No, but maybe she's too far away to talk with us. We don't know how far this thing goes with her. She could be miles from here by now, Bear. We'll just have to keep trying to contact her until we find her."*

"Come on, guys, let's go find your Mari," said Sam as he walked toward the door. The entire room seemed to take a deep breath before heading for the door.

Doc watched them leave, wishing with all his might that they would find Mari safe and sound. He didn't know if Bear and Cole would survive losing Mari. He knew that she was their heart, the very air that they breathed.

He looked up at the ceiling. *“God, please, if you have never heard me before, listen to me now. You make sure that girl stays safe. Cole and Bear are good men and they need Mari more than anyone has needed her before. Don't let anything happen to her. Please!”*

Chapter 10

Cole turned the water off and looked at himself in the bathroom mirror. He looked like crap. He could see gray hair at the edges of his temple. His face was tired and thinner than it had been before Mari had disappeared. He had lost weight, several pounds if he guessed correctly.

Bear wasn't looking too much better. He had lost more weight than Cole had. The stress from trying to find Mari was exhausting on everyone. Cole just couldn't believe she had been missing for nearly five months. It all seemed like a horrible nightmare. How could a woman like Mari simply disappear for five whole months?

Cole had been sure that they would find Mari walking down the road on the way to town after it was determined that she was no longer at the ranch. He and Bear had even walked the entire fifteen miles to town and back several times looking for any sign of her. They had searched everywhere that they could think of, but there had been no sign of her anywhere.

Cole had been frightened when Mari disappeared but as time went by, his fear had grown into outright terror. All sorts of grisly scenarios had run through his head, from Mari being dragged off by wild animals to being kidnapped by a mountain man. Cole just didn't know what had happened to her. She had simply disappeared.

Cole dried off his hands and walked out of the bathroom and into the living room. Walking to the kitchen he grabbed a mug and poured himself a cup of coffee. He could see Doc sitting at the dining table talking to Camilla.

Camilla had been a surprise. When Nick had brought her to the ranch Cole had been surprised to see that she looked nothing like Mari. It was hard to tell that they were even sisters. Camilla was tall and slender with long strawberry blond hair where Mari was short and curvy with long auburn hair.

Having to explain to Camilla that Mari had disappeared was nearly the hardest thing he had ever done. It had been all he could do to keep from crying right along with her. He would have stepped up and hugged her if Nick hadn't.

Since that time he had begun to suspect that there was something between the two of them but he wasn't positive. They seemed to spend as much time fighting as they did going off together.

The biggest surprise about Camilla was that she was pregnant. She was due in a few weeks. Nick didn't seem to mind that she was pregnant but he had gone totally ballistic when the father of the baby, Heath, a close friend of Camilla's, had shown up at the ranch. He was still here, which just added to the tension around the ranch.

Personally, Cole liked Heath. He seemed like a good man, but he seemed to bring out a lot of aggression in both Nick. Then there was the animosity that seemed to have grown between several of his team members. Everyone seemed to be fighting more with everyone else. He didn't quite know what to do about it. His concern was more on finding Mari than figuring them all out. And he wouldn't stop searching until he found her.

Cole sat down at the table across from Doc and Camilla. He took a long sip of his coffee before acknowledging their greeting.

"Hey, Cole, any news?" Doc asked.

Cole shook his head. "No, nothing today. Jax thinks she might have something but she won't tell me until she has more information. Guess she doesn't want to give me another false lead."

"Yeah, it's hard for her, Cole. She's one of the best in the world at what she does and she's hit nothing but stone walls. It's not easy for

her to admit that she doesn't have a clue as to where Mari went," Doc said.

"I wish she wouldn't feel bad. It's not her fault. I no longer believe that Mari just disappeared. I think someone took her," Cole replied as he wrapped his hands around his coffee cup.

"You think someone kidnapped her?" Camilla exclaimed.

"I'm sorry Camilla. I didn't want to tell you like this, but yeah, I do. Mari is a bookworm. She's smart, I'll give her that, but she does not have the skills to disappear like this. Someone had to have taken her."

"Do you know who it was?" Doc asked as he patted Camilla's hand.

"No, I haven't got a clue. I don't think it was anyone that Mari knows. I mean come on, who would she know that would do something like this." He shook his head again. "No, it had to have been someone connected with me. And that opens a whole new can of worms."

"How is it that we all live on a working ranch but I always find everyone sitting at the dining room?"

Cole turned his head to see Jake walking into the dining room. "We're soldiers, not ranchers. We pay people to take care of that stuff," Cole replied sarcastically.

"Hmmm, that's probably a good thing considering that not a single one of us knows our ass from a hay bale," Bear quietly added as he walked into the room and sat down with his own cup of coffee.

"Hey, man, I need your advice on something. I need to talk to you about Heath," Jake said to Cole as he sat down across from him and Bear and began explaining his problem.

"Hey, Bear," Cole asked a few minutes later as he watched Jake run out of the room, "Is it me or does it seem like our little family is getting bigger and bigger every time we turn around?"

"It isn't just you, Cole," Bear replied.

"Our little family is growing, Cole," Doc added.

“Yeah, Mari won’t know it when she comes home,” Bear laughed as he replied, turning to look outside when he heard a car pull to a stop in the driveway.

“Someone’s here. Any idea who it is?” Cole asked as he and Bear got to their feet to head outside. Doc and Camilla were right behind them.

“Looks like Sheriff Jones. I wonder what he wants.” Bear replied as he followed Cole outside.

Cole ran for the driveway, hoping against hope that the sheriff wasn’t there to give him bad news. His heart was beating so hard he was sure he was going to have a heart attack as he waited for the sheriff’s car to come to a stop. It was all he could do not to run to the door and rip it open, demanding that the sheriff tell him what he knew.

Bear was practically bouncing next to him so he placed a hand on his shoulder to calm him. “Just calm down, Bear. Wait for him to tell us why he’s here.”

They both watched as the sheriff climbed out of the car and walked toward him. They could see the sheriff’s wife sitting in the backseat. The only reason they knew she was the sheriff’s wife was because she had brought them dinner several times since Mari’s disappearance. The sheriff and his wife, Marge, had nearly become a regular fixture out at the ranch since then.

Both Cole and Bear had been surprised at the friendly response they had gotten from the town folks upon hearing of Mari’s disappearance. They had stepped up and helped search for her with no questions asked. Cole had never really felt like they belonged here until then.

These days they went into town on a regular basis and were greeted by friends wherever they went. Cole and Bear both knew that in a weird sort of way they had Mari to thank for this.

“Cole. Bear.” The sheriff nodded to them.

“Sheriff Jones. To what do we owe this visit?” It was all Cole could do to exchange pleasantries with the man when all he wanted to do was scream at him to tell him why he was there.

“Look, this isn’t going to be easy.”

“Oh my god! Mari! Is she—” Bear moaned.

“No, no! We haven’t found Mari yet. But we do have news.” The sheriff began walking back toward his car. He stopped at the back door of the car and turned to Cole and Bear. The look on his face was so sad that Cole didn’t think he could take it.

“You need to stay calm. Please,” he begged quietly as he turned back to the car and opened the door. The sheriff reached down and lifted something wrapped in a small blue blanket out of the car. He turned and began walking toward Cole and Bear.

“*Cole?*” Bear cried out in Cole’s mind. He was terrified. He held his breath as the sheriff laid the small bundle in Cole’s arms. Bear knew he had stopped breathing when Marge laid a similar bundle in his arms.

He slowly reached down and pulled the edge of the plush blanket back revealing a sleeping little face with long lashes and a button nose. He looked at the little round face in wonder before glancing at Cole. He too was staring down at a similar little face.

“*Cole?*” he asked, totally befuddled. He looked back down at the little baby cradled in his arms before looking at the sheriff. He was shocked, astounded, confused. “What...who—” His mind couldn’t form a complete thought.

“These two,” began Marge, “were left on our doorstep sometime this morning, along with a note telling us to bring them to you. That you’d understand.”

Cole took the notes that Marge handed him and unfolded them. His hands shook as he began to read the first one addressed to the sheriff and his wife.

To Sheriff Jones:

*These are the children of Coleman and Benjamin Daniels.
Please see that they get them.*

The second note had Cole raging with the desire for revenge.

To Coleman and Benjamin Daniels:

As a show of my generosity, I am giving you the lives of your sons.

But know this, you took something that I loved.

