

~ Sunrise III: Cabin Fever ~

by J.A. Bard

Disclaimers: The characters in this story are mine as is the topic of the story.

Language/Violence: There is some violence.

Love/Sex Warning/Disclaimer: This story depicts a love/sexual relationship between women. If you are under 18 years of age or live in a state or country where a story like this is illegal, please don't read it. There are many stories out there for you to read.

NOTE: There will be a sequel to this story.

Goddess bless and peace profound.

If you have anything to suggest, comments, etc., I'm willing to open up your mail.

Chapter 1

Elizabeth tossed her warm winter coat on top of the two overnight bags sitting on the floor boards in the back seat of Alex's Discovery II SUV along with supplies for three days. Elizabeth paused a moment and wondered if she was over packing for their trip to Alex's mountain cabin, where cold and snow were expected. She had never been up to Alex's home away from home. Alex had told her before she met her, sometimes she shared her days off with other women. Alex didn't want her to be upset if she should find forgotten clothing that didn't belong to her. Elizabeth stood staring at the packed SUV, thinking, did she harbor any jealousy. It would depend what, if anything, was found. Elizabeth laughed at herself. Chances were, her friend, Sam, went through the cabin and removed any incriminating evidence. Sam was like that.

"Elizabeth! Alex is on the phone," Linda called from the house.

Elizabeth closed the SUV's door and joined Linda Scripts in the kitchen. She and her husband agreed to house-sit or rather, watch over the cats while they took a few days off. Her husband was Detective Mark Scripts, Alex's partner with the Sunrise Police Department.

"She wants you to stop at the women's shelter. Genie has a thermos full of a breakfast surprise she mixed up for you two. Just what is a breakfast surprise?" Linda asked as she handed the portable phone to Elizabeth.

"Alex was hinting she wanted Genie to make apple pancake batter. But I think it's just plain old eggs and bacon, since Alex said she would be fixing breakfast, and you know she hasn't been at her best in the kitchen this week. She burnt the coffee twice yesterday." Elizabeth laughed when she heard Alex's indignant snort over the other line. "Hi, hon," Elizabeth answered sweetly. "Ready to make friends with the bears?"

"Don't even joke about that, Elizabeth. There really are bears up there. Good thing the cabin is reinforced with concrete along the base."

"Can bears swim? If not, we can install a moat with steep sides to prevent any visits," Elizabeth winked at Linda who was trying to stifle a not so quiet laugh.

"All right, I can tell when I'm the center of the joke. Laugh all you want now, but when one of those big furry beasts chase you..."

"Hon, it's winter and they hibernate," Elizabeth said.

"Right, right. But there is always one that bucks the biological clock," Alex said.

"You're mixing your bucks with your bears," Elizabeth said.

"Are you ready to pick me up?" Alex asked impatiently. "Damn. Writers always have to catch you on a mix of...whatchamacallits"

"No profanities in public. You're talking about your chauffeur and cook, darling. I'm on my way. Stand on the corner and I'll pick you up on the fly. Bye."

Linda laughed as she took the phone from Elizabeth.

"Linda, I want to thank you and Mark for taking care of the little ones, again. I hope you enjoy the privacy and maybe some quiet."

Linda gave her a quick hug. "Thank you for thinking of us. Don't get me wrong, I love my kids and in-laws, and I don't mind them bringing their dogs, but I also like breaks and I'm sure they will enjoy a break from us. The grans let them get away with a few things Mark and I won't. So, the occasional relaxing of rules is good especially if we're not the one's taking care of the consequences."

"Well, on your first night alone, be sure to use the outdoor hot tub. Looking up at the stars while in bubbling hot water is an indescribable experience."

"Hmm." Linda's eyes lit up, quickly abandoning the plan for finger food in front of the fireplace.

Elizabeth slid behind the steering wheel already thinking of the road up into the mountains she had mapped out. The electronic gate rolled shut as her back wheels crossed the small hump on the driveway.

Linda restrained the wolfhound by her collar. "You're staying, Angel. Don't you want some quality time with your dad? Hmmm? I sure do," she said. Linda gave a gentle tug on Angel's collar and both went back into the house.

Linda tapped the keys on the portable phone, knowing her husband's cell number by heart. "Hi, tall dark and lean...I got the candles, massage oil, and me dressed in something that would make your imagination sizzle. How about bringing something over of your very own and we can play pin the tail on the..." Linda giggled at her husband's interruption. "No, Mr. Detective. I want you dressed so I have something to work with. Don't be making it too easy. Elizabeth just took off. Where are you?...Still in Brisbane...Good. Can you stop at the bakery on Gower?...Uh huh, you got that. I'll see you in about an hour, and no stopping at home or the office," she ordered good naturedly.

Elizabeth stopped with the SUV's engine idling at the women's shelter's driveway. While waiting for Genie to deliver her surprise in a thermos, Elizabeth pulled her cell phone out to call Alex.

"Hey, hon. I'm at the House. Will I be too early? Should I find something to do until..." Elizabeth laughed. "I'll be on my way in a few."

Claire came out of the old Victorian House's back gate holding the thermos and a brown bag. Bruno trotted next to her sniffing the air.

"Hi, Elizabeth. The girls were just remarking they missed you at Tai Chi. I told them you were busy getting ready for a weekend trip to the mountains. Do you have enough warm clothing?"

"Yes. I'm too wound up to do any Tai Chi. Don't remind me that that is exactly what Tai Chi does... unwind me. I want to be excited."

"I don't blame you. Just be careful up there. I wish you took Genie up on borrowing Bruno."

"Poor Bruno would freeze up there. I couldn't bear to see a dog dressed in snowshoes and jumpsuit, thank you very much. So, are you going to tell me what's in this thermos or do I have to wait?"

"Wait. Better get going. Your mate will be sending out smoke signals if you take too long."

"I'm sure she's building the fire now." Elizabeth waved and headed towards the police station where she was sure Alex would be pacing. As it was, Alex was waiting outside of the station talking with Harriet, a fellow police officer.

Alex nodded goodbye to Harriet. As she opened up the passenger door she looked through the lightly tinted back window. The packed back reassured her she really was going on a weekend getaway.

"You two have a good time!" Harriet shouted as Elizabeth pulled away with a happy Alex strapping in.

"You bet," Alex said. "How was your day?" Alex asked dutifully, as she slid her hand into Elizabeth's.

"Busy. I didn't realize that cooking in the mountains would be different, so Genie gave me all this advice on how to bake and how long to boil and next thing I know, she's calling you to tell me to pick up a thermos of morning delight...." Elizabeth glanced at Alex.

"Morning's delight means pancake mix. Only if it's not too early in the morning."

"She also suggested we take Bruno with us. She thinks we need some protection since your friend Sam is not going to be there. Is she trying to tell me something?"

"She worries about everyone she likes." Alex drew Elizabeth's hand to her mouth and kissed her palm.

Momentarily overtaken by the rush of sensation, Elizabeth adeptly avoided hitting a parked car. "So, how was your day?"

Alex leaned back in her seat and closed her eyes. "Busy. We're back to working on our suspect list for the boss of the Jaded Amulet. My brain is weary going over it. Dr. Ebbens and Lily, though I do think they are up to something illegal, are not the bosses. Margaret, Margi and Gary have too many coincidences linking them. They also fit a lot of the prerequisites for making the list." Alex was quiet for a few moments as she let her thoughts wander through the evidence.

