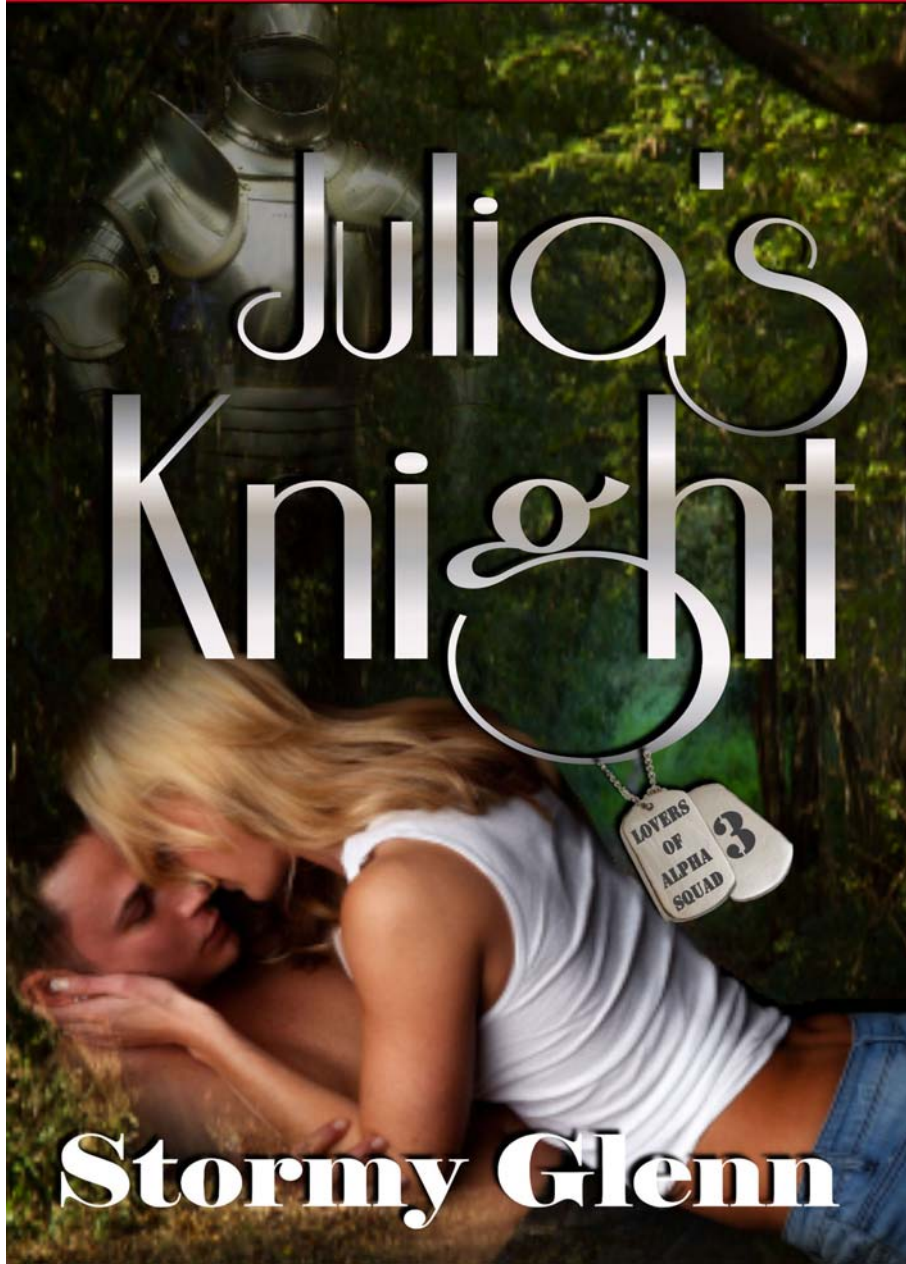


SIREN PUBLISHING

# Julia's Knight

Stormy Glenn



# **JULIA'S KNIGHT**

*Lovers of Alpha Squad 3*

**Stormy Glenn**

EROTIC ROMANCE



Siren Publishing, Inc.  
[www.SirenPublishing.com](http://www.SirenPublishing.com)

**ABOUT THE E-BOOK YOU HAVE PURCHASED:**

Your non-refundable purchase of this e-book allows you to only ONE LEGAL copy for your own personal reading on your own personal computer or device. **You do not have resell or distribution rights without the prior written permission of both the publisher and the copyright owner of this book.** 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. If you do not want this book anymore, you must delete it from your computer.

**WARNING:** The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000."

If you find a Siren-BookStrand e-book being sold or shared illegally, please let us know at **[legal@sirenbookstrand.com](mailto:legal@sirenbookstrand.com)**

**A SIREN PUBLISHING BOOK**

IMPRINT: Erotic Romance

**JULIA'S KNIGHT**

Copyright © 2009 by Stormy Glenn

E-book ISBN: 1-60601-399-8

First E-book Publication: March 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](http://www.SirenPublishing.com)

# **JULIA'S KNIGHT**

*Lovers of Alpha Squad 3*

**STORMY GLENN**

Copyright © 2009

## **Chapter 1**

Julia Spencer McKenzie opened the door and let herself into the grand estate home she shared with her husband of two months, Samuel McKenzie.

It was a beautiful home, boasting of six bedrooms, ten bathrooms, a large gourmet kitchen, formal dining room and living room, and study, all set on several acres of land in the Boston countryside.

It was from the study that Julia heard voices. Julia laid her sweater down on a small settee in the hallway and walked toward the voices, wondering who Sam was talking to.

“Sam?” she called out as she opened the study door and walked in. The question of who Sam was talking to was answered the moment she stepped into the room.

It was Dr. Daniel Evans, the man her husband Sam was in love with. “Darling, aren’t you going to introduce us?” Julia asked as her perfectly manicured hand wrapped around Sam’s arm.

She lifted an eyebrow, looking in Daniel’s direction when she heard a low growl come from him. It was obvious to her that Daniel didn’t like her touching Sam.

It was even worse when Sam wrapped an arm around her waist. She could see the confusion in Daniel’s eye warring with his love for

Sam. Julia shook her head softly. Her husband could be such an idiot sometimes.

“Dr. Evans, I would like you to meet my wife, Julia. Darling, this is Dr. Daniel Evans, a friend from back west.” He looked up right into Daniel’s eyes. “He’s just dropping by to bring me some news from my brother.”

Daniel stared at Sam in total shock. “You’re married?” he asked in an agonized whisper.

“Yes, as a matter of fact, we just got back from our honeymoon,” Sam replied.

“How long—?” Daniel asked as he shot Sam an agonized glance.

“Julia and I have been married nearly two months,” Sam said.

“Aren’t you going to congratulate us, Daniel?”

“Yes, of course, congratulations to you both. I’m sure you’ll be very happy together.” He shot Sam a scathing look. “You two are perfect for each other.”

Good god, Daniel was as big a bonehead as Sam was. Julia wished she could lock them both in a room together until they worked everything out.

They belonged together, even if they didn’t know it. Julia hadn’t wanted to marry Sam any more than he had wanted to marry her. But, feeling there was no other choice, they did what they had to.

Sam had been honest from the moment their honeymoon had started. He was in love with Daniel and theirs would always be a marriage of convenience.

Julia just shook her head again as Daniel grabbed his jacket and walked toward the door, his posture stiff. “Goodbye, Sam,” he said before walking out the door.

She could see Sam’s shoulders slump as the door slammed behind Daniel. Well, he had certainly burned that bridge. Daniel was never going to forgive Sam after this.

“That was cruel, Sam. You didn’t have to hurt him like that.” She winced when Sam turned to look at her, the pain of Daniel leaving

evident in his eyes. "And I really do not appreciate being used to hurt him."

"I'm sorry, Julia, but you know I had to do it. Daniel and I can never have anything together. You know that more than anyone else. It's better for him to not have any hope," Sam said as he wrapped his arms around her and kissed the top of her head.

"Without hope, what reason do we have to get out of bed in the morning?" Julia asked wistfully.

"Do you still hope, Julia? Even now?" Sam asked as he stared down at her.

"Yes, I still hope, Sam," Julia said. "I have to have hope. It's the only thing keeping me alive." She had to have hope that someday her life would be normal. If she didn't she wouldn't be able to make it through a single day.

"So, what did the doctor say?" Sam asked, interrupting Julia's thoughts. "Are you okay?"

Sam had insisted that Julia go to the doctor when she had become ill several weeks after their return from their honeymoon. She had fought him in the beginning but eventually gave in.

Julia smoothed down her skirt and walked to the couch sitting in front of the fireplace. "Define 'okay.'" She laughed bitterly.

"Honey," Sam started as he sat down next to her, taking her cold hands in his. "What's wrong? Are you sick?"

A tear slipped down Julia's face. "I'm pregnant."

Sam inhaled deeply at her news. "Wow, okay, so I guess it worked then," he said in wonder, referring to the artificial insemination they had tried.

After deciding that they were in this mess with their fathers together and they just wanted to be friends, they had secretly used artificial insemination in the hopes of getting Julia pregnant.

They had started the procedure as soon as they left on their honeymoon, using that as an excuse to visit a prominent doctor in Switzerland. Apparently, it had worked.

“Sam, I’m scared. I know we agreed to do this to keep our fathers happy but now that it’s actually happened, I’m scared. I don’t want them to get their hands on our baby. Look at what they did to us. What do you think they will do to a defenseless little baby?”

Sam shook his head. “I don’t know, Julia. But we’ll figure it out.” He pulled Julia into his arms and hugged her close.

Julia was so upset that her whole body shook. “Are you upset about the baby?” she asked in a quiet whisper.

“No, honey, I’m not.” Pulling Julia onto his lap he tucked her head under his chin. “How could I be upset that you’re having our baby?”

“Oh Sam, I wish we really loved each other,” Julia cried as she cuddled into Sam’s strong arms. “I wish things were different.”

Things would have been so much easier if they had loved each other. But Julia wouldn’t begrudge Sam his feelings for Daniel. It was what she suspected kept Sam hoping, even if he didn’t realize it.

“I know, honey, I wish we did, too. But we can’t choose who we love. But if I could ever love a woman, it would be you. I hope you know that. You have a lot to offer the right man. I’m just sorry I’m not that man.”

“Me too,” Julia murmured quietly. “I’m sorry I’m not the man for you.”

“Not enough hair on your face,” Sam chuckled. “But I’ll always be here to take care of you, Julia. I won’t let anything happen to you.”

“You can’t stop it, Sam,” Julia said as she sat up straight. “Once they find out I’m pregnant, you know what will happen.”

Sam nodded.

Trying to get Julia pregnant had been a gamble but they had felt like they had no choice at the time. They had gotten a lot of pressure from both of their fathers. Now it seemed really stupid but there wasn’t much they could do about it.

“Don’t say anything right away. Let’s just keep this between us. I’ll think of something.” Sam began formulating ideas in his head on

how to get them both out of the situation that they were in with their lives intact.

Julia nodded. "Our fathers will figure out I'm pregnant eventually, so think fast."

"I'll think of something, Julia. I promise."

\* \* \* \*

Julia set her book down when she heard the front door open and hurried from her bedroom. She hoped that it was Sam. It had been nearly two months since Daniel had left and Sam had begun plans for them to escape.

Julia knew that if they didn't hurry, it would be too late. She was already starting to show. A few more weeks and Arthur McKenzie and Douglas Spencer would know she was pregnant.

Then all hell would break loose. If Sam could get everything in order, they were going to flee the country until after the baby was born. After that, who knew?

Coming down the stairs, Julia was stunned to see her father, Douglas, standing in the entryway taking his coat off and handing it to James, the house-man.

"Father?" she asked in confusion as she walked up to him. "Is something wrong?" Besides him being in the house when Sam wasn't here.

Julia could feel the hairs on the back of her neck stand up as an uneasy feeling passed through her. She didn't like the way that her father looked at her.

A father just shouldn't look at his daughter the way he did. It gave her the creeps and made her wish that Sam were here. Julia fisted her hands at her side as she braced herself for what was about to come. She just knew she wasn't going to like it.

“Do I need a reason to visit you, my dear?” Douglas asked as he reached over and grabbed her by the elbow, escorting her into the study, shutting the door behind them.

“No, of course not, father,” Julia said. She hoped she didn’t sound as frightened as she felt. Her heart was beating so fast she wouldn’t be surprised if he could hear it.

“I decided I needed to know how things are going between you and Samuel. I see you so rarely since you got married, Julia,” Douglas said.

“Oh, we’re just getting settled. That’s all. It’s hard to get used to living with someone, you know?” Julia said quickly. Maybe too quickly by the calculating look that Douglas gave her.

“How hard?” Douglas asked.

Julia’s brows drew together as she frowned. “I don’t understand. How hard is what?”

“How hard is it for you to get used to living with Samuel?” Douglas asked.

“What do you mean? Sam is very easy to live with.”

“What I am asking, my dear, is whether you’ve started on that grandson for me. I am not getting any younger, you know. I want to enjoy my grandson before I’m too old.”

“Are so sure that I will have a son?” Julia asked. She briefly wondered if they had figured out she was pregnant but dropped that idea when she saw the look in her father’s eyes.