Now, I'm returning the favor.

Cole crushed the note in his hands as the tears fell down his face. He glanced down at the tiny baby he held in his arms before turning an agonized face to Bear. "They're ours, Benjamin."

Bear looked at the baby then back at Cole, confusion and a bit of apprehension in his eyes. "Ours?" he asked hesitantly.

Cole could hear Camilla cry out behind him as he continued. "These are our sons. Ours and Mari's."

Bear pulled the blanket back revealing the little boy to his gaze. He was perfect. He had all of his fingers and all of his toes. But he was so small, like a little porcelain doll. All of his features were so delicate.

Bear almost jumped out of his skin when the little bundle yawned and opened his eyes to gaze up at him. Bear could swear he was looking right at him. "His eyes, Cole," Bear cried as he rubbed his thumb gently over the little baby's cheek. "He has Mari's eyes."

Cole stepped closer to Bear to look down at the baby he held in his arms. It looked just like the one he held in his arms. Twins, Mari had given them twins.

Oh god, Mari. Where was she? Where had she been this entire time? Someone had her the entire time she was gone. And now that the babies were here, he was going to hurt her. Cole couldn't let that happen. He had to do something.

"Jax, take this note and see if you can get anything off of it. Doc, check these little guys over, from head to toe. I want you to make sure

there is absolutely nothing wrong with them. And give their clothing and blankets to Sam. He needs to check them over.”

Cole handed his baby to Camilla and pushed Bear in her direction. “Camilla, you stay with the babies. Don’t let them out of your sight. I’m gonna see what I can find out from the sheriff.”

He watched as they all walked slowly into the house before turning back to the sheriff and his wife. “Tell me everything you can remember.”

* * * *

Mari slowly opened her eyes and looked around the small room she was in. Nothing had changed in the room in the months she had been there. She never saw anyone except the guards. They came and went, brought food and water twice a day. But mostly they stood outside of her door guarding her, or keeping her from escaping. Mari no longer knew which.

They never said a word to her or looked at her wrong. They just did what they came in to do and left. Mari had tried to question them in the beginning but gave up after a few weeks when she received no responses.

She still had no idea who had her or where she was. A part of her had wondered if Cole and Bear had kidnapped her to keep her from running away, so that they could keep her babies. She soon dismissed that idea as absurd. They would never do that. They just weren’t mean like that.

She didn’t even know exactly how long she had been there. Months, she knew. The first couple of weeks had been horrible. She had been terrified. But as time went by and no one really bothered her she had begun to settle down.

A man that said he was a doctor occasionally came to see her as soon as he figured out she was pregnant. His name was Ivan. After a

time Ivan had also become her friend. He had been her only link to the outside world besides the guards.

Two weeks ago Ivan had induced her labor and delivered her babies. He promised that he would see that they were safely delivered to Cole and Bear. That's the only thing that kept Mari together, knowing that her babies were safe with their fathers.

Ever since the babies had been born she knew her time would soon come to an end. Ivan had told her that the babies were the only reason she was still alive. And now they were no longer an issue.

Each time the door opened she wondered if this was the time they were coming to kill her, and each time that they left she wondered if it wouldn't be better if they did. The waiting was almost worse than the knowing.

Mari crawled out of bed, took a quick trip to the bathroom, and then washed her hands and face. There was no point in getting dressed, as she didn't have anything to change into. Walking back into her small windowless room she sat on the side of the bed to wait some more. That's all she seemed to be doing lately, waiting.

After she had began to master her fear of her kidnapping, her thoughts had often run to Cole and Bear. What she wouldn't give to have them again. If she could have done it all over again, she knew she would have stayed, even knowing that they didn't love her the way she loved them. She had spent hours, days, crying over her stupid mistake in leaving them.

If all they wanted from her were her babies, at least she had been able to give them that. There was some satisfaction for Mari in that. She just hoped that one day they would tell her sons about her.

Mari watched quietly from the bed as her door opened. Ah yes, breakfast was here. She watched dispassionately as a guard came in and set her breakfast on a small table. She was a little curious when a second guard followed the first one into the room and laid a box on the end of her bed.

She waited until they left before slowly opening the box. She was surprised to find a short, off the shoulder evening dress and a pair of black high heels in the box. There was a small note on top that said simply, "7:00pm." Guess they wanted a fancy show for her demise.

When the door opened at 6:55pm, Mari was dressed and ready to go. The guard motioned her to follow him down the hall. Mari stepped outside of the room she was in for the first time since she had been brought in several months earlier. They hadn't even brought her out when the twins were born but delivered them right there in the room.

She followed the guard down a long hallway and up a set of stone stairs, then through another set of hallways until the guard stopped in front of a set of heavy wooden doors.

Okay, this was it. Mari took a deep breath as the guard opened the doors and motioned her into the room. Her jaw dropped as she stepped into the room. She jumped and almost squealed when the doors shut and locked behind her.

The room she was in was unbelievable. Centered in the middle of the room was a large bed with a thin netting hanging from the ceiling and covering the bed from top to bottom. There was a roaring fire in a large stone fireplace. She could see a table set with fine china and candles sitting just beyond the doorway to a balcony. Everything was done in very fine taste, almost like a fancy hotel.

"Good evening, my dear. I'm glad you could join me."

"Ivan? What are you doing here?" Mari asked as she rushed across the room to the doctor. "What if they catch you?"

"Oh, it's okay, my dear Mari, they won't catch me."

"Ivan, you have to get out of here. I don't want them to hurt you." She tried pushing him toward the door but he only laughed and grabbed her by the hand to lead her out to the table on the balcony.

"You worry too much, Mari. Come, sit down and have dinner with me. It's delicious, I promise you." He pulled out Mari's chair and waited for her to sit down.

“Ivan, what’s going on here?” Mari was totally confused and starting to feel the fear she had had when she was first taken.

“Dinner, my dear, a romantic dinner for the two of us.” He gestured to her chair. “Now please, sit.”

Mari walked cautiously over to the chair he held and sat down. She stiffened when she felt him brush her neck with his lips. “Ivan, what are you doing?”

“I’ve waited a long time for you, Mari, a very long time.” Ivan walked around the table and sat down across from Mari. “But not to worry, my love,” he said as he flashed her a smile and took one of her trembling hands in his, “Now, we have all the time in the world to be together.”

“Be together? Now? What are you talking about?” Mari asked carefully.

“Well, of course. Now that your unfortunate physical state is over, we have plans to make.”

“Plans?” Mari felt like she was losing her mind. Either that, or Ivan was totally off his rocker. “What kind of plans?”

“For our future, of course.” Ivan said it so matter-of-factly that Mari almost believed him.

“Our future? And just what plans do we need to make for our future?”

“Nothing for you to worry your pretty little head about, my love, I have taken care of everything. Tonight is our night. I’ve arranged for my priest to marry us tomorrow and then it’s on to our honeymoon.”

“Married? Have you lost your mind?” Oops, she probably should not have said that. Ivan did not look pleased.

“Yes, married. You didn’t think we could be together and not be married, did you? The mother of my children will have my name. I will not have an illegitimate child.”

This time Mari couldn’t keep the laughter out of her voice. “A child? What the hell made you think I would have your child?” Mari

quickly stopped laughing when Ivan leaned across the table and slapped Mari across the face.

“No wife of mine will speak to me like that! Stop it, right now!”

Mari looked at Ivan standing there, his eyes glaring at her in anger. She knew she shouldn't, but somehow she couldn't stop herself. Too much had happened in her life over the last year to stop her now.

“I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on earth.” She knew from the glow in Ivan's eyes that she probably should have stopped, but instead found herself standing up and throwing her drink in his face.

“I will never be your wife and I will never have a child by you. Never!” she yelled as she began stepping around the table.

“Mari! You will do exactly what I tell you to do,” Ivan shouted.

“Fuck you!” she yelled as she started picking items up off the table and throwing them at Ivan's head. She knew she was in trouble when she saw blood trickle down his forehead from a bowl breaking on his head.

Ivan reached for Mari and started shaking her. “This is how you treat me? After everything I've done for you?”

“Done for me? What the hell have you done for me?”

“You were supposed to die the night I found you. They killed my brothers and you were going to be their payment. But I didn't kill you, did I? No, I could see the tears you had been crying. I knew that they had been hurting you and I saved you from them. I even let you finish giving birth to those stupid little brats of theirs.”