"Hopefully we haven't clued them in about our suspicions. Burns is checking out Margi's birth records to see if she was a twin. On a surface check, she was adopted. Burns did a background check on Margaret when she applied to work at the clinic, but he didn't ask for a copy of her birth certificate, so he's sent off a request to the Santa Ana Hall of Records. I spent most of the day racking my brain on trying to remember what I knew as a SID agent and what I know as a detective for Sunrise. I am so glad I gave up my covert work but..." she groaned, "I still have to keep confidences. Officially, there are only three people in Sunrise that know I worked for SID; you, Sam Bear and Chief Harper. Harper suggested I keep it that way. I thought for sure he was going to insist I tell Mark but..." she shook her head perplexed, "he decided the best kept secret was the one unspoken."

"I don't think much passes by Detective Mark Scripts. Did you keep notes as a detective separate from your other self," Elizabeth asked, curious how a covert operator worked.

"Yes. I went through my 'detective' notes this morning. Midmorning Mark got a call from Brisbane for the court so while he was gone I talked to the chief about my SID notes."

"Hmm," was Elizabeth's only comment.

"In the list of names I showed you," Alex continued.

"The one that you thought was a death list because five of the men on the list were dead," Elizabeth spoke, letting Alex know they were on the same page.

"Yes, that one. I had pulled some dog hairs from the folds of the paper as well as some lint. The dog hairs were identified as belonging to a brindle pit bull. Well, it turns out that Margaret has a brindle pit bull that she takes over to the vet in Brisbane that is registered to a Marco M. Wollas. She lived in Brisbane before she and Gary became a couple and rented the farm house on Tulare Lane. I located a Marco Wollas in Orange County where Margaret used to visit her ailing mother...her biological mother not her adopted one. SID's research found that Marco is also adopted and that his adopted family moved out of California shortly after the adoption."

"If you find that they all are related that would mean a government agency got involved...illegally?"

"Consider the coincidences," Alex suggested.

"So, you think these adopted people are related and are running this local group, the Jaded Amulet."

"This local group is statewide. That's a lot of territory to cover for one or two people. Why not siblings?"

"Because siblings always fight. That's why SID was able to bring about the White Knights demise...or end most of their businesses." Elizabeth glared out the windshield, not believing the family was toothless. Hopefully it would take a very long time to grow teeth.

"Uh huh," Alex agreed and then yawned. "Tell that to the mafia or any group that bans together and uses the term 'family' to describe its membership," she reminded her.

Elizabeth let out a noisy gust of air, knowing Alex was right. She was blindsided with her fresh memories and raw wounds of two powerful families taking the lives of two people she loved. "So you just about have this case figured out?"

Alex refrained from opening her eyes, being content to relax with the sway of the SUV. "Not entirely. Still too many loose ends. I want to know about the names on the list and if it is a hit list. I want to know about the missing hit guy. I think it's a woman...and I..."

"Whoa! What hit guy? You've left some gaps in your presentation of the facts, ma'am," Elizabeth scolded her.

"It wasn't part of SID's protection of you so I didn't say anything. But, yes, about a year ago, we found a body in the forest on the other side of the mountain from my cabin. It belonged to Henrich Reiner, an assassin from Europe. He was a cross dresser and used it effectively in his disguises. At the time of his death, we know that he had a protégé with him. I believe the protégé is female who is a male impersonator because it sounds like something Henrich Reiner would do. The way I read it, she survived whatever went

on in the forest and killed one of the names on the list that was up there in the forest with them." *And I suspect a few more but I can't prove that.* Alex sighed and scratched her nose.

"Another reason why I believe it's a woman," she continued, "is that before you arrived here, I was monitoring the Jaded Amulet and the local militia because the gang used the militia meetings as a cover to sell illegal weapons. During one of these meetings, a sniper took a few shots at me. I got one shot off and I hit her. From the blood samples we gathered, we know it's a female, but we haven't gotten much more information on her. SID was helping us due to the mutual interest SID and Harper had in getting the White Knights out of his back yard. Anyway, the sniper is still out there and I think she is probably pissed at me because I shot her."

"Who do you think tossed you off the cliff, before the body bag toss?"

Alex gave a short laugh. "Who told you about that?"

"Genie. She was using it as part of her argument as to why we needed to take Bruno to protect us."

"I got sloppy. It was the same night someone broke into my apartment. While one was checking my place, the other tailed me and couldn't pass up the opportunity to push me off a rock I was sitting on. I think that was Jaded Amulet work and that was what cinched my belief that the boss is more than one person."

"Uh huh. Alex. Think how this sounds: The head or heads of a crime organization, that covers California, stakes out your apartment personally, not to mention in a small town more than two hours from any major city...and when the opportunity presents itself, pushes you off a cliff. What makes you so important in this big org? My readers won't buy it...however, since I'm a willing participant that entertains the suspicion that Margaret at the Clinic is not always Margaret but sometimes..."

"Margi," Alex chorused with Elizabeth.

"But, when I step back from it..." Elizabeth left it hanging

"Why would a crime group have people here in Sunrise?" Alex asked. "The only advantage of having a 'gang' here is the lack of Coast Guard patrol, the wilderness area to conduct business, and a PD force that has their hands full working on other cases..." she trailed off, tired of asking the same questions and not getting answers.

Elizabeth's voice grew soft as she turned an idea over in her mind. "So, are you telling me we need to worry about a sniper being out in the woods with us?"

"I hope not. It's too cold up in the mountains. Her fingers would get cold and her limbs would get stiff. Both not good for accuracy. And she'll only get one try," Alex threatened.

"I hope you're right."

Alex turned her head to study Elizabeth's profile. Elizabeth's light tone belied the tension Alex saw. She was sure though, once she showed Elizabeth her passageway under the cabin to the woodshed, Elizabeth would feel somewhat better.

Alex sighed heavily and turned back to looking out the front windshield.

"That was a heavy sigh," Elizabeth commented.


"I was just thinking I need to leave work behind. This is our R&R."

"Alex, where do I turn?"

"Left. Slow down or we'll miss the back road. Yes, right here."

When they finally rolled up to Alex's parking spot, both women entertained the idea of dumping everything on the kitchen floor and going to bed.

However, before Alex fell into bed, while Elizabeth checked the kitchen out and put things away, Alex checked to see if anyone had been by.



Chapter 2

Scampering sounds above her had Alex's senses fully engaged, while she struggled with her body's natural instinct to seek cover. She remained on her stomach curled around a pillow; the pillow that she would normally have her P7 semi-automatic under. However, when sleeping with someone she had made sure it was just out of hands reach.

"It's a squirrel," Elizabeth said, with amusement.

Alex rolled over to stare at the tall figure standing in the doorway to the kitchen. "Howong..." she cleared her throat, and tried again. "How long has..." then changed directions, "how long have you been up?" She thought she should have been cognizant of Elizabeth getting up.

"A while. Is it a friend of yours?"

Alex threw the covers back and slid out of bed, deciding she might as well get up. It was still dark but the smell of coffee had her mind set on a cup, dark and no sugar.

"No. I know better about feeding or befriending the wildlife."