“Of course you will have a son, Julia. I will accept nothing less,” Douglas said as he walked over to stand next to her. “It’s your duty to provide me with an heir.”

Julia took a step back from her father. She felt crowded and just a little threatened by how close he stood to her. “My duty?”

“Yes, Julia,” Douglas said as he turned and walked over to the study door and opened it, admitting Arthur McKenzie, Sam’s father. He turned to look back at Julia, a smirk on his face.

“Arthur and I have been waiting for months for you and Sam to provide us with our heir. Since Sam so obviously has failed in that duty...”

“I will take care of it,” Arthur said as he advanced on Julia.

Julia shook her head, shock filling her and freezing her feet in place as she stared at her father in horror. “We’re trying, I swear.”

“You know, Julia, it would be a shame if anything happened to Robin. She’s my only grandchild. At least, until you provide me with another one.”

“Robin?” Julia exclaimed, her hand fluttering against her throat. “What do you mean? Nothing’s going to happen to Robin.”

“And nothing will, if you cooperate,” Arthur added.

“Yes, Julia, Arthur is correct,” Douglas said as he reached into his pocket and pulled out his cell phone. “When I picked her up from school today, I was so glad nothing had happened to her.”

“School? You picked Robin up from school?” Julia whispered. She was sure her heart had stopped in her chest as she realized that Douglas had her daughter. “Why?”

“To insure that nothing bad happened to her, of course,” Douglas said as he dialed a number on his cell phone. “Would you like to speak to her?”

Julia’s hands trembled as she reached for the phone and held it to her ear. “Robin?”

“Mommy?” said a small voice on the other end. “Can I come home now? I don’t like it at Grandpa’s house. He’s not very nice.”

“Soon, baby, I promise,” Julia whispered as tears began to stream down her face. Julia spoke with Robin for a few more moments, then closed the phone and handed it back to her father.

She knew that if she didn’t do what they wanted, something horrible would happen to Robin. It might not kill her...maybe a broken arm or something, but she would be hurt.

“What do you want me to do?” Julia asked as she looked at Douglas and Arthur. She had no choice. They had her daughter. She had to do whatever they wanted her to do.

“Just do what Arthur says,” Douglas said as he headed for the door. “He’ll take good care of you, Julia, and ensure that any child you have is a McKenzie.”

Julia’s eyes widened in sudden comprehension as she watched her father walk away, leaving her alone with Arthur. She quickly began to back up as Arthur advanced on her.

“Time for us to start the next generation, Julia.”

\* \* \* \*

Sam closed the front door and handed the butler his jacket. “Thank you, James.”

He had been out all day organizing and setting up things with a private attorney his father knew nothing about. If his father knew that Sam had arranged to leave and take Julia, and their baby with him, all hell would break out. Julia was nearly four months along and starting to show. They didn’t have much time left.

He needed just a few more days to get his plans into action before they could leave. Sam planned on taking Julia on a romantic getaway just for the two of them.

From there, they would spend the next several months traveling until the baby came. Once the baby arrived, then they could make legal preparations for everyone’s safety. But they had to leave before either of their fathers knew Julia was pregnant or the entire plan would fall apart.

“Is Mrs. McKenzie home?” Sam asked the butler as he headed for the living room.

“Mrs. McKenzie is upstairs, sir. I believe she is talking with your father.” Sam could hear the concern in James’s voice. Sam wasn’t too thrilled with it either.

Sam had hired James just before he married Julia for her protection at the recommendation of a friend from the service. He had wanted someone not connected to his father in the house, someone that couldn't be bought, to be around for Julia when he could not.

James was a fifty-seven year old retired Navy SEAL who stood six foot two and weighed at least two hundred twenty five pounds. He was built like a brick shithouse with muscles from the top of his bald head to the bottom of his toes.

It had quickly become apparent that James and Sam's father did not get along when Sam's father had tried to strong-arm his way into the house. James had made him wait until Sam appeared before letting him leave the entryway. Nope, James definitely did not like Sam's father. And that just made Sam like James even more.

Sam nodded at James and headed up the stairs. He checked the upstairs family room, then Julia's den but found them empty. A sinking feeling began in his stomach as he ran toward Julia's bedroom. He tried the door but it was locked. He could hear faint crying noises coming from inside.

Running to his bedroom Sam ran through the connecting closet and into Julia's room. He stopped suddenly, shocked by what he saw. His father had his small delicate wife pinned to the bed as he tried to rape her.

"Stop!" Sam yelled as he pulled his father off of Julia and pushed him away before pulling Julia into his arms, protecting her from his father.

Holding Julia with one hand, Sam grabbed a blanket off the bed and wrapped it around her bruised and nearly naked body before setting her carefully on the bed before standing to confront his father.

"What the hell are you doing?" he asked, feeling rage fill his body at what his father tried to do to Julia. His hands clenched into fists as he glared at him. "Have you lost your mind?"

"Obviously what you have failed to do," Arthur yelled at Sam as he began zipping up his slacks. "All we asked of you was to give us

an heir. But could you do that one little thing? No, so we decided I would take care of it for you.”

Sam’s jaw dropped in shock. “You decided to rape my wife because I didn’t get her pregnant? And who the hell is *we*?”

“I wasn’t raping her. She wanted it just as much as I did. Ask her, just ask her. Her father said she’s always wanted it,” Arthur shouted as he pointed at Julia.

Sam heard a whimper come from Julia’s huddled form on the bed and saw red. He pulled back his fist and punched his father in the mouth. Another punch had Arthur falling to the floor, his lip bleeding.

“Get the hell out of my house and don’t ever, ever, come back here again. Julia is my wife and you will never lay your grubby little hands on her again. And you can tell the same thing to her father.”

Sam grabbed Arthur by the back of his shirt and threw him out the bedroom door after unlocking it. “James!” Sam yelled as he pushed his father down the hallway. James came running up the stairs faster than Sam thought the older man could run.

“Please escort my father out. He is no longer welcome in this house. That goes for Mrs. McKenzie’s father as well. If either of them attempt to get into the house, or anyone connected with them, call the police immediately.”

“Yes, sir!” James grabbed Arthur by the back of his shirt and started escorting him to the door when Arthur began yelling.

“Get your hands off of me! You can’t do this to me! Do you have any idea who I am? I’ll make you pay for this! Mark my words, Samuel, I will make you pay for this!”

Sam stood there until James slammed the door on his sputtering father. Then he started up the stairs. “James, call my attorney and tell him to get his ass over here now. Then I want you to lock up the house. No one, and I mean no one, is to get into the house without my express permission, understood?”

“Yes, sir, of course, right away,” James replied.

Sam ran down the hallway and into the bedroom to find Julia huddled in the corner of the room, the blankets pulled protectively around her. She made no sound but Sam could see the tears streaming down her bruised face.

He walked slowly over to her and picked her up in his arms. Sitting on the side of the bed he began rubbing her back. "It's okay, honey. He won't ever get to you again. I swear it, Julia."

Julia started sobbing, her whole body shaking in reaction to the assault. "My father came over. He said that I had a duty to give him an heir. He—he said that since you couldn't do it, that Arthur would. Then at least it would still be a McKenzie child. Then he let Arthur in."

Sam just held Julia as she cried, letting her get it out anyway she had to. "Tell me what happened, honey."

"Arthur pulled me into the bedroom after my father left. When I tried to stop him he hit me. He told me over and over again while he hit me that I had a duty to provide them with an heir."

"Did he—?" Sam didn't want to ask but he knew he had to. He needed to know how bad the damage was before he took action.

Julia shook her head. "No, you came in before he could do anything. But what if he tries again, Sam? What if they find out about the baby?" Julia suddenly stiffened in Sam's arms. "Oh my god, Sam, what if something happened to the baby?"

"Honey, I'm sure the baby is fine. Everyone knows that they can take a lot. Just think, that little guy is safe and sound in his own little world. He'll be fine."

"So you think it's a boy then?" Julia asked hesitantly.

"Honey, I don't care if it's the tooth fairy as long as long as he, or she, is safe and happy."

Sam held Julia until she stopped crying and fell asleep. He gently lay her down on the bed and covered her up. She looked so tired, so small and delicate as she curled up on the bed. Sam still couldn't

believe that their fathers had planned this. They had actually planned the cold brutal rape of his wife.

He quietly shut the door behind him and headed downstairs to the study. Opening the door he ignored his attorney, Ethane Thomas, sitting on the couch and went straight to the liquor cabinet, pouring himself a stiff drink before swallowing it down in one gulp. He closed his eyes briefly as the whiskey burned down his throat before turning to Ethane.

“Thank you for coming, Ethane. Things have gotten...complicated.” Sam poured himself another drink and one for Ethane before handing it to him as he sat down on the couch beside him.

“Our illustrious fathers have decided that they want an heir no matter what the cost. While I met with you they came over and decided since I could not impregnate my wife, my father would. At least then they would be assured that the baby was a McKenzie.”

“But I thought you told me that your wife was already pregnant,” Ethane said, cocking his head to one side in confusion.

“She is, but we didn’t tell them that. In fact, we kept it from them just because of things like this. You have to understand, Ethane, our fathers have never been told *no*. They have always gotten everything they ever wanted at the drop of a hat. And they want an heir.”

“I don’t get it. Aren’t you and Julia their heirs?”

“Yes, and no. My father hasn’t ever been able to completely control my brother or me. He doesn’t like that. He wants an heir that is totally under his thumb, one made to think just like him. I’m not it. Neither is my brother.”

“So what do you want to do now?” Ethane asked.

“I have to get Julia out of here. I’ve told James that neither of our fathers is welcome here but that will only stop them for so long. My main concern is for Julia and the baby. They have to be safe. I couldn’t care less about my inheritance. Neither could Julia. We just want our baby safe.”

“So what would you like me to do?”

Sam stared down at the crystal glass in his hands for several moments before he could speak again. He was still full of anger at what the fathers had done.

“They tried to rape her, Ethane. I stopped my father before he could but he hurt her.”

“What?” Ethane exclaimed. Then he suddenly snapped his fingers. “Sam, that’s it.”

“What’s it?” Sam asked confused, trying to remember what he had said.

“If they tried to rape her, we have them.” Ethane nearly laughed at the confused look on Sam’s face. “Evidence, man, evidence, but we need to act quickly. Has Julia taken a shower yet?”

“No, she’s sleeping upstairs,” Sam said slowly. “I see where you’re going with this, but I don’t want the police involved, not yet. Not until I know Julia is safe.”

“She has to see a doctor, Sam, get pictures, a rape kit, the works. And we do need to inform the police,” Ethane insisted.

“I know, but now is not the time to go public with this. That would be like waving a red flag in front of a bull,” Sam said as he shook his head. “No, we have to do this quietly.”

“If we take her to the hospital they may want to call the police. Do you have another suggestion?” Ethane inquired.

“I just might.”

## Chapter 2

As the car she was in pulled into a long driveway, Julia turned her head to look out the window. Sam was driving them to a ranch in the countryside of Southern Oregon. She figured she was about as far away from Boston, Massachusetts as she could get.

Sam said she would be safe here, safe from her father, and Sam's father. Julia couldn't believe what a mess her life was in. She was newlywed to Sam, a man in love with another man, and pregnant with Sam's child.

Arthur and Douglas had both wanted her to agree to have sex with whomever they said, including Arthur. To top it all off, she was so nauseated she just might not make it all the way up the driveway.

Julia wiped a weary hand over her bruised face. Crazy Acres, the damn ranch was called Crazy Acres. It couldn't have been more perfect if she had tried. This whole situation was crazy.

Four months ago when her father had forced her to marry Sam, she never thought she would be running for her life and that of her unborn child. Julia didn't think things could get worse, but she had been wrong before.

Sam brought the car to a halt and turned off the ignition before turning to look over at Julia. "You okay, honey?"

Julia nodded, which made her wince. Her head ached, much like the rest of her body. She just wanted to lie down and sleep—for an entire month.

Sam climbed out of the car and came around to help Julia out. Ethane climbed out of the back and grabbed their bags, following

them into the house. Sam didn't knock, just pushed the door open and started on in.

Several of the tallest men she had ever seen in her life jumped to their feet, rushing toward the door. Julia huddled into Sam's embrace. Her gaze briefly fell on Daniel, standing off to one side watching Sam like a starving man eyeing a banquet.

"Sshh, it's okay. They won't hurt you, I promise. These are my friends, and they're here to help us. Let's just get you to a room where you can lie down, and I will explain everything to them, okay?" Sam whispered into Julia's ear, and he led her away.

Julia nodded as she followed. She had reached the bedroom door when a noise across the room suddenly made her look up. Julia's heart beat faster when she encountered soft green eyes the color of summer grass. Julia had never seen that particular color in someone's eyes before.

The rest of him went right along with the eyes. Everything about him made Julia's heart beat faster, her palms sweat. The hair caressing the sides of his face was almost blue black in color. His strong square jaw angled into cheekbones with high elegant ridges. He had a generous mouth, an aquiline nose. Touches of humor showed in the wrinkles near his eyes.

Julia's gaze slowly swept down his tall, powerful body. He had to be at least six foot five and two hundred eighty-five pounds. Every inch of him was pure lean muscle.