Mari broke free from Ivan's grasp as he went to hit her again and started backing away from him. He was crazy. She finally realized that Ivan had been playing with her this entire time. He was the one that had kidnapped her. He was the one keeping her prisoner.

“My babies, what did you do with my babies?” she asked as she backed away a few more steps.

“They're gone,” he sneered, “forever!”

“Gone?” Mari cried, her heart breaking into a million pieces.

“Yes. The only babies you will ever have will be mine.” Ivan took a step toward Mari, his hands reaching out for her.

Mari backed away until she backed up against the railing. She glanced over behind her and looked down, way down. They must be three stories up from the hard ground below.

She glanced back at Ivan when she heard him take another step toward her. He was only a couple of steps away from her. “Did you kill my babies?” she asked in an anguished whisper.

Ivan looked right at her and taunted, “Yes!”

Mari heard Ivan yell out as she gave herself a little push backwards and then she felt herself float away into nothing.

Chapter 11

Cole put little Nathaniel down next to his brother Gabriel in their bassinet, giving them each a small kiss on their heads before covering them up and leaving the room, quietly closing the door behind him.

“Hey, they asleep?” Doc asked when he saw Cole leave the bedroom.

“Yeah, just put them down. They should be out for awhile, at least until their next feeding anyway. Never seen two boys eat so much in my life,” he laughed.

“I have,” Camilla laughed, “their fathers.”

“Funny, very funny,” Cole laughed. “You get the next butt change.”

Everyone sitting around the table laughed at the banter between Cole and Camilla. It was good for them to see him laugh again. It had been awhile. It had only been a week since the sheriff had dropped off the babies and everyone could feel a little of their tension lower just being around the adorable twins.

The biggest change was in Cole and Bear. They were in heaven when they were caring for their sons. Anyone looking at them could see the love Cole and Bear had for the two little boys. It was a joy for all to see.

Doc was especially happy about their appearance. Mari had told him that Cole and Bear wouldn't care who the father was, they would love the babies anyway. Looking at the way that they cared for the two infants he knew she had been right. He just wished that she were there to enjoy it with them.

“So, Cole, I have a bit of news for you, if you want to hear it.” He still felt guilty about not telling them Mari was pregnant until she was gone. But there was nothing he could do about that now. He just hoped his news could make up for it in some way.

“Sure, Doc, what’s up?”

“You might be interested in this too, Bear. Have either of you ever heard of Heteropaternal superfecundation?” Doc asked.

“Um, no,” Cole said blankly. “I’m not even sure I can say it.”

Doc chuckled at Cole. “Heteropaternal superfecundation is very rare. In fact there are only a few documented cases in the United States. The very first recorded case was made by Dr. John Archer in 1810. Dr. Archer was also the first doctor to receive a medical degree in the United States.”

“Well, what is it?” Cole asked.

“I’m getting to that. Do you remember when you asked me to check over the boys, from head to toe?”

Cole nodded. “Yeah. Are you saying there’s something wrong with the boys?”

“No, they are both in perfect health, especially for two little boys that aren’t even a month old,” Doc assured him.

“Then what is it?”

“Heteropaternal superfecundation is where a woman, Mari in this case, has sexual relations with two or more men, you and Bear, at short intervals within the same ovulatory period and becomes impregnated by both men.”

“And this means—” Cole asked.

“I did a little testing. You and Bear both had sexual intercourse with Mari during the same time period, correct?”

Both Cole and Bear nodded their heads, a smile starting to form on Cole’s lips as he began to understand where the Doc was going with all of this medical mumbo jumbo.

“Well, then I would say congratulations are in order for both of you. You are both fathers.”

Bear still looked at the Doc in confusion while Cole began laughing so hard he nearly shook the table. Bear just stared at him, not understanding.

“Don’t you get it, Bear? Mari did the impossible. She gave birth to twins, but we are each their fathers,” Cole said as soon as he could catch his breath.

“I know that, Cole, but I still don’t get it.”

“It’s simple, Bear, genetically, one of the twins is my son and one of the twins is your son. But they both have the same mother, right Doc?” Cole asked as he looked over at the doctor.

“Yeah, that about covers it.”

“But does that still make them twins?” Bear asked in confusion.

“Sure it does. They still shared a womb and they both have the same mother. They just have different fathers. Like I said, it’s very rare but it does happen. In these rare cases, the eggs are fertilized at different times with two or more acts of sexual intercourse within one menstrual cycle.”

“Do you know which twin is which?” Bear asked hesitantly.

Doc nodded, “Yeah, I do. Looking at your genetics was part of the process. Do you want to know?”

Bear glanced over at Cole cautiously. “Do you?”

Cole looked down at his hands and thought for several moments. Did he want to know? Would it make a difference in how he felt if he actually knew which of the twins was his? Would he feel any different for the other twin? They had both become so precious to him in such a short amount of time. He couldn’t conceive of giving up either of them.

Looking back to Bear he gave him the only answer he could. “No. I’m happy just knowing they’re ours. I don’t care which one of us is which twin’s biological father.”

Bear let out the breath he had been holding while he watched Cole think about it. “I’m glad. I don’t want to know either. I just want them to be ours. I just wish Mari could be here.”

Cole reached over and squeezed Bear's shoulder, "*I know, Bro, I know. I wish she was here too.*"

Releasing Bear's shoulder, Cole looked at Doc. "Have you found anything else? Anything at all that might lead us to Mari?"

Doc shook his head no. It broke his heart every time Cole asked him that question but he hadn't found anything that could lead them to Mari. He knew everyone was doing their best to find her but it just didn't seem to be enough. They still had very little to go on.

"What do we have so far?" Cole asked, looking around the table at his teammates. "Jax?"

"I've tracked the paper that the note was written on to a paper mill outside of Portland. It could have been purchased at nearly any store in the US. The ink, however, was very expensive. It's only made in one place in the world and has to be special ordered. I did a little creative research and found a list of buyers that cover about 100 people worldwide. I'm in the process of cross referencing those names with all of our past cases."

"Sam? Anything on the baby blankets or their clothes?" Cole asked as he turned to look at Sam.

"Nope, just your garden variety nursery blankets that you can find in almost any store around. Pretty much the same thing with the clothes, too. But I did find some small bits of pollen on the blankets that I am having analyzed. It may give us a region to start looking in."

Cole nodded his head as he took a drink of the coffee Camilla placed in front of him before looking around the table at everyone else. "Anyone else have anything?"

"Well, there is one more thing I noticed when I was doing the exam on the boys," Doc stated. "I can't be positive, but it seems to me that they boys must have been delivered by a doctor."

"What makes you think that?" Cole asked.

Doc shrugged his shoulders. "It's nothing I can definitely put my finger on but it just seems to me that their umbilical cord cuts were

cut perfectly, like a doctor would make.” He looked up at Cole, a serious look on his face. “I think we are looking for a doctor.”

“A doctor? Are you sure?”

“The cuts are perfect, straight through and clean, like a scalpel would make. If a baby is born at home, the cut is usually more uneven, serrated, like from a kitchen knife.”

“And this makes you think we need to look for a doctor?” Bear asked, still doubtful.

“I don’t know. But why would someone kidnap Mari, then keep her healthy throughout her pregnancy, deliver the boys, only to give them back to you? And the boys are in excellent health,” Doc explained.

“Well, that’s good enough for me. Jax, can you narrow your search to include anyone we may have had contact with that has any type of medical training?” Cole asked.

“Sure, that shouldn’t be a problem. Won’t take me but a moment to do that,” Jax said as she wheeled herself out of the dining room and headed for her office.

“Thanks Doc, this may be the break we need. Anything else you come across, no matter how strange or insignificant it may seem, let us know, okay?” Cole stated.

Doc nodded as he stood up and headed for the kitchen to drop off his cup before walking away to his office. They all sat around the table for awhile talking about the twins, the investigation, Mari.

Finally, Bear stood up and headed out the door. He needed some fresh air. It was so hard to sit there and do nothing while Mari was still missing. He missed her so much. The last several months he had felt like he was dead. Having the boys helped, but he didn’t think he would begin to live again until she was in his arms again.

“Bear?” Cole called from the doorway. “You okay?”

Bear looked over his shoulder at Cole before nodding his head. Cole walked over and wrapped an arm around Bear’s shoulders and gave him a little squeeze. “We’ll find her.”

"I know, but it's just so hard knowing she's out there all alone."