Alex headed to the toilet, and squeezed behind the door to shower. Normally, it was just a small inconvenience that the once two by two foot closet was converted to a shower stall for the space the hot tub took, but today it was very annoying.

By the time she made it to the kitchen breakfast smells comingled with coffee. Her stomach growled in appreciation, and she was more than happy it wasn't her cooking.

"Good morning. Is that Genie's breakfast surprise?" Alex asked.

"Good morning. They aren't the pancakes you were expecting, but just as good. Eggs with all sorts of interesting things tossed in," Elizabeth leaned over to receive the kiss Alex was offering. Alex looked up at her ceiling as more tiny feet scampered across the cabin roof.

"The noise started about an hour after we went to bed," Elizabeth informed her as she turned the burner off under their omelets. "They must think we're invading their space."

"They must be in the attic. Is there anything I can get?"

"Your cupboards are bare so there's nothing to add that isn't already on the table."

Alex sat at the table, noting that Elizabeth had moved her laptop and papers to the top of the bookcase. Elizabeth filled each plate with food and sat down.

While eating, Elizabeth took another look around the room. The front part of Alex's private hide-away was bare of personal items. It was a rectangular shaped room that served as a kitchen and front room with a potbellied stove that kept the front room warm. The dining table was handily set near a bookcase and electrical outlet, with a window to look out of. The room had a small couch and a comfortable reading chair with a reading lamp attached to a small table. Alex had told her that a popular writer previously owned the cabin and used it as his retreat to write. However, Elizabeth knew of the writer and his famous high-tension violent spy books. She suspected the man was paranoid in real life, and the bomb shelter and tunnel that ran from the cabin to the woodshed confirmed her suspicion. The security system now installed with the cabin she guessed was Alex's doing, since her previous job with SID left her open to attacks.

Elizabeth wondered about the energy around the cabin since Sam was a retired CIA operative and chose to live isolated in a cabin about fifteen minutes from Alex's.

"Since you were awake most of the night, you'll be going to bed soon, huh?"

"That's true. Sleep patterns are harder to change than what I thought. However, I'm not that tired at the moment. I took a nap for a while."

"After we clean up, how about a small tour?"

"Just what I had in mind. I didn't want to go looking around without you...just in case you may have someone stashed somewhere," Elizabeth teased

"No, I moved all my skeletons and what not's out before I brought you up here. Though, I still may have a blowup doll."

Elizabeth chuckled. "So you say."

Elizabeth was studying the spy equipment in an unlocked cabinet in the basement, while Alex went through a wall closet. "I didn't realize I had these up here. When Sam ran me through his wilderness training I bought stuff I thought I would need. It turned out Sam had plenty of equipment ...but I feel better using my own."

"Why do you scan for bugs up here? Expecting trouble or just a safe place to keep things?"

"Though Sam keeps an eye on the cabins up here, he's not some big eye in the sky that can see everything, so I make sure I can dial in via my PC and keep an eye on the place. Remote viewing a la internet. "

"Eye in the sky...the satellites the government uses to keep an eye on everyone," Elizabeth said. "It saved my butt a few times, so I'm being a hypocrite when I say I'm very uncomfortable with the type of people behind it. The government has some very dark people with not very nice plans for the common citizen."

"Every country has black ops and people that want to dominate the masses. Our media is flooded with subliminal messages that the government chooses not to regulate and video games are used to indoctrinate the users without their knowledge and for what purpose? Not everyone reacts to the same stimulus. I would go crazy trying to do right if I didn't focus on what I can do without worrying about what I can't. What do you believe, Elizabeth?" she asked in a lighter voice, hoping to tone the seriousness down.

"I believe thought matters. What I think is what my world reflects back at me. If I want to learn something new, I know I have to open myself up to wonders and things I have no description for because, it's new." She was quiet for a few moments, and though she was looking at her, Alex knew it wasn't her she was seeing.

"If you're climbing to the top of a mountain, don't expect to reach it without some strenuous work. The journey is the lesson and without it, there's nothing new at the end."

"So lose all expectation and you'll discover new things," Alex said. "I guess that belief was hard to practice with Bobby messing with you."

"This is supposed to be a vacation. The past is the past. Sorry about the dark thoughts. Every now and then..."

"I know that well." Alex moved to the wall and felt along the rough edges. A doorway opened into a dark entrance.

"Let's check this out. This tunnel goes to the wood shed. When a blizzard hits or the snow is too high, it works out well when I need more wood."

As they walked down the tunnel Elizabeth could see that it was made from old concrete water pipes. Alex moved her light and RF detector along the pipe connections and small air vents. There was a white tube at the top that had electrical boxes along it for lights.

"Your lights don't work?" Elizabeth asked, curious also why they were red.

"Yes. They're red so my night vision isn't bothered. Flashlights work better during daylight. When I stay up here I usually check the tunnel before going to bed," Alex said. "Last night I just looked at the alarm messages. I had already checked the cabin from work so I didn't expect any trouble."

They reached a y-joint in the tunnel. "This way opens near the water tank." She shined her light to a short tunnel. "The septic tank is on the other side of the cabin. The previous owner has a periscope is on top of the water tank that gives a bird's eye view of who's on the property without having to open the front door."

"I now believe the rumors that Harold White was as paranoid as his stories were," Elizabeth said.

They moved further down the main tunnel. Alex paused to pick up a small wood chip that was in an otherwise clean tunnel floor. "Turn your light off," she said. She lifted the floor high enough to extend her bug detector. She quickly drew it back in and closed the floor door. "Looks like someone has been in the woodshed."

Alex led them back to the basement. The morning sun was shining through the windows when they stepped into the kitchen via the broom closet.

"Do you think someone was in your tunnel?" Elizabeth asked, nervously looking toward the windows.

"No. Where each pipe fits into the other there is a motion sensor that starts a camera. I put them in myself. None of them registered a visitor. The wood chip could have been from someone walking around the wood shed. There's a vent for air that the chip could have been kicked down."

"Not done by, say that squirrel that's running around in your attic?"

"Maybe. A squirrel is better than something bigger."

"Like a bear who is ignoring his biological time clock?"

"I'll take the squirrel over the bear. Not even Xena, Warrior Princess bare handed could wrestle a cranky bear to sleep."

"You're right. She would knock it out. So what are you going to do?"

"Go out and take a look at the shed. We need wood for the heater."

Elizabeth looked at the nicely stacked wood against the wall in the wood box, then back at Alex that was adding things to her pockets from a box she had pulled out.

"We're going to be burning a lot of wood tonight," Alex explained as she checked her back holster to reassure herself that her gun was in place, and then she stepped outside.

Thirty minutes later Alex was back looking furious. "That blasted squirrel!"

Elizabeth looked closely at the bruise forming on her forehead. "What happened to you?"

"That damn squirrel threw a nut at me! I thought squirrel's hibernated too or snuggled up in their tree hole and ate their stored nuts!"

"They don't hibernate but they do stick close to home where it's warmer. It isn't rabid, is it?"

"I think it's going through a psychotic break down."

"A psycho squirrel to keep us company. I can think of worse things to have on a vacation. So, are we being trapped inside here?" Elizabeth asked.

"No! I'm not going to let some dingy squirrel trap me indoors!"

Elizabeth pulled her warm coat on. She intended to give Alex support in her next trip outdoors. Maybe Alex was too close to its stash of food.