He had wide, strong shoulders that narrowed to an incredible six-pack abdomen wrapped in a white short-sleeved shirt, and lean hips encased in skintight blue jeans. His stance emphasized the force of his thighs and the strength of his legs. He was perfection, and Julia wanted to wrap herself around him.

He seemed to be just as stunned as she was. He looked at her, his eyes staring into hers, eating her up. She started to take a step toward him when Sam caught her hand and pulled her toward the bedroom.

She looked into the room and then back at the man. He gave her a brief, hopeful smile and nodded to her. Julia returned his smile with a small one of her own and let Sam lead her into the bedroom. Hopefully, she would see him again.

\* \* \* \*

Caleb watched the small delicate woman walk into the room with Sam, followed closely by Doc. He knew Doc was needed. Her face was swollen and bruised. Caleb wanted to find the ones who had done this to her and beat them the same way they had beat her. Her...he didn't even know her name, yet she was forever etched in his mind.

She was beyond beautiful, even with the bruises covering her face. She was petite and flowerlike, with high-perched breasts and a slim waist, which flared into agilely rounded hips. Her features were dainty, her wrists small. She had to be at least a foot shorter than he was and a hundred pounds lighter. He would tower over her.

Her facial bones were delicately carved and her mouth full. Her nose was straight, short, and charming. Her thick ash blonde hair hung in long, graceful curves over her shoulders and tumbled carelessly down her back, wisps of hair framing her face.

She started to turn toward him only to be stopped by Sam. Caleb clenched his fists, surprised at how angry that made him. He wanted to be the one touching her.

He offered her a small, reassuring smile when she turned back to him, a hopeful look on her face. He felt like he had won the lottery when she returned his smile, no matter how hesitant it was.

She had smiled at him. Caleb vowed then and there to get another one from her as soon as he could. She should be doing nothing but smiling.

Doc left the room and went to sit down at the dining room table with the other members of the Alpha Squad. Caleb slowly followed,

watching the door for Sam to emerge. He didn't sit down until he saw Sam leave the room and shut the door behind him.

Sam came and sat down at the table. The heavy lines around his eyes showed how tired he was. Sam was here to ask for their help. That could be the only reason he was back after moving to Boston. Caleb wondered if Sam's troubles involved the woman.

Caleb tapped his foot as he waited anxiously for Sam to begin speaking. It was all he could do not to reach across the table and demand for Sam to talk. He nearly held his breath until he did. He had to know about her, who she was and why she was here.

"I want to thank you all for being here. I'm in a hell of a mess and I need your help," Sam said. "First, I want to apologize to some of you I may have hurt by keeping my silence."

Sam looked down the table at his brother. "Sky, we have always been close and I know that I hurt you recently by keeping things from you. This, and the things we talked about in the truck before I left. I didn't tell you because I didn't know how to. I didn't want to hurt you but in my desire to keep you safe I think I may have caused more damage. For that I am sorry."

"Keep me safe?" Sky asked. "Keep me safe from what?"

Sam shook his head lightly. "I'll get to that in a moment. But first, there's someone else I need to apologize to."

Sam was obviously talking to someone but he kept staring at his hands. Caleb looked down the table as he wondered who Sam talked to but he couldn't see any one person responding.

"There is someone else that I hurt. I thought at the time that I had done the right thing. I was wrong. I thought that I could deny what happened between us and neither of us would get hurt. I was wrong. I thought that I could deny my feelings and that they would just go away. Again, I was wrong."

Sam glanced down the table toward Doc and his speech seemed to be aimed at him. Caleb wrinkled his forehead in confusion. Sam had

always dated women, in fact they had gone out on a couple of double-dates before. Why was he talking to Doc?

"I know I gave you the impression that I didn't care about you. In fact, I went out of my way to give you that impression. But I do care, very much so. I should have fought for what we could have had together, like you did, but I was too scared. I know I have no right to ask you this after the hurt I caused you but I'm begging you to listen to what I have to say before condemning me to a life without you. Please," Sam said as he glanced down the end of the table to where Doc was sitting.

So, that's how things were, huh? Doc gave Sam a slight nod, then Sam whispered, "Thank you."

"About six months ago my father contacted me."

Caleb turned his head and glanced over at Sky when he heard a soft gasp come from him. Sky was pale white. What the hell was going on?

"He made me a deal. He would disown Sky and stay out of his life if I would agree to move back to Boston, marry the woman he picked out for me, and produce an heir for him. At the time, it sounded like a good deal to me."

Sam had agreed to marry a stranger? Was *she* that stranger? Oh, God, he hoped not.

"You have to understand who my father is," Sam said. He has made millions crushing people, legally and illegally. He's ruthless when he wants something. Sky and I spent years under his thumb. Joining the Navy SEALs after dealing with my father was a walk in the park."

Sam paused to take a drink of his coffee. He was silent for a moment as he stared down into his cup. "I've always thought he was a little crazy. As small children, it wasn't so bad because of our mother. But then she disappeared and he turned his rage on us. Neither of us came away without scars."

"Sam," Sky cried, tears in his eyes.

“Because I was born first, our father didn’t care about Sky, except to use him as a punching bag. I was always going to be the heir. I was groomed from a very early age to take over for my father. Some of the things I saw, what he did,” Sam said.

He clenched his hands tightly together. “Well, I just don’t understand how someone could be like that. My father always made it clear that he expected me to be just like him, to take over for him. Instead, as soon as we were old enough, Sky and I escaped to the Navy. Boot camp was our first true taste of freedom. You may have all thought boot camp horrible. For us, it seemed like heaven.”

Sam stopped to take a sip of his coffee again and seemed to be gathering his thoughts. His hands were clenched so tightly around the cup, Caleb wondered if it was going to shatter.

“Like I said, six months ago my father contacted me and I agreed to move back to Boston and marry the woman he had chosen for me and produce an heir for him. A couple of months ago I married Julia. I truly expected some plastic society bimbo. It surprised me when I went on my honeymoon and learned that Julia is actually a very sweet innocent young woman who is just as caught up in this mess as I am.”

Caleb’s heart fell to his feet. Her name was Julia, and she was married to Sam. She could never be his. He didn’t know whether to cry or reach across the table and strangle Sam. He nearly hated him in that moment.

“The pressure to produce an heir from both of our fathers was intense. A couple of months ago we found out that Julia’s pregnant.”

The breath left Caleb’s body as he gasped. She was pregnant? With Sam’s child? His misery was like a steel weight. He barely heard Sam as he continued to speak as he tried to draw breath into his lungs.

“We had done what our fathers had wanted but we were both terrified of what would happen to the baby if, and or when, our fathers found out. So we decided not to tell them. Instead, I started making arrangements with Ethan here to leave the country.”

“You actually think they would make you disappear, Sam?” Cole asked.

Sky and Sam instantly nodded their heads.

“I have no doubt that they could make us disappear. People who oppose our father have a way of going missing. I’ve seen it happen,” Sam said.

“And no one has wondered about it? No one has investigated?” Cole asked.

“Oh, I’m sure it’s been investigated but when you have the police in your back pocket, evidence has a way of disappearing, just like witnesses.”

“Is that what you need our help with? Getting you and Julia out of the country?” Bear asked.

“Leaving the country would have been easy. No, things are much worse than that. Earlier today, when I got home, I found my father trying to get Julia pregnant himself. He tried to rape her. I stopped him in time and forced him to leave.”

Suddenly, Doc stood up and looked at Sam. “That’s why you called me?”

Sam nodded. “I knew why you hung up on me. You had every right to, after the way I treated you.”

Doc turned white then green and ran from the room. Sam jumped from his chair and started after him.

Caleb sat there, wondering what to do, until he heard Julia’s voice in the hallway, telling Sam that she would see to Doc. He had to know what the relationship between Sam and Julia was. Did she really belong to Sam, or did he have a chance? Was Sam involved with Daniel?

Deciding to get the truth from the source, so to speak, Caleb got up and followed Sam into the hallway. He found him leaning against the hallway wall next to the bathroom door.

Sam nodded to him as he walked up. “Hey, Caleb. How are you doing?”

“Better than you, it would seem,” he said as he leaned against the wall next to Sam.

“Yeah, well.” Sam laughed roughly. “Things have been better.”

“So tell me, what’s the story with Doc?” he asked, deciding to go down that path instead of the one with Julia. Hopefully, this one would give him the answers he needed.

“I love him,” Sam replied, looking at Caleb. Caleb looked at Sam for several moments, considering that bit of news. So, Sam was in love with Doc. Did that mean Julia was free?

“And Julia?”

“I care for her. She’s a great girl, but I don’t love her, not like I do Daniel.”

“Daniel?”

“Sorry, I was referring to Doc. His real name is Daniel, but I guess because of what he does, everyone calls him Doc. To me, he’s just Daniel.”

“Okay, that works.” Caleb chuckled.

As they both waited for the door to open, the silence between them lengthened. Neither one knew quite what to say to the other. So neither of them said anything, they just stood there in an uncomfortable silence.

### Chapter 3

Julia watched from the bedroom door as Daniel ran from the dining room into the bathroom. Sam ran quickly after him, concern written all over his face.

“Let me,” she whispered and followed Daniel into the bathroom. She closed the bathroom door behind her, leaving Sam waiting outside.

“Here, Daniel,” she whispered. She handed him a wet washcloth when he was done emptying the contents of his stomach, then a glass of water.

“He loves you, you know,” Julia said to Daniel as he rinsed his mouth.

“Does he?” Daniel asked, his voice sounding skeptical.

“Oh yeah.” Julia smiled. “He loves you very much. He did what he did to protect me, to protect Sky. It was wrong, but it’s what he thought he had to do at the time. But he does love you. On our honeymoon, you were all he talked about.”

“And that doesn’t bother you? Being married to him, pregnant with his child? And you say he loves me? How can you be so calm about all of this?”

Julia gave Daniel a small laugh. “He doesn’t belong to me. He never did. He’s always been yours. As for my being pregnant, we never had sex. We went to Switzerland on our honeymoon and had me artificially inseminated.” Julia laughed again. “In fact, that’s how I found out about you. He couldn’t...uh... perform. Guess I don’t do it for him.”

Julia leaned in close and whispered into Daniel's ear, "Of course, as soon as he starts talking about you...guess you're more his type."

"How is all this supposed to work?" Daniel asked, gesturing to her abdomen. "You two being married, and the baby and all. How's this supposed to work?"

"I don't know, Daniel. I guess that's something we will all have to discuss. I won't come between you two, but I also want Sam to be a part of this child's life. If you can live with that, live with me and the baby in your lives and knowing I have no designs on Sam, then there doesn't seem to be anything we can't work out."

"How can you not have designs on Sam? How could you not be attracted to him? Are you blind?" Daniel asked.

"Daniel, I care a lot for Sam. He's been there when I needed him. But sexually, Sam does nothing for me. Maybe I always knew he was gay, so I never developed an attraction for him. Who knows? But the point is I don't love Sam, not like you love him. And he needs your type of love."

Daniel stared at Julia. "And what about you, little Julia, don't you deserve that type of love?"

"Maybe someday," she said. Her thoughts went briefly to the tall, sexy man with curly blue black hair she had seen when Sam had escorted her to his room.

"Right now, I just want to concentrate on having a healthy baby and getting out of this mess our fathers have put us in," she said as she put a stop to her fantasies.

"Thanks, Julia."

"Ah, you're more than welcome, honey." Julia laughed. "Now, I'm going to go, because there is a very anxious man outside this door that has some serious groveling to do."

Julia walked out of the bathroom, stopping suddenly when she saw *him* leaning against the wall next to Sam. She stared at him for several moments before reluctantly tearing her gaze away and turning to face Sam.

“He’s waiting for you. Tell him the truth, everything. He loves you, but it’s going to take a lot of begging on your part for him to forgive you. He’s really hurt.”

Sam smiled down at Julia and leaned in to give her a kiss on her cheek. “Thanks, honey. You’re a peach. Now go get something to eat while I try to dig myself out of the doghouse.”

Sam walked past Julia and into the bathroom, closing the door behind him before Caleb turned his eyes back to Julia’s beautiful deep blue ones.

“You’re okay with this?” he asked, indicating the bathroom door.

Julia shrugged her shoulders. “Sam was never mine. I knew that from the very beginning.” She laughed lightly. “So, yeah, I guess I am. Sam will never love me like he loves Daniel. I’d rather see him be happy with Daniel than miserable with me.”

“You seem remarkably accepting of this whole situation.”

“You’d be amazed at what a person can come to accept after awhile,” Julia voiced sadly.

“Where does that leave you?” Caleb asked.

“Better than some, worse off than others.”

Caleb thought about that for a moment. “I’d like to make it better for you.” She could deny him right here and now, and to be honest, Caleb would be surprised if she didn’t. Or they could see where things went.

Julia gave Caleb a bright, beautiful smile and whispered, “I’d like that.”

Caleb returned her smile, a light, joyous feeling in his chest. He grabbed her hand and escorted her to the dinning room, helped to her to her seat, then grabbed her a plate of food. He hadn’t forgotten Sam’s instructions for her to eat.

It filled Caleb with joy to know he was providing something for her, even if it was just a plate of food. He wanted to be able to provide everything for her. He wanted that right to be his, not Sam’s. He was

still bothered that Sam was married to Julia, even if he was in love with Doc.