Cole nodded his head in agreement. He knew exactly what Bear was talking about. He tried really hard to put those worries in the back of his mind. Most of the time he was successful, but not always. At those times, it was all he could do to stay standing. The grief he felt was so terrible it almost broke him every time.

"Come on, let's go for a walk. Camilla can watch the boys for a little while." Cole walked down the steps and toward the driveway. A walk would do them both good.

Bear pushed his hands inside his pockets and followed Cole down the steps. It was beautiful out this time of night. The moon was shining in the sky, the wind was blowing through the pine trees, and crickets could be heard chirping in the tall grass. It was a perfect night and Bear was miserable.

"Do you think she will want to stay with us when we find her?" Bear asked softly.

"I hope so. She has too." Cole replied.

"But what about her leaving in the first place? Something had to make her leave. You know who ever took her couldn't have gotten into the ranch without us catching them. Mari had to have left first, then they took her."

"I don't know, Bear. But you're right, she had to have left here first, then they took her."

"Yeah, but why would she leave?" Bear asked. It broke his heart to think that Mari had left them. He had been sure she was happy with them. She seemed to be happy, then she was gone. What happened to make her leave?

"Hey Bear, do you see something down by the gate?"

Bear squinted his eyes to see down to the gate. He could see a small outline of something on the ground outside of the gate. He started running with Cole on his heels.

Bear didn't take time to unlock the gate. He just ripped it open and fell to the ground next to a small pile of blankets. Cole dropped to

the ground across from him. Bear reached for the edge of the blanket with trembling hands and slowly pulled it back. The sight before him made him turn and crawl away to throw up everything in his stomach.

“Oh my god,” cried Cole as he slowly pulled the blanket down further. “Mari.” He reached down to run his fingers lightly over her blood soaked hair. “Oh, baby, what did he do to you?”

Bear crawled back over to Cole and Mari, wiping the tears from his eyes so he could see. “Is she...is she—” he sobbed.

“I don’t know,” Cole cried as he reached down to search for her pulse. When he didn’t feel anything he moved his fingers around a bit and tried again. Still nothing. Cole was starting to lose hope when he felt a small thump against his fingers. It was so slight he almost missed it. He held his fingers there until he felt another small thump.

“Bear,” he whispered. Cole looked up when he got no response from Bear. Bear was staring down at Mari’s bruised, cut, and swollen face.

“Bear,” he said again. He had to repeat himself two more times, the last time a yell, before Bear lifted his tear streaked face to his. “She’s alive. You need to get Doc and the guys down here. “

“She’s alive?” he whispered in astonishment.

“Yes, but barely. You need to get Doc.”

“I’ll carry her,” Bear said as he went to lift her. But there didn’t seem to be any place that Mari wasn’t bruised, cut, or bleeding. He didn’t know where to pick her up at without hurting her.

“No, we don’t know how injured she is. Go get Doc.”

Bear jumped to his feet and ran faster than he had ever run in his life, yelling for Doc as he went. He saw several people run outside as he got closer to the house. “Doc, come quick. Its Mari,” Bear yelled as he started back for the gate. “Bring the truck.”

“Mari?” Doc yelled back before running into the house to grab his bag. He grabbed his bag and a couple of blankets from the infirmary and ran back out the door to jump in the truck with Sam, heading toward the gate. Everyone else was running after Bear.

* * * *

Cole watched Bear run down the driveway toward the house before pulling his handkerchief from his back pocket and tried to wipe away some of the blood on Mari's face. But there was so much blood.

"Oh baby, I'm so sorry."

He gently brushed the hair back from her battered face. With all the damage he could hardly tell it was Mari. He leaned over and pulled the blanket the rest of the way down her naked body and groaned when he saw the damage.

He felt sobs breaking free as he gazed at her battered and bruised body. There was blood everywhere along with scrapes and scratches. Both of her hands were swollen, her left arm turned at an odd angle. It was sure to be broken. He was really worried that she might have internal injuries. There was just so much damage. How could she possibly survive this?

His face whipped up to hers when he heard a small whimper come from her cracked swollen lips. He leaned down to her. "Mari? Baby? Can you hear me? Honey?" He felt like singing to the world when her head turned toward him.

"*Cole*," she whispered silently.

It was the first time Cole had heard Mari in his head in nearly six months. He suddenly felt like his heart had started beating, like he was finally alive again.

He saw Bear kneel down on the other side of Mari out of the corner of his eye as he gently caressed her cheek. "Come on, baby, open your eyes and look at me."

"Cole? Is she—" Bear was afraid to voice his fears. His heart finally started beating again for the first time in what felt like months when Mari turned her head slightly toward him.

"*Bear*," she mouthed, a small smile pulling at her swollen lips.

Cole smiled at Bear through his tears as Mari faded back out again. She was alive and home where she belonged. Now they just had to make sure she stayed that way.

Doc jumped from the truck and ran over to the two crying brothers and shoved Bear out of the way as he knelt on the ground next to Mari. "My God! What happened to her?" he whispered as he looked at her ravaged body. "Is she alive?"

"Yeah, I'm getting a pulse, but it's slight, and she woke up a few seconds ago," Cole said quickly.

Doc pulled out his stethoscope and checked Mari's heartbeat. It was there, but faint. He felt over her neck, arms and legs before pulling the blanket back over her naked body.

"Okay, we're gonna have to move her but be careful. She has several broken bones and probably some internal injuries. Sam, bring me the long board and a neck brace from the truck. We're gonna have to tie her down to move her. Even the slightest movement could cause more damage."

Sam ran around the side of the truck and grabbed the equipment Doc asked for before running over and placing it on the ground next to Doc. Doc slowly wrapped the neck brace around Mari's neck. Then, with Cole and Bear's assistance, they rolled her onto the backboard. With the help of Sam they lifted Mari and carried her to the back of the truck, sliding her in before Doc, Cole, and Bear slid in beside her.

Sam jumped in the front of the truck and started to turn the truck around to head back toward the house when suddenly the front windshield shattered. He stomped on the gas and peeled out driving as fast as he could back up the driveway.

In the back of truck, Doc, Cole, and Bear ducked down, Bear throwing his large body over Mari to cover her as bullets ripped through the side of the truck.

As soon as they drove out of the range of the bullets, Cole squeezed Mari's hand and placed a small kiss on her head before

jumping over the side of the truck and disappearing into the trees. Bear watched him go, carefully watching the trees around them as the pulled in front of the house.

“Nick, Caleb, someone’s shooting at us. Go help Cole out down by the front gate. It’s probably whoever took Mari. Sky, you and Jake help us get Mari inside and down to the infirmary,” Bear said as he crawled out of the truck and reached for Mari. “Camilla, I want you to go get the twins and take them downstairs. Stay with Jax until one of us comes for you.”

“But, Bear—” she began.

“Honey,” Bear said as he patted her shoulder, “I know you want to be with Mari right now, but you need to think about the boys.” Bear glanced over at Rune as he pushed Camilla toward the house. “Rune, you know what to do.”

Rune nodded grimly as he headed back into the house. Sky, Jake, and Sam helped Bear lift Mari and carry her into the house behind Doc. They carefully maneuvered her in the door and down the stairs to the infirmary before laying her on the exam table, backboard and all. Jake went back out the door and upstairs as Doc and Sky began working on Mari.

Doc ushered Bear from the room, wanting to spare him as much pain as he could. Thank god Mari was unconscious through it all. Doc and Sky worked quietly but efficiently as they treated Mari’s numerous injuries. Bear impatiently paced the hallway outside of the exam room. It seemed to take forever.

After a while Bear sat in one of the few chairs against the wall while he waited. He buried his head in his hands when the turmoil became too much for him. His joy at having Mari back was boundless. His fear that he was going to lose her all over again, this time permanently, was overwhelming. Bear didn’t know if he could handle that.

Cole walked in and saw Bear, stopping to watch his shoulders shaking with his grief from his position by the exam room door. He

knew what Bear was feeling, the endless pain that was sweeping over his joy in finding Mari again. He knew he had failed both Mari and Bear. He hadn't kept Mari safe. It was his fault that this had happened to her.

Mari was sweet and loving. She wouldn't intentionally hurt anyone. It was his job to protect her, to keep her safe. Just as it was his job to care for Bear. Bear was a gentle man despite his size, or maybe because of it.