"So, what are we going to do out here?" Elizabeth asked she walked in the steps Alex had left in the snow, leading to and from the woodshed.

"Get some wood. The squirrel was in the shed. When I was looking around the shed for any devices not planted by me...I must have scared it."

"Not it scaring you?" Elizabeth teased. "Now I think I see some sort of cause for it getting upset. Maybe the shed is it's home and it stored it's nuts there. You didn't happen to see if it's a tree squirrel or..."

Alex's blank look had Elizabeth rephrasing the question. "Did it have a tail bigger than its body or was it a tiny red or black squirrel?"

"A big tail," Alex affirmed.

"Well, it's not defending it's food cache. They hide food in all sorts of places. That's the tree squirrel. The smaller tailed ones stash their food where they live."

Before pulling the shed door open, Alex looked back at Elizabeth then gave a good perusal around the area to see if there was anything out of place, like other footprints in the snow. Nothing from her angle. Turning back to the immediate problem, she cautiously opened the door, turned on the light before stepping in.

Elizabeth couldn't figure out if Alex was pulling her leg with all the dramatics or if there was really something they should worry about. She followed Alex in and closed the door behind them to cut out the cold. She watched as Alex pulled a CPM700 out and began to sweep the shed, starting with the ceiling. All Elizabeth could see was piles of dust and huge thick spider webs that had long ago been abandoned.

"It's clear. I like to practice vigilance when I'm not in familiar territory. It's to keep up my skills."

"I'll remember that and not be alarmed if you should appear with night vision goggles when going to the toilet at night," Elizabeth said.

"Good. After all this is a vacation to leave behind our usual worries," Alex said. "Put your arms out and I'll drop a few cuts of wood."

"Now I know why you brought me along," Elizabeth said.

Alex latched the shed and locked it as the left. Elizabeth was wondering how they were to escape into the shed if she just locked it.

"I hope that squirrel doesn't get upset that you just locked it out of what could be its winter home."

"It's supposed to be wild and find its own home," Alex said. "When it gets warmer, I'll find where they got into the attic and block it off."

"Tree squirrels are adaptable. The gray squirrel can be traced back to 50 million years," Elizabeth said.

"That old, no wonder they move so fast," Alex muttered as she dumped her cords into the wood box on the porch.

"Why is that?" Elizabeth asked puzzled as she followed suit and let the wood slide off her arms.

"To avoid getting grabbed by those prehistoric birds or stomped on by something bigger than itself." Alex shouldered open the door and ducked as something came whizzing by her head.

"Hey!" Elizabeth pushed past Alex dragging her inside and both of them hitting the floor.

Two thuds hit the door.

"What did I tell you!" Alex remarked rolling to her feet outraged.

"That isn't a squirrel, Alex."

Alex immediately dropped back to the ground swiveling to glance at Elizabeth who was lying where she landed on the kitchen floor.

"What is it?" Alex asked.

"A draft prospect for a pitching position," Elizabeth said, and then chuckled at the look of chagrin on Alex's face. "It's either someone using a sling shot or that squirrel should be drafted."

After taking a glance around the room to see if it was safe, Alex rose and left the room, returning with a scope. At the corner of the kitchen window she panned the area in front of the cabin. She thought she detected movement, a shadow, and refocused the lens.

"Blasted squirrel. There he is. Hmm. He's making tracks for the next tree. Good riddance."

"Well, I'm beginning to get tired. Would you mind if I took a nap while you spy on the squirrel population?"

"Think I'm getting squirrely, huh?"

Elizabeth gave her a dour look. "I can't believe you actually would use that pun."

"It's appropriate. Sweet dreams." Alex rose from her crouched position to kiss Elizabeth on the lips, lingering for a few moments before breaking. "Hey, spying on the wildlife up here is not my usual routine when I'm up here alone."

"I sure hope not," Elizabeth told her and retreated to the bedroom.

Alex returned to studying the outside. Something was giving her creepy feelings and it wasn't the squirrels. Her clothes were too dark to sneak around outside; and without all white apparel, she would be an easy target. Besides she didn't want to leave Elizabeth alone.

She pulled out her cellular phone. It had a voice scrambler and since she was calling Mark who also had one on his phone, she thought she was secured. She pressed the button to activate it, then cursed to herself. Bad reception. No signal booster.

After trying to unsuccessfully read a book and being too wound up to snuggle with Elizabeth, she decided to go out. Normally when Sam was gone she would check the place around Sam's just as Sam would check her place.

Alex's walk to Sam's cabin took more than the usual fifteen minutes to make a path through the snow and stopping often to listen to the surrounding sounds. The plops of snow falling from the snow laden tree limbs made her jumpy, but she continued with her shuffling, bent forward in the almost knee high snow. She could hear squirrels chattering and noted that there were now more than two of them following her progress.

As she neared Sam's door, three squirrels in the tree near Sam's cabin were making a lot of noise. For a moment she wondered if they were real...after all Disney could create life-like mechanical animals. Alex looked around as she felt that itch at the back of her neck, like someone was sighting her through the cross hairs of a scope. She knocked the snow off her boots on the boot brush and drew out her key. She left her boots inside the door.

Sam was a master of lying traps. She slowly moved through the room, glad that where she was going had a few traps she could safely pass. Her worry was that if someone was watching her with a thermal detector they would see a pattern to her movements and decipher how to bypass the traps.

From a trunk she pulled out a white coat, pants, gloves and a GPS cellular phone she had thought she would never need again. She folded everything in an overnight bag and walked into the kitchen where she left a note.

I need a visual reason for visiting his cabin. Walking out with an overnight bag is not good. Food. Leftovers. Sam always has leftovers. I wonder what he has.

Inside of his refrigerator were four Tupperware containers. One had a note attached.

'Alex, here's the rest of the lamb stew. Hope there's enough for both of you. Take the rest of the bread too.

Sam

Alex looked at it suspiciously then rubbed her forehead, feeling ridiculous. She was back to disbelieving what she was seeing. Surely, someone, besides the squirrels was watching them. Was it Sam? Was he setting up a trap for someone and using her and Elizabeth as bait? Not likely. Not with Elizabeth.

Alex studied the seal around the cap looking for the telltale mark Sam always left. Sam was more paranoid than she. Not finding the seal she put the container in her bag, though she would not eat it, and pulled out another. Leaving behind things she was expected to take would arouse suspicion. And since some of the containers looked like they were tampered with...someone obviously had been in here besides Sam. After going through the refrigerator she moved to the cake dish above the refrigerator. He was going to be gone for days and the cake would probably be old and stale when he returned. However, there was no seal.

Damn! A chocolate double dutch fudge cake. It would have been nice. It would be like Sam to put Exlax in it just to teach me a lesson.

The chattering of the squirrels outside and sliding snow from the roof, brought a small groan from Alex. She listened for a moment curious about the sound of feet crunching in the snow. Worried, Alex moved cautiously into the front room and looked out the one-way windows. Elizabeth was trudging towards the cabin.

Alex glanced at her watch and realized she had been gone for over an hour. If someone was watching this place, she could have compromised herself. What had got in to her?

"Hey," Alex called softly as she stepped out onto the porch with the bag. "He left us some leftovers. Lamb stew."

"I was wondering if the squirrel had something to worry about," Elizabeth looked around the porch and then returned her gaze to Alex.