He was even more bothered that he was so obsessed with a woman he had just met. But there was something about Julia that called to him that he could not ignore.

\* \* \* \*

After feeding Julia, Caleb walked with her to the living room, where everyone seemed to be gathering and getting comfortable. He sat down on the couch with her. He leaned back in the couch and moved his leg until it touched Julia's. He had to have some sort of contact with her, even if was just a little. He needed it like he needed to breathe.

Caleb looked around the living room. Most of the members of his Navy SEALs team were present. Sky was leaning against the fireplace, talking to Ethane, Sam's attorney. Cole and Bear sat in opposite chairs as they talked with Jake and his brother, Nick. Caleb's own brother, Rune, stood behind him.

And Julia just sat beside him, seeming to take it all in. He watched her out of the corner of his eye, seeing the self-satisfied grin that came over her face when Sam and Daniel walked into the room, holding hands.

Sam held Daniel's hand, leading him to a chair, where he sat down, pulling Daniel to sit down beside him, and cuddled him close. Daniel had a dazed look on his face. He looked a little bewildered by the whole situation.

"I'm sorry, Julia. I forgot to introduce you to the men I work with," Sam said as he looked at Julia. "Daniel, you know. He's our resident doctor. His sister Jax is downstairs. You'll meet her later."

"You can't miss her," Cole said. "She's the one trying to get a speeding ticket in that damn wheelchair of hers."

“Most likely.” Sam chuckled. “The man next to you is Caleb Boudreaux. Right behind him is his brother Rune. If you haven’t noticed already, Caleb and Rune are twins.”

“Every member of our team are twins, Sam,” Cole added.

“True, but we’re not all identical twins like Caleb and Rune,” Sam replied. He pointed to the man standing in front of the fireplace. “That’s my brother, Sky.”

Julia nodded at him.

“Cole and Bear Daniels,” Sam said as he pointed at the two large men sitting across from Julia. “Cole is our commander. Last but not least, Jake and Nick Logan.”

“You’re all twins?” Julia asked, looking around the room.

Sam nodded. “Yep. We’re part of a special ops team. We all live here at the ranch until we have to go on a mission. I was a part of the team until I took a leave of absence to go to Boston.”

“What sort of missions?” Julia asked.

“Well, I think that—” Sam began.

Caleb was taken from his musing when Sky looked at Sam, a deep frown on his face.

“Sam, whatever made you agree to anything Father would demand? You know how he is. God, I can’t believe that you did that, and without discussing it with me first.”

“I honestly believed I was doing the right thing, the only thing I could. You, more than anyone else, know what he’s like when he gets an idea in his head, like a dog with a bone. He will not let it go. And he wanted an heir.”

“I don’t get that, Sam,” Cole began. “I thought you and Sky were his heirs. Why would he need another one?”

“I don’t completely understand it myself. But what I figure is he wanted an heir he could groom after himself. In his mind, Sky and I failed him by not being selfish pricks like he is. He needed someone he could control, manipulate, make in his image.”

Sky began pacing in front of the fireplace as he glared at Sam. "So you agreed to marry Julia, a complete stranger, and produce a child for him? Have you lost your ever-loving mind? Why would you give that monster another child to hurt?"

"Sky, I honestly wasn't thinking that far ahead. As soon as Julia told me she was pregnant I knew what I had done, and tried to fix it," Sam explained.

"You can't fix this, you idiot. You just gave him a new target. God, I can't believe you were that stupid. You know what he's like. You grew up in the same household I did."

"Sky," Julia interrupted, "you need to give Sam a break. He knows he made a mistake but now we need your help to fix it." Sam had been nothing but sweet and caring to her. She was not going to let Sky tear him down and make him feel bad.

"You need to stay out of this! You have no idea what you're talking about," Sky yelled at Julia.

Julia jumped to her feet and stomped over to Sky. She began poking him in the chest with her finger and yelled back, "You forget, dumb ass, I'm carrying the new target. As for not knowing what I'm talking about, I know a lot more than you think I do. I'm the one that bastard tried to rape. I'm the one pregnant with the next McKenzie heir. I'm the one Arthur forced to get married, just like Sam. Do you think I wanted to marry him?"

"Hey!" Sam interjected.

"Oh! You shut up, too!" Julia yelled as she glared over at Sam before looking back to Sky. "There's a lot more going on here than even you two fools understand."

She couldn't believe how stupid these men were being. They had bigger problems than who did what. "There's a lot more going on here than you two fools understand."

Julia suddenly stopped talking and clamped her hand over her mouth as if she had said too much. She looked between Sky and Sam

before quickly sitting down on the couch, lowering her eyes to the floor.

Out of the corner of his eye, Caleb watched Sam kiss Daniel on the head and lift him off his lap only to set him back down in the chair he vacated. He walked over and knelt at Julia's feet and took her trembling hands in his.

"What is it, honey, what do you know?" Sam asked softly. "What has you so upset?"

Julia huddled in her chair, making no response, just staring at Sam for several moments as the tears streamed down her face. "I can't tell you," she whispered finally. "They'll kill her." The room went silent at her whispered words.

"Kill who, Julia? Who will they kill?" Sam asked quietly.

"My baby."

"Julia," Caleb began as he wrapped an arm around her. "None of us here will let anyone hurt your baby. She, or he, will be safe and sound. All you need to worry about is having a healthy baby. You have an entire team of Navy SEALs to protect you and your baby."

Caleb could tell by the dropped mouths and silence that everyone was momentarily stunned at the little speech he gave Julia. He never talked that much, ever. But they quickly recovered and added their assurances to his.

"Julia, I'd never let anything happen to our—" Sam began only to be interrupted when Julia waved her hand in Sam's face.

"You don't understand," she said quickly, "I told you that you didn't understand. Why can't you just let it go? Please!"

"What don't we understand, Julia?" Sky asked as he came to stand behind Sam.

"They have my daughter," she exclaimed.

"Your daughter? You have a daughter? Why didn't you tell me? Where is she?" Sam began shooting off questions to her only to be stopped by Daniel's hand on his shoulder.

"Sam, stop. Can't you see how hard this is for her? Give her a little space." Daniel sat down on the floor next to Sam and rested his hand on Julia's leg trying to reassure her.

"Come on, honey," Daniel said. "Tell us the rest of it. We need to know everything. I know you're scared, and you have a right to be, but without knowing the whole picture we are going into this blind."

Bear came up beside Sam and handed Julia a glass of juice. She drank it down and handed the glass to him, thanking him, before wrapping herself in the blanket Cole handed her.

When Caleb reached down to hold her hand she latched onto it like a lifeline.

Sam stood up, grabbed Daniel's hand to pull him up, and went back to the loveseat. It pleased Sam when Daniel curled up next to him as he had been before.

"Julia, please talk to us. You're safe here," Sam said after he settled Daniel closer to him.

No one said anything for several moments. They waited and gave Julia the time she needed to compose her thoughts. Never letting go of Caleb's hand, she began talking.

"My daughter Robin is five years old. I met her father when I was in college, studying to be a doctor. I was in my third year of residency when I found out I was pregnant. When I told Robert, he was ecstatic. We made plans to get married. Then my father found out."

Julia paused briefly when the memories became too much, burying her face in Caleb's shirt as he held her in his arms. After a few minutes she lifted her head and wiped her face and began again.

"My father hated Robert. He came from the wrong side of the tracks, the son of an auto mechanic. When my father, Douglas, couldn't buy Robert off, he had him killed." There were several gasps and a few curses throughout the room.

"After I had Robin, my father used her to keep me in line. He knew I knew that he had killed Robert. He told me so to my face. He said that if I didn't do exactly what he told me to, he would kill Robin, too. I

knew he would so I did what he told me to do. I would have gone to the police but I had no proof of anything.”

“Then what happened, Julia,” Sam asked.

“My father and Arthur came up with this brilliant plan to have an heir. At first they wanted me to marry Arthur. Then they decided on Sam. They told me that if I didn’t marry Sam, I would never see my daughter again.”

“They wanted you to marry my father?” Sky asked, astonished.

When Julia nodded Sam asked the next question. “If they wanted you to marry my father then why did they make you marry me?” Sam dropped Daniel’s hand and sat forward, leaning his arms on his legs and he stared at Julia in confusion.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you, Sam, especially after the way you shared your feelings about Daniel with me. But I couldn’t. They said that they would kill Robin if I said anything,” Julia said.

“Honey, I understand, you did the only thing you could under the circumstances. But please, now is not the time for secrets. We need to know the truth, all of it.”

Julia stared at everyone in the room one at a time then nodded as she came to a decision.

“There’s a special provision in your grandfather’s will that says only a blood heir of his can inherit his estate. This is your mother’s father and his estate is the financial basis of your father’s empire. Without it, your father would be broke. Your father has controlled it since the minute your mother disappeared. As a blood descendant of your grandfather’s, the estate is supposed to go to you, not your father. He wants an heir from you so that he can continue to control that financial fortune.”

“I still don’t get it. Why me and not my father?” Sam asked

“It took me awhile to figure it out myself. It’s simple, really. Arthur McKenzie is not your biological father. He married your mother when she was pregnant with you and Sky. So you had to produce the heir in order for it to be a blood relative.”

"He's not my father? Then who is?" Sam exclaimed. His eyes widened in shock at Julia's words.

"I don't know who your real father is. I suspect only your mother did. Since Arthur had married to your mother by the time you were born, you were given his last name. I suspect it was one of those *saving face* type of marriages," Julia replied.

"And how do you know this?" Sky asked.

"I overheard a conversation between your father and mine. They've been in business together for years, long before any of us were born," Julia explained.

"He's not our father, you can call him Arthur." Sky growled. "I always felt that Arthur hated us, but I could never figure out why. This explains a lot. God, he hated us so much."

"We couldn't walk across the room right without him getting mad at us," Sam added. A sudden thought came to him. "Julia, do you have any idea what happened to our mother? Is she really dead?"

"You don't know what happened to your mother?" she asked.

"No, we came home from boarding school when we were about eight years old and she had simply disappeared," Sam said. "We were never allowed to speak about her after that. We weren't even allowed to say her name. If we brought her up at all Arthur went ape-shit on us."

"I remember one Christmas when I bought a present for her. It must have been a few months after she disappeared," Sky began quietly as he stared off into space like he was in his own little world. "I put it under the tree for her. I felt so sure she would be there for Christmas. She never missed a holiday with us. When Father...uh, Arthur...found it, he beat me so bad I spent the rest of my Christmas vacation recovering."

"Sky, you never told me that."

Sky sent a sorrowful little smile over to Sam. "You weren't there that Christmas. He had you shipped off to some sort of holiday visit

with one of his business cronies. He told me that you wanted to be there.”

“Sky, I never went to visit any of his cronies. What are you talking about? When did this happen?” Sam asked.

“It was the first Christmas after Mom left. If you weren’t with one of his cronies, where the hell were you? You should have been home with me,” Sky said loudly, his hands tightened into fists as he glared at his brother.

“I worked the entire Christmas after Mom left. Arthur wouldn’t let me come home. He told me that only lazy people celebrated holidays. I spent my entire vacation working in one of his factories. He told me you worked in another factory.” Sam let out a bitter laugh. “Why do you think I never went home for holidays after that? He had me working.”

Sam ran his hand through his hair as he looked down at the floor. “God, I can’t stand holidays now,” he said quietly.

“You were a child, Sam, how could you be working?” Julia asked.

“That didn’t matter to my father. If you had free time on your hands, you worked.” Sam dropped his hands between his legs as they clenched into fists. “It was as simple as that.”

“So, you’ve never celebrated a holiday?” Daniel asked quietly.

“No, not after our mother left,” Sam replied.

Julia turned her head and whispered into Caleb’s ear. “I’ll be right back. I need to visit the little lady’s room.”

“Do you remember where it’s at? Would you like me to show you the way?” he asked.

“That would be nice, thank you.”

Caleb stood up and reached for Julia’s hand, pulling her to feet. He gestured to Cole that he was taking Julia to the bathroom when he saw his questioning look. Cole nodded and waved him on. Holding Julia’s hand, Caleb led her down the hallway to the bathroom.

Closing the door behind Julia, Caleb leaned against the door and waited for her to come out. As he stood there, he wondered how he could save her daughter and make her happy again.

No mother should be separated from her daughter. It caused a deep pain in Caleb's chest every time he thought about what Julia must be going through.

"Hey," Julia said as she opened the door.

"Hey," Caleb said. He smiled at Julia. "You feeling any better? Do these still hurt?" he asked as he gently rubbed his fingers down the side of Julia's face and over her bruises.

"No, not really." Julia ducked her head. "I must look a sight."

"I think you look beautiful," Caleb said softly.

Julia lifted her head, tilting it back to look up into Caleb's face. "Really?"

"Yeah, *bébé*, I do." Caleb was pleased to see Julia's face blush as she smiled. It meant that she was happy with his compliment. He hoped it also meant that she felt the same attraction to him that he felt for her.

"So, what do you do here?" Julia asked.

Caleb shrugged his shoulders. "A little of this and a little of that. Mostly, I blow things up, though."

"You blow things up?"