And he had failed both of them. And he didn't know how to make things better. He didn't know if it was even possible to fix his screw up. If he ever got his hands on the person shooting at them, he'd give it his best shot, though.

Cole and Bear jumped when Doc opened the door and walked out. Bear jumped up from his seat and went to stand next to Cole as he held his breath, waiting for Doc to say something, anything.

Doc nodded his head to let them know Mari was still alive. "I won't lie to you, it's bad, real bad. The next forty-eight hours will be crucial. However, I believe that if she can make it through the next two days, she will be okay. I've put her in a coma to help her heal. Sleep is the best thing for her right now."

Cole started to speak but had to clear his throat before he could. "Can you...can you tell us what her injuries are?"

Doc pushed his hands into his pockets, taking a deep breath. "She has a broken arm, concussion, three broken ribs and both her wrists are sprained. There doesn't seem to be any internal injuries beyond some severe bruising to both her kidneys and her liver. She also has numerous scrapes, scratches, and cuts. It took nearly three hundred stitches to close them all up."

"Was she raped?" Cole asked, praying to god that she had not been hurt in that way. He didn't start breathing again until Doc shook his head no. Cole felt Bear sag next to him in relief.

"No, I saw no signs of her being abused like that. After examining her though, I am even more convinced that whoever had her had to be

a doctor. She had an episiotomy scar that was newly healed. It was stitched by a professional.”

“So you still think we are looking for a doctor?” Cole asked.

“I’d stake my career on it.”

“Can we see her?” Bear asked quietly, his eyes begging Doc for permission to be with Mari.

“Yeah, you can go but only for a few moments. Mari needs her rest. You need to be prepared for what you see. It’s not pretty. She’s not breathing on her own, guys, she has a breathing tube. I’ll take it out in a few days but right now she needs all the help she can get.”

Cole and Bear nodded their understanding. They knew it wasn’t going to be pretty but nothing could be worse than when they had first found her. That was a sight neither of them would ever be able to wipe from their minds.

Cole and Bear turned to go into the room, Cole stopping to squeeze Doc’s arm as he passed him. “Thanks, Doc, for everything.”

Doc just nodded as Cole went by. “I’ll be in my office if you need me.” He walked to his office and slumped down in his chair, resting his head in his hands. He didn’t know what exactly had been done to Mari but if he ever got his hands on the man who did this to her, well, he wasn’t sure he could uphold his Hippocratic Oath to *do no harm*.

* * * *

The brothers hesitantly walked into the exam room. Mari was dressed in a simple hospital gown and covered with a white sheet. The only noise in the room was the consistent beep of the machines that she was hooked up to.

Cole walked to one side of Mari’s bed, Bear on the other. Cole wanted to hold her hand but he was afraid to touch her. He didn’t want to hurt her, so he just laid his hand on her arm, wanting to let her know he was there.

The touch of Mari's warm flesh beneath his for the first time in six months brought quick tears to his eyes. He blinked several times to clear his vision but it didn't help. After a moment he gave in and let the tear flow down his cheeks.

Bear just gazed at Mari, also afraid to touch her. She looked so small, so fragile. He had no idea how she had survived her injuries but he would be thankful for eternity that she had. He also knew he would spend the rest of his life making it up to her, if she would let him. First she had to get better, then he had to find out why she had left.

The brothers stood there looking down at Mari, both in a shared world of grief when the door opened and Sam stood in the doorway. He motioned for them to step outside. Bear started to walk toward the door but Cole motioned for Bear to stay with Mari.

"You stay with our girl. I'll handle this. I don't want her to be alone," Cole said.

Bear nodded and went to sit down next to Mari's bed. Cole watched from the doorway as Bear gently brushed her hair back from her face. Cole wiped his sleeve over his eyes and left the room, closing the door quietly behind him.

"Well? You find anything?" He asked Sam after shutting the door.

"He's gone now. Rune found his hidey hole. This guy is an idiot. He left a trail of bread crumbs all over the place."

Cole lifted an eyebrow curiously. "Oh?"

"Cole, man, this guy has to be local."

"Local?" Cole was dumbfounded. How could this guy be local?

"Oh yeah," Sam said as he ran a hand through his hair. "We found his truck." He glanced at Cole from under his lashes, trying to gauge whether Cole could handle what else he had to tell him. "The back of the truck is covered in blood, Cole."

Cole felt pain spear through his chest. He took several long drags of air into his tight chest before speaking, fists clenched at his side. "What...what else?"

“There’s no registration in the vehicle. It looks like this guy knew we would find the truck. Either that or he’s neurotic. The truck’s interior was clean, way too clean if you ask me. Nick’s going over it now. Also, we found a couple of receipts pushed down between the seat cushions. They’re all local. Either he’s from around here or he’s been in the area for a while. Both receipts are over two months old.”

“Or he’s trying to throw us off his trail,” Cole said.

“Yeah, thought of that too. It may have been just a little too easy to find his truck. But we still have to follow the trail. If he is local, or if he’s been in the area for a while, someone will have seen him. If we can get a description from Mari, that would help a lot.”

“That may take awhile. Doc has her in a medical induced coma right now to help her heal.”

“What about the blankets she was wrapped in? Any clues there?” Sam asked.

“I don’t know. To tell you the truth, in all the commotion, I forgot about them. I’ll have Doc get on that. Maybe he can find something.”

Sam watched Cole peek through the small glass window on the exam room door. Man, he wouldn’t be in Cole and Bear’s shoes for all the tea in China. He had watched the hell that they had gone through over the last several months. It just didn’t pay to be that wrapped up in someone. Sam hoped he never fell in love.

His thoughts briefly went to the one person he had a yearning for. The one person he thought he could love, if he loved anyone. The one person he could never have. Shaking his head he locked those thoughts away. There was no reason to keep longing for something that he could never have. Yep, love sucked.

Chapter 12

Doc looked up from changing Mari's IV bag as he heard the door open and saw Bear and Cole walk in. He nodded to them and finished his task. His heart was heavy with the news he had to give them.

He had taken her off the respirator and stopped the coma medication two days ago, two weeks after she had been found. She had still not woken up. He was becoming concerned. While her injuries were healing, she did not seem to be responding to anything he did.

"What's up, Doc? Is Mari okay?" Cole asked as he tenderly brushed her hair back from her face. The bruises on her face had begun to fade and she was looking more and more like their Mari.

"I'm not real sure what's wrong. All of her injuries are healing just fine."

"Then why hasn't she woken up?" Bear asked.

"That's what worries me. She should have woken up by now. I ran an MRI and a CAT scan. There's no reason for her to still be unresponsive."

"Could you have missed something?" Bear asked quietly.

"No," Doc replied shaking his head, "I didn't miss anything. Her injuries are healing just like they should, she hasn't had any complications, and there doesn't seem to be any lingering effects from her injuries. All of my tests results show that everything is just as it should be, considering her condition."

"Then what is it? Why isn't she waking up?" Bear asked desperately.

Doc felt tears welling up in his eyes as he gazed down at Mari's sweet face. She had come to mean so much to so many people, and in such a short amount of time. It would haunt all of them if she didn't make it.

"I think she's giving up," Doc said quietly.

"What the hell does that mean?" Cole demanded angrily.

"Modern medicine can only do so much. We can heal the body. We can not heal the spirit. Mari's body is healing, but the rest of her is giving up." He flinched at the devastated look in Bear and Cole's eyes. "I'm sorry, there's nothing more I can do. The rest is up to Mari."

Doc knew his words shattered Bear and Cole. He knew that before he even saw the tears falling down their cheeks. They loved her so much and the loss of Mari could destroy them.

"Nothing?" Bear asked in an anguished whisper. "There's nothing you can do?"

"I can care for her body, but unless she decides to fight, I don't think she will make it."

Bear and Cole said nothing, just stood there staring down at Mari as if they would give up right along with her. Bear dropped to his knees next to the bed, laid his head down on the mattress beside Mari's hand and began sobbing, squeezing Mari's fragile hand in his. Cole let out a strangled cry and bolted from the room.

Doc patted Bear on the shoulder before leaving him alone with Mari. He had no idea what to do. He felt totally out of his depths. He had done everything right where Mari's medical condition was concerned but she just didn't seem to be getting any better. He was losing her. In all of his years as a medical doctor and researcher, he had never felt so helpless.

Bear wiped his eyes and looked at his beloved Mari. He didn't know how to reach her. How to let her know how very much he needed her. She was his life, the very air that he breathed. How was he supposed to live without her?