"Worry about?"

"You going after it." Elizabeth smiled and pointed to the bag, "I gather you found something to eat."

"Oh, Yes. Sam is not just a good cook but he bakes the most mouthwatering bread and chocolate cake you ever had."

Both women turned to look toward the direction a projectile that landed near their feet came from. Three squirrels with long tails were on a branch watching them.

"It's either a virus or hereditary."

Once back in her cabin Alex unloaded the bag. She handed Elizabeth a voice scrambler and one she slipped into her pocket.

"Is there a reason for this paranoia?" Elizabeth asked worriedly.

"Aside from the fact it is near that time of the moon for me?" Alex looked around the cabin and then nodded. "Someone's been in my cabin and I'm not sure it was Sam. Usually when Sam checks this place he leaves something behind that tells me he's passed through, just like I do for him."

"What about his?" Elizabeth asked as she peered at what was in the container. She closed her eyes for a moment and wrinkled her nose.

"No. He had containers in his refrigerator that had been gone through, including the one with OUR lamb stew, so I took that one and another that was still sealed so whoever had been in his place would not suspect I guessed the food was messed with."

"Well, in this container it's definitely not lamb stew. What is Sam's hobby besides rescuing people?"

Alex looked at her puzzled. *Rescuing people? What does she mean by that?*

Elizabeth, unnoticed by Alex, winced; she had yet to tell Alex when she first met Sam.

Alex shrugged her shoulders at her own thoughts and took the container in question from Elizabeth. "What is it?"

"Looks like someone's science project. Perhaps you should be more careful what you remove from his frig. Let me put it in ours and we'll return it before we leave here."

"Yes. Hungry?"

"Not really. After looking at the contents of that container, I think I'll wait."

Both women studied each for a few moments before Alex moved to her and slipped her arms around Elizabeth's waist, pulling her close. They stood that way for a while, holding each other, letting the sexual tension build, ignoring the running feet across the attic that started up again.

"What are you thinking," Elizabeth asked after a while.

"How to get rid of that squirrel and his buddies," Alex told her, moving her hands across Elizabeth's back, while gently nibbling her neck. "And one way, is to ignore them. Care to help?"

Elizabeth pushed Alex back a step and kissed her hard on the lips. "I have a good idea for distractions...like to share a hot tub?"

"It's going to take a while to fill the tub...but, I can think of some things to do until then."

"Too late for warm ups...I already filled the tub. Come-on. I also found some interesting things on the shelf near the tub. Care to show me how they work?"

Alex's mind went blank trying to remember just what she had in the bathroom besides razor, mint shaving cream, plastic clothes pins... Alex swallowed and then followed the tug a smiling Elizabeth gave her as she led the way into the bathing room.

Chapter 3

"Well, I can see that we have the old stand-by for after Thanksgiving," Alex held her turkey sandwich up. "I love turkey sandwiches. Besides the turkey dinner, to me this is the second best part."

"Turkey sandwiches?"

"Yes. Thick cuts of meat with mayonnaise. Mmmmm. The only thing my mother was good at...baking turkeys, while I perfected the sandwich by using wheat nut bread and for variation, a slice of cheese."

Elizabeth nodded at Alex wondering if this would be a good time to ask her more questions about her mother. If Alex spoke about her family it was usually about her trips to visit her twin aunts that lived in Washington State. That's about all she really knew, with the exception of her mother's boyfriends and husbands who sometimes abused Alex and her brother. She also, knew her brother had died in a motorcycle accident but Alex didn't seem especially distressed over his death. Elizabeth decided to leave that for another time.

"So, do you have any games?"

Alex looked up from her half eaten sandwich. "I have plenty of those...do you like computer games, or...were you referring to something else?"

"I'm not that up on computer games...board games I am."

"What kind of board game have you in mind?"

"I noticed in your basement you have a Chutes and Ladders game. I got pretty good at that with Noel."

Alex looked up, annoyed with the noise in her attic. "I had bought it for Katie for last Christmas and hid it up here because she can find presents like a blood hound on a scent and forgot where I hid it."

"She already has the game."

"I bought another. What are they doing up there?"

"We can play in the basement where you won't hear your up stair guests,"

Elizabeth laughed.

Both women were startled when a boom sounded above their heads then a rocking motion, followed by a few more muffled booms. Darkness engulfed them.

Alex rolled off the couch, knocking the Chutes and Ladders players onto the floor. Quickly she made her way to her emergency trunk, pulling out her flashlight and backup gun.

The ground shook again.

Alex crept up the stairs to her cabin but backed down when the floor cover was hot to the touch.

"What was that? A gas explosion? Did we leave the gas on?" Elizabeth asked.

"No, it wasn't our gas. Let's wait out the fire. This bomb shelter is a secured room. It was made for something worse than this. With all that noise, Grey Horse would have heard it at the ranger station."

"With that much noise we should also be getting the Mounties," Elizabeth said. "Your vacations are a bit too exciting, Alex."

Alex moved her flashlight near the staircase. The metal trapdoor and the seal were preventing smoke to leak. "I agree. I would rather something more relaxing. Let's dress warmly and see what it looks like at the water tank and wood shack."

Alex went to the trunk and pulled out clothing and a weapon.

"I sure hope it was just an accident," Elizabeth said.

"Me too, but I'm not taking chances. "These are Mark's and will fit you better. They're white and before the fire, would have let you blend in with the snow. With the explosion there's going to be debris of I don't know what."

"After this vacation, we're hiring a vacation planner," Elizabeth said as she pulled the large pants over her sweatpants.

"I agree."

Alex lead the way to the water tower exit, thinking if there was a fire, that would be one place not damaged. Through the vents water was dripping. Alex pushed at the cover plate and finally got it to open. Looking out she could see flames in the night, still burning what was left of her cabin and her neighbors. Looking toward Sam's cabin, she could see there was a fire over there too.

"Whatever caused all this, covered a lot of ground." Alex pulled herself out of the tunnel and turned to help Elizabeth out.

"Alex," Sam said from behind her.

"Sam! Are you alright?"

"Are you two alright? Do you two know how damn lucky you are? Come on. We need to get you out of here before the FAA and any sightseers find out about your basement"

What happened?" Alex and Elizabeth asked simultaneously.

"A small drone plane flew overhead. It must have had explosives because as it went over your neighbor's cabin, it exploded, then your cabin and then mine. Someone wanted to be sure they hit their target. Your SUV exploded too. We'll be staying at one of the guest cabins down the road until you get a ride back down the mountain." He sniffed the air as he led them away from the collapsed water tank. "I can smell snow soon."

Sam crunched his way to his SUV parked on one of the back roads. The three gratefully climbed into Sam's battered SUV. It was still warm.

"You have a phone that works, Sam? I have to call the chief and let him know we're okay."

While Alex called her boss, Elizabeth, sitting in the passenger seat, studied Sam carefully. "So Sam what have you been up to lately?"

Sam briefly glanced at her and then looked back out at the road as they bumped along. "Not much. Spent some time in the city getting pampered...got bored and headed back early."

Elizabeth nodded, partially listening to Alex's conversation. There seemed to be an argument going on which kept Alex preoccupied.

Elizabeth first met Sam when her previous lover, an FBI agent, introduced him as one of her few real friends in the business. It was because of Sam, that Elizabeth came to work with SID. It was her trust in him that gave her strength during the hard times.