Caleb chuckled at the astonished look on Julia's face. He nodded his head. "I'm in demolition."

"Is that dangerous?" Julia asked. Caleb could see her hands twisting together as if she was nervous.

"Not any more than being a bus driver. I've been fully trained and I've done this for years. I basically just light large firecrackers and throw them in buildings."

"Oh, that's all?" Julia laughed. "And you live here with all the other members of your team?"

Caleb nodded. "We're all pretty close due to our training. We don't do well in large crowds. The alpha king of the hill thing," Caleb

laughed. "So, yeah, we stay here at the ranch until we're needed for a mission."

"Have you been a team long?" Julia asked.

"Yeah. We've been together a long time. I trust each of the men in my unit with my life. They haven't let me down yet."

"Sounds nice, having so many close friends that you can depend on."

Caleb nodded. He reached down and took Julia's hand in his, looking at how delicate they seemed compared to his own large hands.

He lifted his eyes from Julia's hands to gaze into hers eyes, mesmerized by the wonder reflected there. "Can I kiss you?"

"I'd like that," Julia replied.

Caleb reached down to stroke Julia's cheek before lowering his lips to hers. His lips worked over hers. His tongue pressed lightly at the seam of her pink lips. The first hesitant kiss was gentle and sweet. The second was anything but. It was hard and wet and demanding. It was hot and passionate.

After a few silent moments, they parted. Caleb could see Julia's heart pounding in the pulse in her neck. Her cheeks were flushed, her breathing ragged. Caleb didn't think she could look more beautiful than she did at that moment.

"I guess we should get back," Julia whispered.

"Yeah, I guess." It was all Caleb could do not to groan when Julia's eyes dropped down to look at his mouth and she licked her lips.

He could feel his erection warring with his zipper, begging to come out and he wanted nothing more. Julia didn't look like she could handle it right now, though.

It wasn't just the bruises on her face. There was a weariness in her eyes. She looked tired. Maybe he could give her a little peace later, a bubble bath or something. Anything to make that fatigue go away.

“Come on, *bébé*, let’s get back to the meeting before they send out a search party.”

Caleb placed his hand in the small of Julia’s back as he escorted her back into the living room and over to the couch. He shrugged his shoulders when Rune stared at him, an eyebrow raised in query.

Rune quickly leaned over and quietly filled them in on what had happened since they left the room. Julia’s mouth dropped open when Rune told her that James, her house-man, was in truth, Sam and Sky’s biological father.

The most exciting news Rune shared was that James was married to Sam’s mother, who was still alive and hidden away by James for her own safety. Sam must be stunned.

“Okay, what do we know at this point?” Ethane asked finally.

“Well,” Julia began, “we know that Arthur and my father will do anything to get their own way, even kill. They have my daughter and are using her to keep me in line. I’m worried what they might do to her now that I’ve pissed Arthur off.”

“That brings up another question. If Arthur knew that the heir had to be a blood relative, and there is DNA testing now days, why would he try to get you pregnant, Julia?” Ethane asked.

“He hates Sam and Sky because they defied him. He hates anyone related to them. I think at that point, he couldn’t have cared less whether he got a blood heir or not. Besides, who would say it wasn’t a blood relative?” Julia asked.

“That makes sense, in a very weird, sick sort of way.” Sam chuckled. “Julia was already married to me and Arthur had no idea of my...feelings for Daniel. I’m sure he thought Julia and I had a normal marriage.”

“God damn, that man is sick. We have to do something to stop him,” Bear said vehemently. “He’s destroying lives for his own sick pleasure.”

“But what can we do?” Julia asked. “He’s too powerful. If we try anything he’s going to kill Robin.”

“Julia, what makes you think that Arthur will kill your daughter?” Daniel asked.

“Arthur may not, but my father will. Douglas Spencer is every bit as ruthless as your fa—as Arthur is. They’ve also been good friends for years. They would work together to get what they want,” Julia assured them.

“I won’t let him touch a hair on her head, little one,” Caleb promised as he hugged Julia tight to his side.

Sam smiled, amused at the protective stance that Caleb had taken toward Julia. The odds that he would try for Julia’s heart kept getting bigger and bigger. Sam didn’t think it would be a bad match. Caleb would protect Julia as much as he could.

“Julia, do you know they have Robin?” Sam asked getting back on track.

Julia nodded her head. “Before I agreed to marry you, my father picked Robin up at school. He is her grandfather so the school released her to him. Why wouldn’t they? Afterwards, he called me and told me that if I ever wanted to see her again, I would marry you. He lets me talk to her on the phone once a week, though.”

“I thought you said he picked her up from school today?” Sam asked.

“He did,” Julia said. “My father took Robin away from me before I married you. He had her placed in a boarding school upstate. He said once I gave him an heir, I could have her back.”

“And that’s where she’s been this entire time?” Daniel asked.

Julia nodded her head. “As long as I knew she was at that boarding school, I knew she would be safe from my father but he picked her up before he came by the house with Arthur.”

“When did you speak to her last?” Sam asked.

“Just after Arthur and my father came to the house. He wanted me to agree to go along with Arthur’s little plan so he let me talk to her.”

"Your father just gave you to Arthur even though you were married to Sam?" Caleb asked through clenched teeth. His arms tightened even more around her small form when she nodded.

"None of you are getting this," Julia shouted. "These men are evil. They will do anything they can to get what they want. They don't care who they hurt along the way, or who they kill. If someone defies them, they disappear or show up dead. Look what they've already done to Sam and Sky. They have no guilt about taking someone out if they don't do what they want."

"Well, I believe our first order of business is to get Robin away from them and bring her here to the ranch where she will be safe," Sam began. "James, you're positive our mother is safe?"

"Definitely, I don't take chances with Lillian's life, ever!" James said vehemently.

Sam nodded. He turned to Ethane. "My father doesn't know who you are. Do you feel safe enough going back to Boston and digging around a little? I want you to look into my grandfather's estate. Find out everything you can on concerning the conditions of his will."

"Then for now, I think that's everything. I also think we all need a break. This has been a long night for all of us and we need some downtime. Why don't we all get some sleep and we'll meet back here in the morning to finalize our plans?" Sam asked.

"Julia, will you be okay? Do you need anything for pain?" Daniel asked from his position next to Sam.

Julia shook her head, "No, I'll be fine, Daniel, but thank you for asking."

"I'll take care of her." Caleb growled possessively as he lifted Julia into his arms and stood up. Julia didn't seem to have a problem with it. She wrapped an arm around his neck and curled into his broad chest like a kitten. She practically purred.

Caleb smiled and pulled Julia closer as he walked out of the room with her. The little sounds coming from her made his cock ache. It

was a contented, satisfied, purr-like sound. He wondered what other sounds she would make when he got her alone.

## Chapter 4

Caleb carried Julia, not to the bedroom she had been assigned, but to his own bedroom. He gently lay her on the bed and then went to close the door.

When he came back to the bed, he lay down beside her and drew her back into his arms, cradling her head on his chest, his arms wrapped tightly around her.

"I will bring Robin home to you, Julia," he whispered into her hair as he listened to her uneven breathing. "I promise, *mon bébé*." He grabbed her chin and raised her face up to his. "Do you believe me?" he asked softly.

Julia looked into his moss-colored eyes. Caleb felt like she was looking into his soul, looking to see if he was telling the truth. Did she believe him?

His breath caught in his throat when her small, delicate hands came up to frame his face. She ran her fingers softly over his face, starting with his forehead, down across his eyes, and over his high cheekbones.

Caleb's entire body trembled when she caressed his lips with her fingers several times before leaning in to replace her fingers with her velvety lips. Her kiss was so soft, just a touch of her lips on his. Caleb let Julia take the kiss where she wanted to, letting her take the lead.

The touch of her lips was a delicious sensation. It was a kiss as tender and light as a summer breeze. It sang through his veins. Raising his mouth from hers, he gazed into her eyes.

"Julia," he whispered before he moved his mouth over hers, his lips hard and searching, devouring her softness. "I need you," he

whispered against her skin between kisses. When he spoke again, his voice was tender, almost a murmur. "Do you want this, *bébé*?" he asked, a huskiness lingering in his voice.

"God, yes," she said in a voice that seem to come from a long way off.

Caleb looked her over, memorizing her figure. "I wish you were mine," he said in a low voice. His deep longing lay naked in his eyes. Julia felt Caleb's body shudder against hers.

Caleb's hands trembled as he unbuttoned her blouse and pushed the edges to the side, his fingers icy but the palms fiery hot. He eased the lacy cup of her bra aside, inhaling deeply when her breasts spilled forth. Beautiful pink nipples topped her lush, full breasts.

Gently, his hands outlined the circle of her breasts, his fingers tracing across her nipples. His touch was light and painfully arousing. Her nipples firmed instantly under his touch.

He pulled her clothes from her body until she lay before him. The shapely beauty of her naked body taunting him until he let out a deep groan.

He leaned down, his lips teasing a taut, dusky nipple before his tongue made a path down her ribs to her stomach. His hands explored the soft lines of her abdomen, her waist, the hollow of her hips.

The stroking of his hands sent pleasure jolts through Julia as his hands moved magically over her body, followed closely by his lips as Caleb whispered his love for each part of her.

Julia writhed beneath Caleb, eager for each touch. "Oh, Caleb," she moaned as she wrapped her hands in his hair.

"I want to know if you taste as sweet as I think you will," Caleb whispered, his hands pulling her legs apart. He lay between her thighs and lost no time exploring her flesh with his lips, his tongue. Within seconds, Julia was gasping his name, screaming in pleasure, as she came against his mouth.

Julia suddenly sat up, pushing Caleb's jeans down his hips, his erect cock springing free. He yearned for her touch, yearned to feel

her caress his aching length. She didn't disappoint him, wrapping one delicate hand around his cock while their lips locked together once more, the other hand pulling his shirt free.

Caleb moved his hand between Julia's thighs as he pushed her back down onto her back. His fingers pushed deeply inside her. Julia arched her body, loving the feeling of her nipples rubbing against his chest hair. He kissed her neck, gently nipping her soft skin.

Julia's hands clenched in his hair as she moaned, "Caleb, oh please, Caleb."

Caleb quickly reached over to his nightstand and grabbed a condom, ripping it open with his teeth before rolling it down his aching cock.

He held her by the hips and gently pushed his swollen cock into her. He filled her up, and she moaned. He locked gazes with her as he pushed in and out of her slowly. Caleb wrapped her legs around his thighs. Julia began to tremble. He pushed harder and faster, almost frantic with his need.

"Caleb," she murmured quietly against his ear. "Caleb, oh God, I'm...gonna..."

"Give it to me, *bébé*. I want to feel you come around my cock," he groaned against her lips.

Julia panted at each thrust his hard cock made, her hips undulating against him. Caleb pulled at her legs, lifting her higher, impaling her with his throbbing cock while she cried out, her arms tightening around his neck.

Julia's trembling body arched, and she held onto him as convulsions of pure pleasure racked her body. Squeezing him hard deep inside her, she screamed his name as she came.

Caleb roughly hammered in and out of Julia's tight grip, his body becoming rigid. He looked deep into her eyes and groaned, "Julia!" He pushed one last time and released his seed deep inside her.

Falling on top of Julia, he pressed his damp forehead against hers. He exhaled one long, shaky breath. His body felt limp, his arms weak and shaking.

Caleb kissed her and then rolled onto his back. He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her onto his chest. He ran his fingers through her long blonde hair and said, "Just give me a few minutes to catch my breath, then I'm going to love you again."

He reached for her a few minutes later. This time they were able to take their time to explore, to arouse, to give each other pleasure slowly.

\* \* \* \*

Julia woke to a soft texture gently caressing her lips. She smelled fresh-cut roses. Opening her eyes, she found Caleb's wide shoulders blocking the early morning sunlight, but the wide grin on his face made up for it. He was obviously a morning person.

The soft texture was a fresh cut rose Caleb rubbed across her lips "Morning, *bébé*. Did you sleep well?" He asked softly before he leaned down to place a kiss on her lips.

"What time is it?" Julia asked. She turned her head to look for a clock.

"Early." He laughed softly. "Even the roosters are still asleep."

"Then why did you wake me up?" she whined as she tried to pull the covers over her head.

"I couldn't go another second without seeing your beautiful blue eyes, hearing your sweet voice," he whispered, a possessive desperation in his voice. He pulled the blankets down to her waist, baring her naked skin to his hungry gaze.

Julia's heart thumped in her chest at the look of need in Caleb's eyes. "I need you," he moaned softly before his lips latched onto her breast, his tongue caressing her sensitive, swollen nipples. Julia froze as her senses flared to life.

“Say I can have you again, Julia,” he whispered against her hot skin. “Say yes.”

His hand seared a path down her abdomen and onto her thigh, the gentle caress sending currents of desire through Julia.

“Yes, yes, yes,” she moaned. She buried her hands in his thick hair and pulled until his hard body was resting between her open thighs, his cock caressing her soft folds. “Caleb,” she demanded, pushing her body against his.

Julia’s body went from cold to blistering hot when she felt Caleb’s hard cock nudge her tight entrance. She was suddenly filled with a ravenous longing unlike anything she had ever felt before. Her body began to squirm beneath his as she tried to bring him into her aching body.