“Mari, baby, please, I need you so much. You can’t leave me, not now, not when I have just found you again. We have so much to live for, so much going for us. Our beautiful little babies. They need you to get better. We all do. Please, Mari, you have to get better,” Bear cried as he watched her.

“Okay,” he said as he wiped his eyes. “Let’s talk, Mari. You can’t come into my life, make me fall in love with you, and then leave me, and now you’re trying to leave me again. It’s not nice. It’s just rude. And I have never thought of you as rude. Now, I know we’ve had some problems but there is nothing we can’t work out. I also know that I have a few things that I need to apologize for.” Bear took a deep breath and started admitting to Mari the things that he had done.

“Cole and I tend to make decisions without talking to you first. That’s wrong. I know that. And I apologize for that. But, baby, we just love you so much that sometimes we just plow ahead and forget that you may have a different opinion than we do. We knew it was wrong not to talk to you about Camilla being missing. But we didn’t want you to worry.”

Bear turned and smiled when he saw Camilla walk in. She gave him a little wave and went to sit across from him, grabbing Mari’s other hand. “And we did find her. It just took us a while. Jax had to do a little creative searching to find her. It was totally illegal, of course, but we did it anyway. Cole and I were in the barn talking about it the night you disappeared. We knew it was totally illegal but we still did it. We’d do anything for you.”

“You should have seen him, Mari, I was sitting in some little dive motel, hiding from this jackass that thinks he owns me because we went out on one date when Nick comes barging in. To tell you the truth, he was quite impressive. But don’t tell him I said that.” Camilla gave a little laugh.

“Anyway, he comes barging into my motel room yelling about you not being willing to get married without me there. That I *had* to be there or else. Of course, I had no idea who he was. I thought he had

been sent by the jackass. So, I took things into my own hands, or knee, in Nick's case. Poor guy, I feel really bad about that now, but at the time, I thought he was there to kill me. I did what I had to do."

Bear laughed at the picture Camilla was painting. He would have paid good money to see Camilla knee Nick.

"After he... recovered... he basically kidnapped me."

"You should have seen Cole's face when Nick called to say not only had he found Camilla, but she was bound and gagged in the back of his car. He had kidnapped her. I thought Cole's head was going to spin off," Bear started laughing, "We broke nearly every law we could getting her here. If she hadn't decided to forgive us, Cole and I could have done some serious time for kidnapping and tons of other things. Oh man, we were in such deep shit."

Bear laughed for several moments before he began to sober up. "I knew what we were doing was totally illegal. And trying to explain to Camilla why you weren't here when she got here, that took some real footwork." He shook his head as he thought about Mari leaving. "Why did you leave, Mari? What did we do? If only you would tell us, I'm sure we can work it out. There's nothing we can't work out if we could just talk about it. Please, Mari, come back to us."

Bear and Camilla continued to talk to Mari, hoping to give her something, anything, to fight for. They talked about Camilla's kidnapping and arrival at the ranch, their search for Mari, the arrival of the babies. They even talked about their plans for the wedding, which were still in full swing. They talked until their voices were hoarse.

Finally, Doc came in told them that they needed to give Mari some rest but they could come back later to continue talking to Mari. Camilla reached over and gave Mari a kiss on her forehead before leaning close to her ear.

"Honey, you've got to get better. These guys love you so very much. They need you."

Bear watched Camilla walk from the room before leaning down to give Mari a light kiss on her lips. "I love you, baby." He patted her hand and walked away, feeling like he was leaving his heart behind with Mari.

* * * *

Over the next week there was little change in Mari's condition. Camilla and Bear took turns sitting with her, talking to her. At some point, everyone came in to talk with her. They even brought the boys in to see her, hoping that maybe they could bring her around. But nothing seemed to work. She just continued to sleep.

Eventually Doc said they could move Mari upstairs and into her own bed. At least there, Bear and Cole could sleep beside her, letting her know that they were there. But Cole wasn't. He avoided Mari like the plague. He seemed to eat up every bit of information about her that he could get his hands on, but he wouldn't go see her. Bear could tell that Cole was hurting but he didn't know what to do about it. Cole refused to talk to him about it.

So he was somewhat surprised a few days later when he opened the bedroom door and saw Cole kneeling on the floor beside Mari, his face buried in her stomach. Bear could tell from the shaking of his shoulders that Cole was crying. What truly shocked him was the small hand that was buried in Cole's hair, gently caressing him. Mari was awake.

Bear wanted to run in and hug her to him, to thank God she was okay. But as much as he wanted to, he knew that Cole needed this time with Mari. He had been so closed off to everyone since Mari had been gone. A few more minutes of waiting wouldn't hurt.

Besides, he needed to go get Doc. That should give Cole enough time alone with Mari. With a huge grin on his lips, and heart filled with joy, Bear quietly closed the door and went to find Doc.

* * * *

Cole tried to stay away from Mari. He just couldn't sit by and watch her die. He thought it was bad enough when Mari had disappeared. But to have her back home and know that she was still dying and there was nothing he could do about it, Cole just didn't think he could survive it. So, he had stayed away.

But as each day went by, he was drawn more and more to her. Finally, he couldn't stand it anymore. He had to be with her, even if it was just until the end. He had waited until no one was in the room and went in.

She looked so beautiful lying there, like she was sleeping instead of wasting away. The bruises had all faded from her face as well as the swelling. You wouldn't know looking at her that anything was wrong.

Cole knelt down on the floor next to her and laid his head on her stomach as his hands roamed up and down her body, willing her to live. *"Please, baby, you have to come back to me,"* he wept silently. *"I need you, Mari. I can't make it without you. I'll die, Mari. I don't know why you left me, but you're everything to me. I want to be a part of your every moment. I want to satisfy your every need. I want to know your thoughts and feelings even before you do. I want to share every waking day with you, all of our ups and downs, the good and bad. Please, Mari,"* he begged, *"you're my life."*

Cole pressed little kisses against Mari as he cried. He laid his head down and continued to cry until he felt fingers threading through his hair. His heart pounded in his chest when he realized that it was Mari. He was afraid to move, afraid that if he did, it might all be wishful thinking on his part, afraid that she would stop. So, he just laid there, tears of joy streaming down his face this time.

He heard the door open and close but he still didn't move. It felt too good to move and he was too happy, until he heard a low sinister laugh behind him. Cole sat up and slowly turned around.

Standing in the doorway of the French doors was a man that Cole had never seen before. However, he was quite familiar with the 9mm handgun he held. Cole slowly came to his feet standing between Mari and the madman with the gun.

“Well, isn’t this touching?” the madman stated. “Although I am surprised to see that the lovely Mari is still alive. I was sure she was dead when I dumped her at your front gate. Oh well,” he laughed, “guess that means I will just have to take her with me when I leave.”

“You will never touch her,” Cole growled.

“And how do you plan to on stopping me? You’ll be dead,” he said as he pointed the gun at Cole and began to pull the trigger. Cole heard the gun go off and waited for the bullet to pierce his flesh. When he felt no pain he looked down at himself, then at the man with the gun.

The man had a surprised look on his face and a red splotch spreading across his chest. The gun fell slowly from his hands as he fell to the floor. Cole quickly jumped over and grabbed the gun on the floor before kicking at the fallen body to make sure he was truly dead.

Taking a deep breath he looked back over at Mari. She was leaning up on one elbow, the Ruger .45 pistol from Cole’s nightstand in her hands. As Cole watched Mari released the breath she was holding and dropped back onto the bed.

“God, I never thought that son of a bitch would die!” she groaned at the ceiling.

“Mari?” Cole whispered as he stepped around the dead body on the floor and stood beside the bed. “Baby?”

Mari turned her head and flashed Cole a big smile. “Cole, I missed you.”

Cole felt his heart start to beat again as he went to sit beside her. He leaned down beside her. His hand trembled as he reached down to caress her face. His fingers ran down her face, over her eyes, across her lips.

Looking back into her eyes, eyes filled with love, Cole groaned and pressed his lips against hers. It was the perfect kiss. Not passionate, not lustful, but filled with love and longing of two soul mates finally brought together.

Breaking the kiss Cole looked down into Mari's tear filled eyes. "Ah, baby, I missed you, too."

Before he could say more the bedroom door swung open. Both Mari and Cole brought their guns up to aim at the occupant in the door. They both let out a deep breath and let their guns drop back down when they realized it was Bear and Sam.