"Did you see the plane?" she asked softly.

"I picked up the radio wave and went out to see what was going on. I could barely see it but when the first bomb went off at the first cabin, I didn't wait around to see if I was the next."

"Is there anyone else up here?"

"Not many people up this weekend. Too soon after Thanksgiving and there's a storm coming in. Another reason for me to get back early. I prefer to be snowed in than out."

"Sam?"

"Yes?" Sam replied to Alex.

"Just when did you get back? I checked your cabin out earlier..."

"Did you take my road kill specimen?"

"Was that what was in the pink bowl?" Elizabeth asked.

"Yes. Someone's been practicing with a sling shot on the wildlife."

Alex touched her forehead. "A sling shot? That's what hit on the head."

"I didn't get back while there was enough light to see if there were any tracks around my cabin," Sam said.

They got out of the SUV and hurried to the cabin. The wind was picking up and it was cold. While Alex secured the cabin, Sam started a fire in the potbellied heater. Elizabeth did her own checking of the cupboards. There were two cans of baked beans and in a plastic container, something she couldn't recognize in the light from her flashlight.

"We're going to have to setup watch," Sam said. "It's too dark for the rangers to come up and investigate and the storm is already here."

"I'll take the first watch, then Elizabeth and then you. You looked wiped." Alex said. Sam and Alex looked at their time pieces, figuring how long each watch would be.

Sam nodded and moved a chair closer to the fire.

"Who is after us now?" Elizabeth asked.

"I have a lot of ideas. Whoever it is, I hope they freeze to death in the storm." She settled away from the window worrying about bullets that could pierce the building's walls. Right now she was feeling exposed. She got up and started to head for the bedroom to look around.

"Shh," Sam whispered, straightening up after colliding with Alex.

"Sam, I don't like this. I'm feeling like an exposed duck here," she whispered.

"Me too. I think until the storm is over, we may be safer in your bomb shelter."

"It's going to be the first time I've used his life support stuff."

"That's okay, I helped him set it up. We'll head over there and worry about who knows you have a basement later."

"You know, it's snowing out there," Elizabeth informed the other two.

"That'll be a mixed blessing. I have warmer clothing we can slip into and weapons if you need some," he said to Alex.

"How the hell you can be so prepared when your place went up," Alex asked.

"I'm like a squirrel that stores my stuff in more than one pile. Before we go, I need to check out my SUV."

"I'll help; Elizabeth can be the look out."

Stepping out on the porch, none of them could see due to the thick snow fall.



Chapter 4

Progress was slow as Sam searched for two of his supply caves in the dark, and then, minus the usual trees for locating Alex's cabin, found the remains of the water tank and then the entrance back into the bomb shelter.

Sam knew more about the accommodations in the shelter than Alex did. He showed them where under a cover against a wall were cots to pull out. Warmer and dry, the three attempted to sleep.

Meanwhile, the snow storm raged on, covering everything in another layer of white.

The white clad figure that had guided the drone and fired at the cabins, was disgusted with the winds from the approaching storm. They had caused him to miss his first shot. As the assassin was coming out the back way, the old man's SUV was spotted with three passengers in it, taking shelter in an empty rental cabin. It meant his job wasn't finished.

When the chill factor dropped and the snow started to fall, the assassin decided it wasn't worth losing digits over and rather than finding shelter in a cabin that had no warmth, left for a warmer place. There was always another day.

"Hey, you two. Rise and shine. We need to make contact with the outside world," Sam told the two women.

Alex rose stiffly. Sleeping in a cot took the body a while to get used to. She dropped out of it. Folded her blanket and reattached the cot to the wall.

"I can't believe I didn't see these when I looked the basement over."

"You were distracted, if I recall," Sam said.

"So, what do you have in mind?" Alex asked, pulling on her boots.

"It's still overcast and colder than an iceberg out there. Two feet of new snow. I contacted Grey Horse. He's bringing fed agents out to investigate. Drones aren't the usual weapons of the local militia. We'll go the long way around to avoid contamination of the area."

"Is there a way we can get them to not find this shelter? Once it's in the reports..."

Sam nodded. "Amanda Briscole can keep secrets. Joe Carpenter is her partner. I don't know much about him."

"Amanda? What brings SID and not DEA," Alex asked.

"Me, I thought. What has you worried?" Elizabeth asked curious.

"The MO of this accident has the SID worried," Sam said.

"So, where are we going?" Elizabeth asked.

"It would be wise to send you back down with Gray Horse but he's already making the long trip to the airport and back with the agents."

"What is SID worried about it?" Alex decided that if Sam was answering Elizabeth's questions without his usual noncommittal replies then she may as well start asking her own questions.

"Someone stole four remote controlled small planes that were in a storage unit SID uses."

"Hm," Alex rubbed her forehead. "Well, that certainly has my red flag warnings up."

"Yep. To complicate matters...don't forget 9-11 and the ever-present terrorist threat."

"Who's working on this besides the SID?" Alex asked suspiciously.

"No one."

"You know, I would say you are a magnet for trouble Sam...but I can't."

Sam nodded. "For that matter...all three of us."

"Not Elizabeth," Alex said.

"Do you know that for sure?" Elizabeth asked. "I don't feel all that safe."

"What we need to do is stay safe until SID gets up here and I can send you two back home."

"So, we're now to the question...who was the target?" Alex looked up at the exit to her snug bomb shelter. She pulled out the periscope and looked for any sign of life.

"Hey, I got a hit," she whispered excitedly.

Sam exchanged places with her. "Uh huh. Do you have a telescope stronger than this?"

"You can kick it up," she explained pushing a small button at the base.

"Ehh. Not so smart to let us see a rifle," he muttered softly as he moved the periscope around looking for anything else. "I know there wasn't anyone out there earlier." He swung it back to where the sniper was and then cursing under his breath. "Our visitor has disappeared."

"Someone approaching?" Alex asked.

"Not sure," he whispered, least their visitor was near.

Alex got anxious. Sam must have got the same feeling because he had them moving back to the shelter. Suddenly behind them they heard a cover move, the soft noise amplified by the tunnel. Sam pushed Alex forward who in turn pushed Elizabeth forward, then slammed the door close. They all heard a thunk just before the door shut.

"Holy shit!" Alex whispered. "That's an assassin."

"Someone is determined to collect on their contract," Sam said.

"Now for sure this is not going to be my safe house."

"Why not?" Sam asked as he moved into the space behind the shelves. "What do you have in here?"

"What are you looking for? It's where Mark and I store I stuff."

"We need to get topside and nab our assassin before he or she gets away," he said.

Elizabeth raised two eyebrows. "We?"

"You'll be our eyes."

Alex looked toward her worriedly then back at Sam. She sighed. Maybe she should ask Elizabeth before she made decisions for her.

"Elizabeth..." she started.

"I'm fine, Alex. I've done worse."

"Worse?" she asked worried.

"Yes. Sitting and waiting is the worst thing I have ever done. I would do anything no matter how scary."

Alex looked over at Sam uncertain.

Sam pulled out equipment he needed. There were four radios. Sometimes Sam had Genie, Mark and her chasing him and she was the keeper of the radios. He set the frequency and handed one to her and one to Elizabeth. He pulled out two sniper rifles and a pair of white socks, handing one rifle and sock to Alex. She slid the sock over the barrel.