“Caleb, please, I need you,” she begged, her hands smoothing down his back to grasp his hips. “Just you, Caleb.” Julia gasped when Caleb leaned down to kiss her. The weight of his body pressing her breasts. Against the hardness of Caleb’s chest.

His tormented groan was a heady invitation. His hands quickly found a condom and rolled it on. Grabbing her hips with his large hands, he lifted his body just a fraction and then plunged himself into Julia’s tight grasp.

Passion pounded the blood through Julia’s heart, chest, and head when Caleb began a frantic rhythm. Together they found a tempo that bound their bodies together.

Julia’s impatience grew to explosive proportions, until she shattered with a scream into a million glowing stars. Her thoughts fragmented as his hands and lips continued their hungry exploration of her body until Caleb arched up and came, roaring out Julia’s name.

She lay there in the drowsy warmth of the bed, her thoughts on the massive man she held in her arms. Was he merely filling a moment of physical desire? Were two days enough time to build any lasting emotion between them? All Julia’s loneliness and confusion welded

together in one upsurge of devouring yearning. If Caleb wanted only this from her, he would tear her soul apart.

Caleb hesitated, torn by conflicting emotions, before softly whispering Julia's name. Half in anticipation, half in dread, he looked down into her eyes to find her watching him. Awkwardly, he cleared his throat. When he tried to speak, his voice wavered with his emotions.

"Julia... I... uh..."

Caleb seemed like a complex man, not easy to know intimately. Because of that, she wondered if she should confess her doubts to him or if it would ruin this moment they had together. Her mind was a crazy mixture of hope and fear as she waited for him to say more.

"I've never seen anyone half as beautiful as you in my entire life. You're like a dream come true."

Julia laughed softly as she looked up into Caleb's dark green eyes. "Is that all you see? Just a beautiful face?" Her statement was ludicrous considering the bruises and swelling that covered her face.

"Oh no, *bébé*." Caleb wiggled his eyebrows as his gaze went down the length of Julia's naked body. "There's a lot more to you than a pretty face."

"Really?" Julia asked as she rubbed her hands down Caleb's strong chest. "Like what?"

Caleb grinned. "Let me show you."

Julia let out a satisfied giggle as Caleb attacked her with his lips. She pushed her hesitations and doubts to the back of her mind and enjoyed Caleb's touch. Heavy thoughts could wait until later. Right now, she just wanted to enjoy what Caleb was doing to her.

## Chapter 5

When Julia walked into the dining room the next morning, Sam looked up and smiled. Caleb had his arm wrapped around her and held her possessively to his side.

After grabbing a plate full of fresh fruit and some juice Caleb sat down at the table and pulled Julia down to sit next to him, pulling her chair close and promptly started feeding her fruit.

Julia looked over at Sam and blushed at his raised eyebrow. Sam burst out laughing when Caleb looked over at him, and growled possessively. Julia seemed to flush even more and buried her red face in Caleb's neck. That just made Sam laugh even harder.

Caleb looked up when he heard Daniel whisper Sam's name. Sam turned to Daniel place a small kiss on Daniel's lips before looking into his eyes and talking softly to him.

"I love you, Daniel, you know that, right?" Sam said. Daniel hesitated a second, then nodded. "I also care for Julia. She is the mother of my child, and I will never abandon her. However, I have no doubt that you are going to be my life. Do you understand that?"

Caleb fairly bristled at Sam's comments. He hated that Sam was married to Julia, that he had a right to her. He wanted that right. Anger surged through him when he thought about Julia belonging to anyone besides him.

Once Daniel had nodded again he turned to look at Julia and Caleb. His tone now serious as he said, "Caleb, if Julia allows you into her life, so be it. It's her choice. She is a beautiful, sweet, young woman and she deserves some happiness."

Sam paused for a moment, gauging Caleb's anger as he continued talking. "I also want you to remember two things. One, Julia is pregnant by artificial means. And although we are married, I have never known her in *that* way. Hell, I've never even seen the woman naked." He tried not to laugh as Caleb growled at that.

"Two, my heart belongs to Daniel. It always will. I have no designs on Julia other than her safety and happiness. I will do everything within my power to make sure that no one ever hurts her again. So, if she chooses to be with you or anyone else, that is her business. If you hurt her, then it becomes my business."

Sam was a little worried, not that he didn't trust Caleb, but because the man was so big. He stood six foot five in his stocking feet. Julia, a tiny snippet of a woman, stood barely five foot four. Caleb had a good foot and a hundred and twenty pounds on her.

Besides that fact, Caleb had always been known to not play well with others. To look at them, anyone would think with Bear's size he would be the dominant one, but Caleb's intimidating demeanor surpassed even Bear. Sam worried that Caleb would overshadow Julia's sweet personality.

Caleb watched Sam for awhile before nodding his head. "Fair enough." Caleb was a man of little words.

"Julia, how do you feel about all of this?" Sam asked. He looked up, smiling when everyone else started to trail into the dinning room, some grabbing food, others just coffee.

Julia lifted her head from where she had it buried in Caleb's arm. She flushed red again but continued to look at Sam. "He's sweet."

Sam's jaw nearly hit the floor at her statement, as did everyone else's.

"Sweet? Did you just call Caleb sweet?" Rune asked from across the table. "You do know who you're talking about, right? Caleb Boudreaux, the meanest, orneriest Cajun outside of Louisiana?"

Julia glared at Rune until he held up his hands in surrender. "That's mean. Caleb *is* sweet. You're just jealous because he's better looking than you."

Sam nearly fell out of his chair laughing. Caleb and Rune were identical twins. Only after years of knowing them both of them had he been able to truly tell them apart.

Caleb just grinned and kissed the top of Julia's head before feeding her another piece of fruit.

"So," Sam began once he contained his laughter, "you're okay with this then?" He gestured toward Caleb.

Julia looked at Caleb, her face blushing. "Yeah, he'll do," she smiled at him. Caleb raised an eyebrow at her but said nothing, just handed her another piece of fruit.

"That's good enough for me," Sam replied as he turned to everyone else sitting at the table. "So, anyone come up with any brilliant plans overnight on how to get our asses out of the fire?"

Ethane nodded. "Yeah, I think I may have something, but it will take some fancy footwork on my part."

"Do tell."

"Well, I've been thinking a lot about your grandfather's will. It seems to me that his estate is the backbone of your father's financial empire. Am I right?"

Sam shrugged. "Got me."

Caleb let the conversation flow away from him as he watched Julia eat the fruit he was feeding her. She was so damn beautiful. What would a gorgeous woman like her want with a man like him?

He was a soldier. What did he know about the things a society girl like Julia would be interested in? He was concerned that the rough life he led might be more than Julia could handle. It wouldn't be easy for her to be the wife of a soldier.

*Wife?* Where in the hell had that thought come from? He barely knew her, and already he was considering her his mate. Caleb wondered if he was out of his mind. He knew how to blow things up,

shoot, and fight an enemy. What did he know about caring for a gentle woman like Julia?

“Now comes the hard part. We need to get Robin safely away from Douglas and back here to the ranch before we proceed with taking Arthur down,” Sam said. “I don’t want them to use her to keep us in line. We also need to do it as soon as possible. I don’t want them to have any idea that we are on to them before then. Any ideas anyone?”

“If Jax can get me a list of all of their properties, it shouldn’t be too hard to find out where she is. I say we just go in and get her. It’s not like we haven’t done this sort of thing before,” Cole said. “This is what we are trained for.”

Caleb watched everyone at the table nod their heads in agreement. One of their own was in need and they would all, to a man, do whatever it took to help. That’s what friends do.

“Then we are all in agreement?” Cole asked. Every person at the table nodded. “Okay then, operation *Rescue Robin* is in effect. Jax, you find out what you can on the computer. There has to be a trail somewhere.”

Jax nodded and wheeled herself out of the room.

“Jake, I want you and Nick to fly back to Boston,” Cole said as he looked at two other members of his unit. “Watch them. I want to know their every move. Hell, I want to know what they have for breakfast before they are done eating it.”

Cole looked at another member of their unit. “Rune, you gather our supplies. Standard mission gear. You know what we need. Sam, you and Sky stay here with Ethane, go over every piece of paperwork you can find on how to bring these assholes down. Caleb—”

“I will bring the little one home to her mother,” Caleb announced quietly to everyone.

“Yeah.” Cole chuckled. “I thought you might. Okay, then you go with Jake and Nick. Find Robin and bring her home to her mother. That leaves the rest of you here to protect what is ours. I want extra

safety measures taken. James, I know you said you had moved Lillian to a safe place but I would feel a lot more comfortable if you would bring her here where we can keep an eye on her. Besides, I am sure Sam and Sky would like to see their mother.”

James thought about it for several minutes then nodded his head. “Yeah, I guess it might be better to have her here where I can keep an eye on her. But that means that I won’t be leaving anywhere. I won’t leave Lillian here by herself.”

“That’s fine. That just gives us one more person for protection. I assume you know how to handle a gun?”

James just looked at Cole, rolling his eyes. “Nope, never handled one in my life,” he said, smirking.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought. Okay, you’re on protection duty as soon as you get back with Lillian.” Cole looked at everyone at the table seriously. “I’m hoping you all understand why Bear and I have to stay here. In case there’s any word on...Mari.” He could barely get her name out.

“Cole, we don’t expect you to go,” Sam reassured Cole, patting him on the back. “You’re needed here, as is Bear. No one thinks any less of you for staying. We all miss Mari and want her home. If it were Daniel, I’d do the same thing.”

Cole nodded his thanks.

“Any more questions?” Cole asked. When no one said anything he asked, “Does anyone have anything else to add then?”

“What about what they did to Julia? They both need to pay for that,” Caleb stated firmly.

“Damn, that’s right. We have all that evidence from Julia’s rape kit,” Sam said, slamming his hand down on the table.

“Julia’s rape kit? What are you talking about, Sam? I thought you stopped him before he raped Julia?” Cole asked.

“I did. But before we flew out here from Boston we had Julia examined by a doctor. He did a rape kit on Julia. While there wasn’t

actually any sexual evidence since Arthur didn't rape Julia, we have pictures and all the medical information from her injuries. I had it all documented and sealed by the doctor."

"Could this put them away?" Cole asked.

Ethane saw where Cole was going with this. "Yeah, any prosecutor on the planet would be thrilled with what we have. It would be a slam dunk conviction," Ethan said

Caleb looked down to where Julia cringed next to him. "Can we convict them without using this information? Without dragging Julia into this?"

Sam looked over at Julia and the silent tears falling down her face. "Julia," Sam asked quietly, "How do you feel about this? Do you want us to use this or not?"

"They need to pay for what they did. If this can help, then use it." Julia wiped her face as she looked at Sam. "I'd rather not if we don't have to. I would prefer to just forget it all."

Sam nodded, "Okay, honey, if we can get them without using it, we will. I'll do everything I can not to."

"Julia, we will find what we need to get them without using you to do it. I promise," Ethane said as he patted her knee. "I know we can find a way. We are all relatively intelligent men here."

When Caleb looked at the hand touching her knee and growled at it, Ethane laughed. "Well, most of us anyway. Some of us are still cavemen."

The laughing at the table only made Caleb growl more as he pulled Julia tighter against him. Finally the laughter died down and Cole said, "Well, then, everyone know what they need to do?"

When everyone nodded Cole scooted his chair back and stood. "Okay, let's get to it then."

Almost as if they had choreographed it, everyone stood, pushed their chairs in, and walked away from the table to do what they were assigned to do.

Jake and Nick packed to go to Boston. Caleb escorted Julia to her room. He slowly let her body slide down his. He liked the feel of her under his hands, her body pressed against him.

"I'm gonna miss you, *bébé*," he whispered against her lips. "Can I call you?"

"You'd better." Julia laughed as she wrapped her fingers in his hair, pulling his head down to hers.

"Every night?" Caleb asked between sweet kisses on her lips.

When she nodded, Caleb gave her a big, mischievous grin. "Ever have phone sex?"

Julia blushed. "No."

"Gonna have to fix that. I know I have only ten minutes, but can I make love to you again, Julia? Before I go? I'm going to be gone for awhile, and it's going to be hell being away from you now that I've found you."

"You talk too much, when you should be giving me something to remember you by." Julia laughed. "Now, shut up and kiss me."

"Yes, ma'am." Caleb growled as he leaned down to plunder Julia's lips. He unbuttoned her pants and pushed them down her hips. He fitted his hand against her. God, she was so wet already, so ready for him.

Caleb's hands were shaking as he quickly pulled his shirt off and dropped it on the floor then pushed his pants down around his ankles after grabbing a condom from his pocket.

Quickly rolling the condom down his aching cock, Caleb reached for Julia. He didn't even take time to pull his boots off as he picked Julia up and wrapped her legs around his hips.

"This is gonna be quick, Julia," he groaned against her lips as he fitted himself to her and plunged inside her tight channel. "I need you too much."

Julia felt the hardness of the wall as Caleb pushed her against it, his hips moving frantically against her as his hands grabbed her hips

to hold her in place. Julia just wrapped her hands around Caleb's neck and held on for the ride.