"Damn it, Bear, don't scare me like that," Cole yelled as he dropped his head onto the mattress, taking deep drags of air into his lungs.

"Scare you? What about me, you asshole? You don't think I didn't just lose ten years off my life hearing a gunshot come from here? I was sure Mari had shot you for being such a jackass. And who the hell was shooting anyway?"

Cole scooted to the edge of the bed and stood up, pointing to Mari, then to the body lying on the floor by the French doors.

"Who the hell is that?" Bear asked as he walked around the side of the bed to see the body Cole was pointing at.

"Dr. Ivan Nirov," Mari replied from the bed.

"Nirov, why does that name sound familiar?" Cole asked as he sat on the side of the bed and gently took the gun out of Mari's hand.

"He's the brother of Yuri Nirov, the maniac that kidnapped me earlier this year. Seems to run in the family." Mari replied as she scooted herself up on the bed to lean against the pillows at the head of the bed.

"And you know this man how?" Cole growled, a bit of the green monster rearing its ugly head.

"This gentleman, and I use that term generously, is the man that has kept me prisoner for the last several months. Apparently, he wanted revenge for your killing of his brothers and decided I was it."

Mari laughed when she heard a growl come from both Cole and Bear this time. “Believe me, I was not agreeable to his plan, which is why I am laid up in this damn bed.”

“Why?” Bear demanded. “What did he do to you?”

“It’s a long story, Bear, and I would be happy to tell you all about it, but first, do you think I could see my sons?” She looked closely at Cole and Bear. “You did say that my sons were here, right?” Her eyes silently begged Cole and Bear not to lie to her.

Bear and Cole both smiled at Mari at the thought of their sons. They nodded and were rewarded with a huge grin and a few tears from Mari. “Let’s get this taken care of first,” Cole said, indicating the body on the floor, “and let Doc check you over, then we’ll bring the boys in to see you.”

Mari nodded regretfully. Now that she knew her babies were still alive and that Ivan hadn’t killed them like he had said, she wanted to see them so very much. It was almost more than she could stand having to wait to see them. But she knew that they needed to clear out the room before the babies were brought in and she also knew that Doc needed to check her over. But the waiting was terrible.

Cole leaned over the bed and picked Mari up, blankets and all and carried her into the living room, sitting down on the couch and cradling Mari in his arms.

Bear called Sheriff Jones and asked him to come by, then called Doc up to check on Mari. Setting the phone down he went and sat on the couch next to Cole, pulling Mari’s legs up to rest across his, rubbing his hands up and down her legs over the blankets.

Mari laid her head on Cole’s chest, glad to be back in his arms again. She reached down and grabbed Bear’s hand in hers, squeezing it as she sent him a small smile. It was good to be back with both of them.

“I heard you, you know, when you were talking to me,” Mari whispered silently against Cole’s skin. *“I heard every word you said.”*

“Did you now?” Cole answered her out loud, “Did you hear how much we love you, how much we need you?” He hugged her close to his body, rejoicing in the warmth radiating from her small body. “I don’t know what we did, Mari, to make you leave us, but I’m sorry. If you would just tell us, I’m sure we can work it out. There’s nothing we can’t work out together, nothing.”

Mari nodded her head, “Yeah, I know. At least, I know that now. Bear explained it all when I was sleeping.” Mari patted Bear on the hand.

“I did? What did I say? How did I change your mind?” Bear asked.

“Let me start back a little ways so you’ll understand it all. Do you remember the night I left?” Mari asked.

Bear and Cole both nodded, wincing at the memory of the fear that had fallen upon them at her disappearance. It had been a nightmare that hadn’t truly ended until just a few moments ago.

“I couldn’t get a hold of my sister, Camilla. Every time I tried to use the phone, someone would stop me. It seemed like everyone was trying to keep me away from contacting her. I had no idea at the time that she had disappeared. So, after talking to the secretary at her school and getting no where, I went to the barn to find you.”

Mari wiggled a little bit in Cole’s lap before settling back down with her head resting on his chest again. This was still hurtful to her, the idea that Bear and Cole hadn’t loved her. Of course, now she knew that they did, but it still hurt. And she didn’t want to hurt them the same with her lack of trust in them. Her fingers fidgeted with the corner of the blanket as she lowered her eyes not wanting to look them in the face.

“When I got to the barn I heard you two talking. You kept saying how you were lying to me and that I would hate you for it, and that what you were doing was illegal. I didn’t know what to think at first. Then Bear said that he no longer wanted a baby with me.”

Cole squeezed her closer to him when he heard Mari's voice tremble. "It's okay, honey, just tell us."

Mari sniffed but continued. "I was devastated when Bear said he didn't want a baby with me. I already knew I was pregnant. That combined with you both talking about doing something illegal and lying to me, well, it just all came together in some sort of horrible nightmare. So I left. I just had to get away."

Mari looked up at Cole, then Bear from beneath her lashes. Bear had tears in his eyes. Cole was clearly angry if the clench of his jaw was anything to go by. Mari just hoped they still loved her when everything was said and done.

"I grabbed a few things and ran. I had been walking for what seemed like hours when I heard a vehicle coming. I thought it was you so I hid in the bushes. It was. I watched the truck drive by when I heard a noise behind me. Before I could turn around, something hit me in the back of the head. Next thing I knew, I woke up and I was in a room with no windows. I stayed in that room the entire time I was there."

"Do you know where it was?" Sam asked from his stance over by the fireplace.

"No, I never really saw outside. Not until that last night and I don't remember much about my surroundings. Sorry."

"Don't worry about it. Just tell us what you do remember," Cole said.

"Well, Ivan started coming in a few days after I was there. After awhile, Ivan and I became friends, sort of. He—"

"Friends? How could you be friends with him?" Cole exclaimed loudly, outraged.

Mari gave a small shrug of her shoulders. "He was the only person that would talk to me. And he was nice to me."

"Nice?" Cole shouted, "He tried to kill you!"

"Cole, shut the hell up. Can't you see this is hard enough for Mari without you yelling at her? Just let her tell it in her own words," Bear snarled silently to Cole.

Bear and Cole waited for Mari to continue talking for several moments but she didn't say anything. When Cole tilted her face up to his he was surprised to see tears in her eyes. "What's wrong, baby? Why are you crying? It's all over. You're safe now."

"He told me he killed my babies," Mari began sobbing. "I asked him straight to his face if he had killed them and he said 'yes.'" She pulled her legs up into her chest and curled up into a ball on Cole's lap burying her face in his chest as she cried.

"Bear, go get the boys. She needs to see them," Cole said.

Bear stood up and left the room coming back minutes later carrying the twins, with Camilla and Nick in tow. Doc was bringing up the rear with his medical bag.

"Mari, baby, I have some little guys here for you to meet," Bear said softly as he gently placed Nathaniel in her trembling arms. He sat down on the couch next to her holding Gabriel close to his chest.

"This little guy is Nathaniel Coleman Daniels, or Nate. The beautiful little baby in Bear's arms is Gabriel Benjamin Daniels, or Gabe."

"Oh, they're so beautiful," Mari whispered in wonder as she unwrapped the baby in her lap. Bear, knowing she was going to check for all ten fingers and all ten toes, unwrapped Gabriel and lifted him in her direction. "They're perfect."

Looking up at Bear and Cole she smiled the most glorious smile they had ever seen from her. "I never got to hold them. Ivan said it would be too painful for me to hold them then let them go." Mari spent several minutes touching and caressing each baby as her eyes filled up on each little breath they took.

"Mari," Cole said as he tried to gain her attention. "Honey, can you tell us how you got hurt? Did Ivan hurt you?"

Mari looked up from the baby she was making goo-goo eyes at. “Oh no, I did that when I jumped off the balcony.”

Bear, Cole, and everyone else in the room just stared at Mari as she went back to making faces at the baby. No one knew quite what to say. They had all seen Mari’s injuries, how life threatening they had been. To know that Mari had done it to herself left them all speechless.

“Uh, Mari,” Cole began hesitantly, “are you saying you caused these injuries to yourself when you jumped off a balcony?”

“Oh sure,” Mari replied never looking up from the baby. “It *was* three stories up.”

Cole felt sick to his stomach. She had jumped off a three-story balcony? Why the hell would she do that? She had to know she could have died, right? “Honey, you do realize that you could have died, right?”