"The rules, don't speak unless it's for misdirection, or a real emergency." He taped one of the buttons causing it to give off static. "Assume but don't rely on the idea that our hunter can hear." He pushed in the ear bud and connected it to the radio. Elizabeth and Alex fit in their ear buds.

"Where are we going to exit from here?" Alex asked out of curiosity.

"Well, there if it's safe on the other side of that door. Alex?"

Alex put her hand against the door and then flicked the channels on the cameras she had monitoring her hide away. "Cameras have been knocked out. The door feels warm. Check it out."

Sam placed his hand on the door, as did Elizabeth. He frowned and waited a few minutes more. "It's cooling. Stun grenade with a canister attached. At least it's not phosphorous." He took a deep breath.

"I don't like the idea of us all exiting out the same place," Alex mentioned, knowing it was looking like that was exactly what they would have to do.

"Me too," Elizabeth agreed.

Sam looked at the door to where he would have liked to have escaped through. "I think we can take the stairs through the cabin and then check the scene before we can split three ways. We can all start up the back but there's a rock that Elizabeth can roost on and spy out the land. It's light out, but visibility isn't going to last with the weather."

Alex nodded, having lived through two years of winters in the area, she quickly learned that unless she planned on spending the week snowed in, it was wise to either beat the snow storm and get out or plan to hibernate.

"Isn't there a way to check on the tunnel?" Elizabeth asked.

"Yes," two voices answered. "If you want to stick your head out there," Alex added. "The tunnel is made of stuff to withstand an explosion but if it's a phosphorous fire...it'll be burning for a long time."

"So, the way to see if there is a fire is to see if the snow is melting topside," Elizabeth guessed.

The two looked at each other. "Yes. Alright, let me take a sneak peek from the top of the stairs."

Sam climbed up the stairs with Alex close behind to pull him back to safety if necessary. However, through one of the air vents he slid the goose necked telescope to look around. "Looks okay. Visibility is bad. Snowflakes are pretty big out there. Listen, I don't want any of you getting lost."

"Don't lose your radio Elizabeth. It has a locator in it for us to find you," Alex warned her.

Elizabeth nodded and slid it into her coat pocket and buttoned it down.

Sam smiled. "Do you know how to fire one of these things?" He handed Elizabeth a P7.

She checked the lock, removed the clip, shoved it back in and held it loosely at her side. "Right."

"Is there something you want to tell me, girlfriend?" Alex asked feeling off balance.

"I had a girlfriend in the FBI, remember? She insisted I learn what I wrote about. If my detective was going to pull out a gun, I had to learn it inside out." She smiled at Alex. "That's not saying I can hit the bulls eye but it does mean I look before I shoot. I also know what a look out does. Clueless Until Midnight was my training manual."

Sam exchanged looks with Elizabeth and nodded. "Sure was. Let's go. I'll give you five minutes to get in position and then I'm out. You don't have a watch," he pointed to Elizabeth. She shook her head.

"You'll hear Alex tell you when to go."

The two women nodded. Alex moved to the door and checked the door again. It was cool. Carefully she pulled the door open. She paused and then moved out, her gun extended in two hands before her. She flipped a switch near the door and a red glow lit up the tunnel, though some of the lights were out with red bits scattered on the floor.

Elizabeth was terrified, but she moved forward listening for anything louder than her heartbeat. She had been through several mock training skirmishes with Helen, her FBI girlfriend, to get a feel for what it was like. On her first one she froze because it seemed so real. The second wasn't as bad and she actually got a compliment for thinking quick by not shooting the wrong person. But after her two years of being stalked, this type of activity seemed to have a less numbing effect on her and she managed not to stumble on suddenly clumsy feet.

Her eyes studied the bits of metal lying about as they neared where the grenade had been tossed. The top to the opening was just big enough for a fist. But to release the latch required Alex's encrypted code, not something Elizabeth easily remembered.

Alex showed her two fingers and mimicked clicking on the radio then showed three fingers. Elizabeth nodded and let Alex unlock the larger cover. Snow covering the tunnel floor dropped down. Elizabeth adjusted her NV goggles and then nodded at Alex. Alex made sure she knew to use the periscope before poking her head up. Elizabeth nodded relieved. She had every intention of looking before jumping out of Alice's hole.

Elizabeth scanned the area, and not seeing anything when the two clicks on her radio sounded, she counted to three and climbed the ladder, lying flat in the cold snow. The cover moved back into place automatically. She rolled to her left, knowing that there was debris from the cabins scattered about. She was hoping not to discover any body parts from wildlife. She brought her attention back to her task. To observe, she needed a high point. She headed for a huge boulder covered in snow. She wondered if Alex was right and the assassin would not use a rifle because her fingers would be too cold to squeeze off the perfect shot.

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Alex moved up the stairs to what was left of her woodpile. Silently she cursed whoever was responsible for burning out her entire winter store of wood and a cabin that was just getting comfortable. She glanced at her watch and waited for one more minute before she gave Elizabeth the signal. She then hefted her rifle with her and ran from the remains of the woodshed and through the remains of the plane. She could see footsteps

already being covered with the falling snow. The footsteps headed towards Sam's cabin. Rather than follow them she headed up the rocky slope, intent on getting a view of the area that used to have three cabins.

Alex dropped to her stomach and held her rifle pointing in the direction where she thought she heard someone grunt. Above her she could now hear heavy breathing and blowing on fingers. Visibility was low in the blowing snow.

Damn! They are going to see my footprints if they look this way.

But the crunch of footsteps continued above her, crossing to her left back towards her cabin. She counted to five and rose. Looking in the direction of the footsteps, all she saw were footsteps. Glancing around her cautiously, she studied anything not blending in, not trusting anything to luck.

She moved far enough away to still see the break in the snow from the footsteps but not to be seen. The terrain she was moving over was rocky, slippery and difficult to move over very quickly. Whoever it was, was making fast progress. The snow started coming down harder so she could only see a yard ahead of her.

Stopping to rethink this approach, she nearly missed the sound of someone blowing on their hands again. Peering through the white she froze. Right before her was a white figure pulling a rifle to his shoulder. Alex's hands were too stiff to get a good shot off, she knew that. Suddenly she dived to the ground and rolled cursing while holding her rifle at ready. She felt cold, tight and hoped the person swinging the rifle in her direction was in worst shape.

The sound of a rifle firing had her rolling behind a rock. The bullet ricocheted when it hit the boulder. Another shot was fired and not from a rifle.

Elizabeth!

Alex pulled her rifle into position and peered into the white mess swirling around her. She couldn't see her shooter...but she could feel him...or her. Alex threw herself back, hoping she accurately remembered this section of the slope to know that behind her was another boulder that she could brace herself against. Everything was covered with white...except for the dark shape that was dropping toward her. Alex shifted her weight and used the rifle butt to hit her attacker. It reminded Alex of the last person she fought...in the rain and lost. This time it would be different.

Her rifle butt slammed down against the barrel of the shooter. Alex shifted her weight dropping to one knee and pushing up, catching the rifle of the assassin and slamming the barrel down. Her adversary dropped the rifle. And as Alex moved to attack a body knocked both of them over the hard rocks. Both were momentarily stunned and before Alex could regain her feet a figure Alex recognized as Sam fired something at the shooter.