Caleb couldn't believe how good Julia felt. Each time with her was better than the last time. If things kept going like this, she'd kill him outside of a year. And he knew he would die a happy man.

He could feel himself getting close, but he wanted Julia to come first. He reached down with one hand and began caressing her until he felt her start clenching around him. He watched her face as he brought her to climax.

Julia was beautiful in her release. Her face was flushed with desire, her eyes half closed, her mouth slightly open in wonder as she cried out, "Oh, Caleb."

Watching Julia orgasm was more than Caleb could take. One, two, three more frantic thrusts into her warm sheath, and his cock exploded inside of her. He felt the strength leave his body as he slowly sank to the floor, holding Julia tightly to him.

He knelt there on the floor for several moments, trying to regain his breath, until Julia started to squirm.

"Caleb, honey, you're squeezing me too tight. I can't breath."

Caleb immediately loosened his grip but didn't let Julia go. Getting to his knees, he walked her to the bed and lay down, pulling her body to rest on his, never letting their bodies separate.

He wrapped her in his arms, tucking her head under his chin. This was the part he loved the most, cuddling with her after making love to her. Just holding her in his arms, knowing that, for this small moment in time, she belonged totally to him.

Caleb was enjoying the feel of Julia in his arms when she began to giggle.

"What are you laughing about?"

"Well, that used up all of about four minutes. What are you going to do with the other six minutes before you have to leave?"

Caleb rolled over on top of Julia with a deep chuckle. “Just you wait and see, *bébé*,” he said as he began thrusting inside of Julia again.

\* \* \* \*

A few minutes later, a very satisfied Caleb left Julia sleeping in her bed and went with Rune to pack their standard mission gear. The four-man team left for Boston fifteen minutes later.

Ethane and Sky began going over the papers that had been faxed to Ethane earlier. Jax hit her computer, and James left to get Lillian. Cole and Sam insured that additional protection was added around the ranch as well as informing their ranch hands of the needed extra security.

After everyone had left Julia walked back into the dinning room and sat down. She looked over at Daniel, the only other person left sitting at the table. “Is it always like that?”

Daniel laughed. “Yeah, pretty much. But usually it’s all of them leaving.”

“It must be hard being left behind.”

“It is. But they are my friends, my family,” Daniel said as he set his coffee cup down on the table. “I want to be there to make sure they’re okay. But, ultimately, I know the best thing I can do is to be here when they come home. But, yeah, it’s hard to sit here knowing that they are out there in danger.”

“How do you deal with it? I mean, knowing what they do is so dangerous? How can you handle it?” Julia asked desperately, thinking of Caleb and the dangers he faced.

“I love Sam and I love the guys. I know that they are all good at what they do. They never take chances. Cole is a good commander. He would never make one of them do anything that they couldn’t do. He always has their welfare in mind.”

Daniel took another sip of his coffee as he tried to decide how much to tell Julia. “They are also very close. Closer, I think, than a normal team would be because of their shared experiences. Any one of them would give their life for any teammates without thinking about it.”

He took a deep breath as he continued. Daniel didn’t want to give away the team’s secrets but he knew Julia needed to know.

“I guess that’s how I deal with it. They all take care of each other, look out for each other. They are connected in some elemental way that you and I will never understand. If you decide to get involved with Caleb, you need to understand that. They need each other just to survive. Caleb will never be *normal*. He will never be like other men.”

He grabbed Julia’s hands in his and looked at her closely. “But if you decide to give your heart to Caleb he will take care of you, treasure you, and protect you for the rest of your life, and your children, too. It’s worth the heartache, Julia, when we sit here at home and worry about them.”

“So we’re just supposed to sit and wait for them to come home?”

“Sort of.” He laughed. “But think of it this way. These guys go out and face danger on a daily basis and beat it. They get into horrible situations. Providing a home for them, a safe place where they do not have to be strong or unfeeling, we can give that to them. I’m not saying you have to be Little Miss Homemaker, just be here to welcome them home with open arms. Just love them. It’s well worth it.”

“I just don’t know if I can handle knowing he’s out there in danger,” Julia said.

“Give it time. Get to know him.” Daniel squeezed her hands. “But if you really want proof, when he gets home, go to him and open your arms. See what his reaction is. You’ll be pleasantly surprised, I promise.”

"I'll think about it." Julia pulled her hands away and looked around the room. "So is this what you do while you wait? Just sit here?"

Daniel chuckled. "Oh no, I have plenty to keep me busy."

"Need some help?" Julia asked. "I'm going to go crazy if I just sit here."

"Sure, come with me and I'll have you so busy you'll forget he's even gone." Daniel stood up and reached for Julia's hand.

Julia smiled, stood up, and followed Daniel out of the room. She was so worried she just might scream, she thought to herself. *Busy would be real good right now.*

## Chapter 6

It had been two weeks since the team had left. As promised, Caleb called her every night. The first couple of times they had phone sex had made her nervous, but after awhile, she began looking forward to his nightly calls.

Caleb could get her going just from his deep, rough voice. Add that to the images he produced in her mind and the fact that she knew he was pleasuring himself while he talked dirty to her, usually had Julia going off in minutes.

James had been delayed in getting Lillian to the ranch. He had called and said he had something he had to take care of before he brought Lillian home but that they were on their way. They would be there as soon as they could get there.

The waiting was horrible. Julia felt like she was going to lose her mind. No one would really tell her anything. She knew they were just trying to protect her, but she would rather know what was going on. At this point, any information would be good.

Daniel had run out of things for her to do. He finally passed her off to Cole. He lasted all of thirty minutes before sending her out to plant flowers with Bear. Bear had a little more understanding.

“Going crazy, are you?” he asked as she knelt down beside him in the dirt.

“More to the point, I think I’m driving everyone else crazy,” she replied with a nervous little laugh.

“No, we all get like this sometimes. I plant flowers to deal with it.”

Julia looked around the very colorful garden. “You must go crazy a lot.” She never would have thought the big, tall man would have the gentle patience to plant such a beautiful garden.

“Yeah, you’d think. But I know it’s hard on anyone sitting here at home, waiting. Between you and me, I think the waiting is even harder than the fighting. But don’t tell the guys. I’ll deny everything.” He laughed and handed Julia a spade and a bag of soil. “Here, dig a hole.”

“Can I bury Caleb in it?”

“Not sure we have enough soil to cover him, but whatever floats your boat.”

Bear and Julia worked for several moments together, enjoying the silence of the outdoors. It was a beautiful early summer day.

“Hey, Bear, who’s Mari?” Julia broke the silence with her curiosity.

Bear froze for a second then looked over at Julia. Julia could see the sadness in his eyes and immediately regretted asking her question.

“If you don’t want to answer, I understand. It’s just that everyone’s mentioned her, and I don’t know who she is. I’m sorry if I said something I shouldn’t have.”

“No, it’s okay. Mari is my fiancée, Cole’s and mine. She disappeared about four months ago. That’s why Cole and I couldn’t leave with the rest of the team, in case we get any information on her.”

“You and Cole? You’re both engaged to her?”

“Yeah, I know it’s kind of weird, but it works for us. You might have guessed by now that we don’t exactly do things the normal way around here.”

“Yeah, I kind of got that when Sam gave me his okay to be with Caleb. I guess I was a little surprised when he didn’t have a problem with it. But I’m glad he doesn’t. I like Caleb, a lot. He really is sweet.”

Bear laughed some more. "That's just got to drive Rune nuts. Caleb has always been the joker, getting the two of them in trouble. And you think he's sweet. That's just too funny."

"Well, he is. Maybe you guys don't see him like I do."

"I should hope not, 'cause eeewww!!!" Bear said as he wrinkled his nose, laughing at the lust-filled look on Julia's face.

Julia was quiet for a few more moments before asking about Mari again. "Is there any chance you'll find Mari soon?"

"I don't know. She's been gone so long. Sometimes I wonder if we will ever find her. It's been really hard on Cole. He needs her so much. She's our light. If something happens to her, I don't know if he will make it."

"What about you? How are you handling it?"

"Not as good as I wish, but better than I thought I would. The only thing keeping me going is knowing that she is alive. I know she is. I can feel it."

"I know what you mean. The only thing keeping me from going completely nuts is knowing in my heart that Robin is alive."

Julia suddenly jumped and placed her hand on her abdomen. "Oh," she whispered.

"Are you okay? Is it the baby? Do you want me to get Doc?" Bear reached over to help her but didn't know how, so he let his hands drop back down to his side.

"No, no, I'm fine. I felt the baby move. It was weird, sort of like a butterfly rolling over in my stomach."

"Can I feel?" Bear asked.

"I'm not sure you'll feel anything, but go ahead." Julia grabbed Bear's massive hand and placed it over her distended abdomen. His hand covered her entire stomach. He moved it around a little and gently pressed down.

"Oh, there, did you feel it? Right there."

Bear grinned and nodded. "Yeah, just a bit. It's a little thing, isn't it?"

Julia laughed joyously, pressing her hand over Bear's. When she looked up at Bear, he had tears in his eyes. "Hey, it's okay, Bear."

"Mari is...Mari is pregnant. She was just a few months along when she disappeared. Twins, the Doc said, she's expecting twins," Bear cried.

"Oh, Bear," Julia said as she wrapped her arms around him and held him while he cried. "I'm so sorry. But remember what you said, you know she's alive. Hang on to that, okay? Don't lose that hope."

"I know, but I'm missing so much. I've never even felt the babies move or anything."

"Is it going to be too hard for you to have me here? Do you want me to leave?"

Bear laughed as he wiped his eyes. "No, but I hope you won't mind if I ask to feel the baby from time to time."

"You can feel me up any time you want to," Julia replied with a little laugh and a wiggle of her eyebrows.

Bear laughed as they got back to planting flowers. Julia would be a good addition to their little family. She had a good heart. He just hoped Caleb appreciated what he was getting.

\* \* \* \*

"Hey Julia," Cole called from the living room. "Caleb's on the phone for you. You can pick up the extension and press one."

Julia eagerly grabbed the phone on her nightstand and pressed one. She heard Cole hang up just as Caleb came on the line. "Julia?"

"Caleb?"

"Hey, *bébé*, how are you? Miss me?" he asked, his voice deep and husky.

"Yeah, I wish you were here with me now. I hate you being so far away."

"Me too, but I have good news for you. I saw Robin this morning." Julia didn't realize tears were falling down face until they

dropped on her hand. “You saw my baby? Is she okay? Did she look okay? Where was she? What was she doing?” She began crying.

“Sshh, *bébé*, she’s fine. She was outside, playing ball at your father’s estate. She looked happy, Julia.”

“Oh, God, please tell me you will bring her home soon. I miss her so much.”

“I know, *bébé*.”

Caleb could hear Julia crying softly on the other end of the line. It broke his heart to hear her sobs. He wanted to strangle her father for bringing such misery to a gentle, sweet woman. He wanted to be able to reach through the phone and cradle Julia in his arms. Being all the way in Boston was hell.

“Julia, *bébé*, its going to be okay. I’ll have her home to you as soon as I can.”

“Promise?” She sniffled.

“Yes, *bébé*, I promise. I’ll have her home real soon. Now dry those tears and tell me what you did today.”

Julia sniffled a few more times before laughing softly into the phone. “I think I’m driving everyone crazy. Cole leaves whatever room he’s in the minute I walk in. I spent about twenty minutes with him before he sent me off to Bear. He’s a little more understanding. He let me plant flowers with him the other day. It was a lot of fun.”

“I’m glad they’re taking good care of you. I would expect nothing less.”

“I can’t imagine what they must be going through with Mari missing and all,” Julia stated sadly.

“They told you about Mari?” Caleb inquired.

“Yeah, I understand some of what they are feeling, but at least I know Robin’s alive and where she is. They don’t know anything. Not where she is, who has her, or even if she’s alive. It must be horrible for them both.”

“Yeah, *bébé*, it probably is. I think I’d go out of my mind if something like that happened to you. You must always be careful

with yourself, *bébé*, very careful. It would not be good if anything were to happen to you.”

“I’m always careful. I’ve had to learn to be.”

“Says the woman who is pregnant and married to a gay man,” replied Caleb sarcastically.

“Caleb!” Julia cried, insulted and hurt by his words.

“I’m sorry, Julia. I just hate the idea that you’re married to another man, even if he is gay. I have no rights to you unless he lets me have them, and it drives me crazy. I want you to be mine!”

“First of all, whether you have *rights* to me is my decision and mine alone. Sam has nothing to do with it. Second, your hating it is irrelevant. This is the situation, and you need to deal with it if you want to be in my life.”

After several moments of silence, Julia started to get nervous. Had she asked more of Caleb than he could give her? Would he give up on her if she continued to be married to Sam? And what happened when the baby came? Sam would always be in her life. Could Caleb deal with that? Did he care for her enough to stay around?

“Caleb, you know I care about you, don’t you?” she asked softly, her voice trembling slightly. She held her breath while she waited for him to say something. “Caleb?”

“Yeah, *bébé*, I’m here.” He sighed deeply. “Look, I have to go. I need to get some sleep before my turn at watch. I’ll call you as soon as I have some more news.”

“Okay, Caleb,” Julia whispered sadly as she slowly hung up the phone. He hadn’t said anything about her words, almost as if she had never spoken them. Maybe it was all too much for him.