“Well, yeah. To tell you the truth, I was kind of surprised when I didn’t,” she said with a little laugh. “I thought for sure I would when I saw how far down it was.”

Cole looked over at the stunned look in Bear’s face and knew it mirrored his own. Looking at the other occupants in the room he knew they were feeling the same sort of shock. Mari had jumped thinking she would be killed. Was she suicidal? Had her ordeal made her lose her mind? Was Mari crazy?

Bear seemed to have the same thought as Cole. He stood up slowly and handed Gabriel to Camilla. Then he reached down for Nathaniel. “Honey, they need to take a nap now. Why don’t you give him to me and we’ll get these little guys laid down. In the meantime, Doc can check you over, okay?”

Mari reluctantly handed the baby over to Bear and then curled back into Cole’s strong arms. She watched Bear hand the baby to Nick and then Camilla and Nick took the babies into the bedroom. She knew everyone was looking at her, wondering. She waited until

the bedroom door shut before speaking. "I am not crazy, nor am I suicidal, so get that thought right out of your damn heads!"

"Honey, why would you jump off a three story balcony then?" Cole asked tentatively.

"Oh, please," Mari groaned loudly as she pushed herself out of Cole's arms to stand, staring at everyone in the room, "Haven't you heard anything I've been saying? Are you deaf or just dumb?"

"Mari, we're all just trying to understand," Doc replied, trying to sooth her growing temper.

"After everything I had been through, and then to have Ivan tell me my babies were dead—" Mari ran a hand roughly through her hair in frustration. "Well, there really didn't seem to be much point to anything and damned if I was going to stick around and marry that asshole. So, I jumped."

There was absolute silence in the room for several moments as everyone tried to take in the things Mari was telling them. It was a quite a story. Mari had been through so much. It was truly amazing that she was standing there, whole, and apparently a little angry if her clenched fists were anything to go by.

Cole and Bear stood up in one joint motion and wrapped their arms around Mari as they began showering her face with kisses. "Oh, baby, we love you so much," Cole said in between kisses. "I am so sorry that you have been through this, but I am truly thankful that you are back with us."

"We're never letting you go, Mari, never. You're stuck with us," Bear whispered in her ear as he ran his hands up and down her back.

"Do you—" Mari cleared her throat before continuing, "do you still want to marry me? Both of you?"

Bear and Cole smiled down at Mari before Cole picked her up and swung her around. "Just try and stop us."

Chapter 13

Mari opened her eyes to realize that it was dark outside, and this time she was not in bed alone. Cole slept on one side of her, lying on his side facing her, his lips resting on her nipple, an arm wrapped around her.

Bear was pressed up against her back, a hand nestled between her thighs from the front, cupping her. Two of his fingers were pressed inside of her. His hard cock was pressed between her butt cheeks, the tip pressing against Mari's tender passage. It was like having a two-by-four between her thighs.

Damn, these men couldn't even stop touching her in their sleep. Not that she was complaining but suddenly she was as horny as hell and they were out cold. And it had been so very long since she had been loved by them.

In the month that she had been home, neither Cole nor Bear had made love to her. They said that they wanted to make sure that she was all healed before they resumed sexual activities. It was driving Mari crazy.

She felt fine. Doc had even said she could resume her normal activities. She was ready to be loved by her men. Now, if she could just convince them.

Mari squeezed her thighs together as much as she could, forcing Bear's fingers inside of her to move just a bit, but it just wasn't enough.

She reached down with her hand and pressed the tip of Bear's cock into her wet entrance and pushed back with her hips. It still

wasn't enough. She couldn't get the leverage to push him all the way in. Plus, his fingers were in the way. Mari was getting desperate.

She tried humping Bear's fingers several times before letting out a moan of frustration. Apparently she couldn't do this on her own. Mari foresaw a very long night ahead of her.

Suddenly the hand inside of her pulled out to grab her leg and bring it over the top of Bear's thighs. Mari let out a desperate cry, which quickly turned to a groan as Bear replaced his fingers with his hard cock. Bear's hand came back to Mari and began stroking her clit as he plunged himself in and out of Mari's very happy body.

Feeling lips at her nipple, Mari opened her eyes to look down at a sleepy Cole. He was watching her through passion filled eyes. Not wanting him to be left out, she pulled him up to a kiss as she wrapped her hands around his hardening cock.

Knowing the bond that Bear and Cole had, she matched her strokes to the rhythm of Bear's hips. When Bear suddenly sped up all she could do was hold onto Cole.

Suddenly Bear detonated inside of Mari, drenching her in semen. He pumped a couple of more times before quickly pulling out of Mari and pushing her onto her back. Wrapping her hair in his hands he forced her lips to his.

Mari cried out as Cole suddenly slid between her legs and filled her. He began to thrust himself into her as fast as his body would let him.

"Oh fuck, Mari, you're gonna kill me," Cole groaned as she tightened around him, telling him she was about to climax. "Missed you so much. I missed this."

Bear pushed Mari's hands above her head and held them in one of his large ones as he devoted his lips to ravishing her breasts. Bear reached his other hand down to her wet folds.

The second he touched her, Mari's whole body arched, her head thrown back, and she screamed, "Oh god!"

“Oh yeah, baby, just like that. You’re so pretty when you cum,” Bear whispered. He rubbed a finger in her juices and brought it to his lips. “And you taste so good. I could eat you up.”

Mari’s quivering and clenching flesh was more than Cole could take and he climaxed seconds after her. The pulsing sensation of Cole’s orgasm sent Mari into another climax, ripping another scream from her lips.

Bear quickly brought his fingers back to Mari’s slick flesh and stroked it a few more times as the waves of Mari’s orgasm went on and on.

Cole pulled himself out of Mari and fell to the bed opposite of Bear. He leaned down and kissed Mari, his tongue swirling inside of her mouth.

Finally, Bear and Cole settled down next to Mari and wrapped her in their arms, each facing her. Bear had Mari’s head tucked under his chin and Cole was lying with his head resting on her breast.

Mari settled on her back, a little flustered when Cole settled his hand between her thighs, placing two fingers inside of her and resting his thumb on her swollen clit. Bear reached down and captured her free breast in his hand, his long fingers wrapping around her nipple. Apparently they intended to go back to sleep the same way they had before.

Mari laughed when she elicited a harsh groan from each man as she settled a hand on each of their softening cocks. She gave a content smile and giving them each a quick squeeze. Payback was a bitch!

* * * *

Mari smiled as she watched Bear and Cole walk across the yard a few months later. Each man held an infant in his arms. Her sons were nearly six months old now and starting to be quite the little gentlemen, when they weren’t screaming their heads off demanding

food or attention. And they *so* had their fathers wrapped around their little fingers.

Mari thought about all that had occurred since she had been found. The last few months had been interesting. She had been cleared of all charges in Ivan's death, although Cole still couldn't figure out how Ivan had found out about Mari, or that the team had been the ones to kill Ivan's brothers. That information was supposed to be top secret. They were still looking into that.

Things were in full swing for the wedding, which was to be held in two weeks. They were just making the last minute plans and adjustments, especially since the president asked to be invited, in secret of course. Mari was a little nervous about having the president of the United States at her wedding, but whatever Cole and Bear wanted, they would get.

Mari rubbed her hand down the small round of her abdomen. In a few months they were going to get a whole lot more, too. And Mari couldn't wait to tell them that this time it would be twin girls.

She laughed as she watched the men. Caleb and Rune were taking turns joking and punching each other in the arms. Sam and Sky were deep in some sort of discussion as they walked with Jake and Nick. Mari could see them all laughing at some stupid joke Caleb was telling.

She stepped off the porch and into Cole and Bear's waiting arms. Yep, life was perfect. Mari let her eyes stray to the other twins...Sam and Sky, Nick and Jake, Caleb and Rune. Now, what to do about the rest of the men in her life?

THE END

WWW.STORMYGLENN.COM

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stormy Glenn believes the only thing sexier than a man in cowboy boots is two, or three, men in cowboy boots. She also believes in love at first sight, soul mates, true love, and happy endings.

When she's not being a mother to her six teenagers or cleaning up after her two 70 pound lap puppies, you can usually find her cuddled in bed with a book in her hand or her laptop, creating the next sexy character for her stories.

Stormy welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website at www.stormyglenn.com



Siren Publishing, Inc.
www.SirenPublishing.com