"Let's get our quarry and gather up Elizabeth. It's too harsh out here. Gray Horse radioed in. The two SID investigators are holed up at the vacant cabin we were in."

"Elizabeth, come in."

"I'm here," a breathless voice answered above them.

Sam hauled the unconscious figure onto his shoulders and the three marched down the slope.

"Hey, do you know where we're going?" Alex asked panting as she took the lead to break a path for Sam.

"Yes. Look over to your right."

Two headlights were heading toward them.

"Right now I don't care if it's not the Mounties," Elizabeth muttered between two cold lips.

"Hey! Get in!" Gray Horse shouted at the group as they staggered through the thigh high snow. Two figures sitting in the vehicle quickly exited and helped Sam with his load.

"Oh, it's warm," Alex groaned as she sat between Elizabeth and Amanda. Her partner was with their unconscious prisoner, cuffing the cold hands.

"I'm glad to see you and this warm car."


"It looks like trouble just follows you two no matter where you hide." She nodded to her partner and he pulled off the mask of their sniper. With his cell phone he took pictures of the face.

"When we get to the cabin we'll get a print and send it to Interpol."

When they reached the cabin it had a fire burning and the smell of something cooking.

"We got the oven working and put the fried chicken in to burn off some of the grease," Amanda said.

"Warm and food. This is great," Alex hummed.



Chapter 5

Monday they were snowed in and Agent Briscolle, once Alex's SID partner and Elizabeth's handler, shared the information SID had gathered.

"So, seven more on the list are dead?" Alex tried to recall the names on the list.

"Yep. So that makes, Johnnie Redfield, Dr. Gene Richmond, Carl Gates and Richard Mack...Gates and Mack met their end in a small plane crash about a year ago on the way to a police convention. BJ Headers remains...and I do mean remains, were found in the desert...a small stolen private plane crashed into his shack...we only found a small part of his body. Someone had cleaned the area to remove evidence of his remains...let's see that's three...Bill Prost...his RV caught on fire on the freeway and nothing left but ashes. Thomas Meadows, drowned in his bathtub...OD. Mike Houston was shot in a bar room fight a week ago. And...Mike Learner died a few days ago in the prison yard."

Alex looked worriedly at Elizabeth. "Someone is hurrying up the hits."

"Uh huh." Sam nodded. He took another sip of his coffee. He stretched his legs out and looked over at their sullen prisoner.

"So, why are we on it?" Elizabeth asked.

Amanda got up and handed Elizabeth a piece of paper. "You still have a contract out on you...and Alex unfortunately pissed off someone. And Sam...well, he's just Sam."

Sam nodded and saluted her. "So we don't know who the real target is," he surmised softly. "Or maybe three in one?"

Amanda nodded. She gestured toward their prisoner. "She's got a bad headache from the dart. We should be getting a jail wagon in a few hours. Chief wants to start on her right away."

Elizabeth cleared her throat and nursed her warm cup of coffee for a few minutes before looking up at Amanda. "You may not have her for long. Don't trained assassins have a pill or something to swallow so when they are captured they croak?"

"Only in your books," Amanda told her. "No one wants to die that bad. By the way, when we were checking her, did you see that scar on her leg?"

Alex nodded. To her it meant this probably her sniper from a few years back.

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"So, where are you going to stay, Sam?"

"Around. You two get on home to your warm bed. Your kits will be wondering if you deserted them," he teased.

"Don't change the subject," Alex told him.

"I've got two SID agents protecting my back. We'll be okay up here."

"Amanda is staying up here? I didn't take her for a camping person."

"I guess you're going to have to get yourself a new SUV," Sam said.

"My insurance agent is going to tell me it's not covered for remote airplanes,"

Alex groaned. "I haven't finished paying for the thing."

"Well, you never know what Santa is going to bring you," Sam grinned.

"Well, if it's a replacement for my SUV, tell him not to be dropping it down the chimney."

"Afraid it will clean the thing?"

"No. Elizabeth and I will be spending a nice romantic evening in front of it and I'll be really pissed off if he interrupts."

"Hmm," Elizabeth commented. "Come on charmer. Let's go. I see lights and I know in my cold bones that it's our ride home."

"Hey you two. Can't you take a vacation," grumbled Chief Harper as he stomped his snow covered feet on the porch. Mark followed him nodding as the chief did to the group sitting around the table. Amanda conveniently slipped into the one bedroom, to avoid complicating the situation by being seen.

The Chief and Mark spoke with Sam and the SID agent that introduced himself as a Federal Agent. Elizabeth and Alex listened. Sam pretty much gave out the information, which didn't escape Harper and Mark.

"Yes, we got the notification about Mike and Mark heard about the barroom death last night from some chit chat at the coffee shop. We were worried about you two..." Harper glared at the two women. "Hell, you both need a bodyguard. Let's get going. Snow is falling again. Blasted weather."

"I'll send you the pictures...I'll borrow Gray Horse's equipment. He should be back tomorrow with supplies and I hope a better weather report," Sam mentioned. He looked at the SID agent. "That alright with you?"

He nodded.

The ride back down was quiet. There was no tension and no questions. The two women were left off at their house. Angel came galloping towards them, pausing long enough to sniff them for new odors.

"Come on. Those two were too polite to say anything but I have to get out of these clothes and into a nice hot shower, clean clothes and between clean warm sheets."

"I'm not so sure I can take any more of your cabin vacations," Elizabeth said.

"Honest, I usually have something else planned for special people that I take up there...though, you're really the only special girl I've taken up there. I mean, the others were just..."

"I got it, Alex."

Elizabeth kissed her forehead and both resumed their walk to the shower. While Alex quickly peeled off her clothes and got into the shower, Elizabeth paused to read the note on the door.

"What's it say." She looked back at Elizabeth who was sniffing the hot tub that was filled with warm water.

"That smells nice. What did Linda put in there?" Alex commented.

"Linda said she cleaned the hot tub and filled it with a rose scent. She says we don't know how to relax."

"I am trying," Alex said. "But is it my fault other people don't read my schedule?"

"We need a new place to call home," Elizabeth said. She stepped into the shower and let Alex help her wash herself.

"I agree. Tomorrow, we'll check the want ads."

"I'm thinking seriously of buying some land next to the forest. How does a castle sound?"

"Does it already have a castle on it?"

"No."

"I'm not sure I can wait for it to be built. I feel over exposed here. I'm tired of worrying about an unexpected guest popping up during breakfast...or some other time."

"I agree. I'm also ready for no geese in my yard."

"Maybe we can stay up in the cabin until your castle is done," Alex suggested, yawning enough to have her jaw crack. "Do they have prefabs?"

"Hon, you don't have a cabin. You have a bomb shelter, which doesn't have a shower or toilet," Elizabeth said.

"Sam said they have prefab cabins. They just ship the parts and click the ends together and presto."

"Alex..."

"Hmm?"

"Have you ever heard of cabin fever?"

"I've been accused of having that just living in my one bedroom apartment...and they were right. Then you came along and rescued me."

"Well...anyway...I would get cabin fever up there. This is alright because ten minutes from here is a small town with people, not bears. We need to rent a place in town."

"Tomorrow. I feel brain dead. Let's go to bed."

"I'm so tired from my vacation," Elizabeth said.

End