Julia knew she shouldn’t have hoped so much. It always ended in disaster for her. Everything did. The only good thing in her life was Robin, and right now, even she was in jeopardy. Maybe she needed to forget about her dreams of Caleb and concentrate on Robin.

\* \* \* \*

Caleb stared at the phone in his hand for several moments before hanging it up. Well, that hadn't gone well. He just didn't know what to say to Julia when she had said she cared about him. At first, he had felt such joy, until he remembered she didn't belong to him.

Julia's unborn child and Robin weren't a problem for him. He loved children. Her connection to Sam was something all together different. He felt like he needed to ask Sam for permission to even speak to Julia, let alone make love to her.

It made him angry that he even had to consider asking another man for anything when it came to Julia. She should belong to him and him alone. It was something he needed to think long and hard about.

\* \* \* \*

Julia was worried when Caleb didn't call the next couple of nights. He didn't even call her for their nightly phone-sex session. Any information she gained came through Rune.

He always said Caleb was out, in the shower, or sleeping when she asked about him. It was clear to her that Caleb didn't want to talk to her anymore, which made her earlier decision to stick to getting Robin back and nothing else, seem like a good one.

Once Robin was back, she would spend her time getting her life back together and getting ready for the new baby. It was time to concentrate on her little family of three and forget about her fantasies. Besides, with each passing day, it was becoming more and more obvious to Julia that Caleb didn't want to be part of her little family.

Julia wiped away the tears on her face. She was giving in to her depressive thoughts, and she needed to stop. If living with her father had taught her anything, it had taught her that tears never solved anything.

She jumped suddenly at the light tapping on her bedroom door. She had been so deep into her thoughts that she hadn't heard the door open. Looking up, she saw Bear standing in the doorway.

"Hey."

"Hey, are you okay?" he asked, seeing the tear streaks on her face.

"Yeah, just wishing foolish dreams."

Bear came to sit down on the side of the bed. "Honey, there's nothing wrong with dreams. That's what keeps us getting out of bed every morning."

"You must think I'm terrible. Here I am, feeling sorry for myself, and you still don't know where Mari is."

Bear patted Julia's hand. "No, honey, you're not terrible. You're surviving, just like I am. Do you think I don't have dreams of Mari coming home safe to Cole and me? I do, every second of every day. We all have battles to face. Some are harder than others, but never think you are terrible for having your own dreams or feeling bad when they don't happen. That's called being human."

"Oh, Bear, I hope you get your dream. I would do anything if it meant you could have Mari back."

"Me too, honey, me too. Now, wipe those tears from your face. I came in here to let you know that Caleb called."

Julia sat up straight in the bed. "Caleb called? Did he ask to speak to me?"

"No, honey. I'm sorry, but he didn't." Bear could see the disappointment dampen her enthusiasm at Caleb's phone call and wanted to hit him. Caleb had no idea what he was doing to this sweet young woman. Maybe it was time to call Caleb and have a little discussion with him. Someone had to kick that man in the ass.

"He just wanted to give us an update and let us know that everything is a go. They are going to try for Robin in the next week or so. Caleb just wanted you to know she's okay. He saw her yesterday afternoon while she was at the park with the nanny. She seemed fine and happy."

“He didn’t ask to speak to me?” she asked again.

Bear shook his head. “Oh, honey,” Bear said as he watched the tears begin to fall down Julia’s face again. “I didn’t mean to make you cry.”

“It’s okay. I guess I expected this. It was just all too good to be true. What would a man like Caleb want with a pregnant single mother married to a gay man?” She laughed sadly before sobering up. “My father always taught me that I shouldn’t dream too big. I always get disappointed in the end. There’s no reason this situation should be any different.”

“Julia, there’s no reason you shouldn’t have your dream. If Caleb has his head so far up his ass he can’t see what a great catch you are, then you don’t need him.”

“But I want him.”

“I know, baby,” Bear said as he gave Julia a small hug. “But sometimes what we want and what we need are not the same thing.”

“That sucks!” Julia laughed.

“Yeah.” Bear laughed with her. “It does.”

## **Chapter 7**

Bear stared at the phone for quite awhile, trying to decide if he was doing the right thing. He really shouldn't get involved in this thing between Julia and Caleb, but he didn't know if he could stay out of it. Julia was really hurting, and Caleb was the reason why.

Bear reluctantly picked up the phone and dialed Caleb's motel room. The phone rang three times before Caleb picked up.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Caleb, it's Bear. You got a minute?"

"Sure. Is everything okay?"

"Yeah, pretty much the same as the last time we talked. But that's not what I'm calling about. I need to talk to you about Julia."

"Julia? Is she okay? Has something happened?"

"Well, that's why I'm calling. Look, I know I'm sticking my nose in here, and I apologize for that now. But Julia's all torn up over this thing between you two."

"What are you talking about? What thing between us?"

"That's what I'm talking about. Either you have something with her, or you don't. But one way or the other, you need to make up your mind. Either be with her no matter what, or let her go once and for all."

"What? Have you suddenly decided you want her? Is there something going on between you two?" Caleb inquired angrily.

Bear began laughing. "Caleb, you're a moron. You don't deserve a woman like Julia." Bear hung up the phone on a sputtering Caleb, wondering what he had just gotten himself into. Caleb was obviously being a complete idiot where Julia was concerned, and he didn't know

if that would change any time soon. He just hoped they worked it out before things got too out of hand.

\* \* \* \*

Caleb stared at the phone in his hand before slamming it down. Damn Bear! He was making all of Caleb's insecurities bleed through the tight wall he had built around himself. Was Bear interested in Julia? And what about Julia? Did she want to be with Bear?

Caleb wondered if Bear could offer Julia more than he could. Bear was definitely gentler than he was. You wouldn't know it to look at him, but Bear was one of the gentlest men Caleb had ever met. He probably was the better choice for Julia.

He just didn't know if he could give her up now that he had had her. Julia was everything he had always dreamed of. The question remained, what did Julia dream of? Caleb had a feeling it wasn't him. He just wasn't what she needed. Julia needed someone who could be gentle with her, understanding of her needs. Caleb was just as likely to run roughshod over her than listen to her wants and needs.

Julia deserved to have a family and settle down. Caleb just wasn't the *settling-down* type of guy. The thrill he got from blowing things up, being in dangerous situations, was something he didn't think he could give up.

Maybe letting her go now would be better for everyone concerned. Caleb didn't know if he could stay around and watch Julia fall in love with someone else, but maybe she needed the chance. Some mild-mannered accountant or something, someone who would come home to her every night instead of being gone for days on end, running around the world.

His decision made, Caleb decided he needed to talk with Sam. He didn't want to hurt Julia any more than he had to, and Sam knew her better than anyone. Maybe he could advise him on how best to break Julia's heart.

\* \* \* \*

Knock, knock, knock. Sam walked to the hotel door a couple of days later and opened it, his eyebrows drawn up in surprise to see Caleb standing there. "Oh, hey, Caleb."

"You got a minute, Sam? I need to talk to you."

"Yeah sure, come on in." Sam stepped back and let Caleb walk into the room, shutting the door behind him. "What's up, man?"

Instead of sitting down in the small sitting area he paced by the window, nearly wringing his hands together.

"Caleb?" Sam stared at Caleb in concern. He was starting to get worried about Caleb when he saw him ring his hands together. "Has something happened with the stakeout?"

"No, I need to talk to you about Julia?"

"Julia? Caleb, she's—"

"Hear me out, please."

"But, Caleb, she's—"

"Sam, I wouldn't come to you unless I was desperate. Please, just listen to what I have to say."

"Okay, Caleb."

Caleb was silent for several moments gathering his thoughts. He could do this, he thought as he tried to collect his courage. He was giving up his dream, but it would be better for her, safer.

"I care about Julia, a lot. You know that, right?"

"Well, yeah, I kind of figured. But what does that have—"

"But I'm not in love with her. I've thought about this for several days. At first, I was just going to ask your advice but the more I thought about...Julia's a great girl. She has a lot to offer the right man. But I'm not that man."

"Caleb, do you know what you're saying?"

"Yes, I do. I think the best thing for everyone is if I just cut things off now. I don't want to hurt her anymore than I have to. It would be

best to end things now. I'm never going to be able to love her like she needs to be loved."

"Oh, man, Caleb! Don't you think you should have thought about this before you slept with her?" he asked incredulously.

"Oh hell, I wasn't thinking then. She was just so beautiful, and I wanted her," Caleb said knowing he was lying through his teeth, and he hoped that, someday, Sam would understand and forgive him.

"So you slept with her, knowing you didn't love her?"

"I didn't know it at the time. I wasn't even thinking about it then. She was so sweet, so delicate. I felt like I needed to protect her the minute I saw her."

"Hell, everyone feels that way about Julia. But what does that have to do with loving her?"

"I need someone in my life who is stronger than Julia, someone that can stand on her own, someone who is not so...fragile. You know what kind of life we lead. How could I ask a woman like Julia to be a part of that?"

"Caleb, I have to tell you that I think you're nuts. Julia may seem fragile, but she is probably one of the strongest women I have ever met. You really need to think about this before making a decision."

"Sam, it's real simple." He was silent briefly before straightening to his full height. "I care about Julia. I may even love her on some level. But I am not *in* love with her, and I never will be. I have to break things off with her before they go too far. I don't want to hurt her anymore than she's already been hurt."

"You don't think this will hurt her?" Sam asked, astonished.

"Look, maybe coming here wasn't such a good idea. I needed your advice on how to do this without hurting Julia. I think maybe you're a little too involved with the situation."

"Man, how can you be so calm about all of this? You act as if this is nothing. You're going to break her heart. I told you not to hurt her, and that's exactly what you're doing." Sam's voice got louder with every word he spoke, until he was nearly yelling at Caleb.

"Maybe I need to go," Caleb stated as he started for the door.

Sam tried to stop him, grabbing onto his arm. "Damn it, Caleb!"

"Let him go, Sam," whispered a soft voice from the other side of the room. Caleb felt his heart squeeze in his chest when he turned his head and saw Julia standing in the doorway with tears falling from her eyes. What in the hell was she doing here?

"Julia," he whispered.

Sam dropped his hold on Caleb's arm and ran a hand through his hair. "Ah, hell!"

Caleb tore his gaze from Julia and turned them toward Sam. "You knew she was here, and you didn't say anything?"

"I tried to. You wouldn't let me get a word in edgewise, remember?" Sam stated, his hands on his hips.

Caleb looked back at Julia. He raised a placating hand toward her. "Julia, I... uh..." Faced with her solemn eyes, he didn't know what to say to her. "I didn't mean to hurt you, Julia."

"I know you didn't, Caleb. You never made any promises, except to get Robin back for me." Julia turned to walk back into the bedroom, only to be stopped by Caleb's hand on her arm.

"About what you said earlier on the phone, I—"

"Please just go, Caleb. You've said what you came here to say. I won't bother you again." Julia pulled her arm free from Caleb's grasp and continued into the bedroom, shutting the door softly behind her.

Caleb stared at the closed door for several moments before turning to look at Sam. He didn't say anything, just shook his head and walked out the door.

Sam watched Caleb stomp out of the hotel room, wincing at the sound of the door slamming behind him. He wasn't sure what this was all about, but he was positive that all was not what it seemed. Caleb cared about Julia. Sam could see it in his eyes. He just couldn't figure out why Caleb was denying his feelings for her. He was clearly hurting himself just as much as he was hurting Julia.

Knocking softly on the door, Sam opened it and stepped into the bedroom, closing the door quietly behind him. Julia was curled up in a ball under the covers, her slight form shaking from her crying.

He lay down on the bed beside Julia and wrapped his arms around her, pulling her head onto his chest. He just held her in his arms, waiting for her stop crying enough to talk to him.

Julia curled herself into Sam's chest. She knew it was too good to be true. She had thought she and Caleb had something together. And to a point, they did, but for Caleb, apparently it had just been sex.

"Julia, honey, are you going to be okay?" Sam asked her when her sobs quieted down to the occasional snuffle.

"Yeah, I'm always okay." She laughed bitterly. "What other choice do I have?"

"I'm so sorry, Julia. If it helps any, I think Caleb's hurting just as much as you are."

Julia rolled onto her back and looked up at Sam. "Then why is he being this way?"

"He's running scared. But from what, I don't know. Nevertheless, that man is terrified. Don't give up on him just yet. Just give him a little more time. He'll come around."

"And if he doesn't?"

"Then he's a bigger fool than I thought." Sam laughed, trying to lighten the mood.

"I knew coming here was a bad idea," Julia whispered as she fell asleep.

Sam clenched his fist, wanting to strangle Caleb. The moron. He had better get his head out of his ass before he lost the best thing that ever happened to him.

## Chapter 8

Caleb moved silently through the darkness. His steps were sure and quick as he made his way along the tall brick wall surrounding the Spencer estate.

As a guard started to walk by, he flattened himself against the wall, hoping that the shadows would hide his presence. He watched silently as the guard walked by before continuing his quest. He had ten minutes to make his way into the house through a balcony on the second floor. Caleb was supposed to sneak into the house and steal Robin.

Nick and Rune would create a distraction so that he could get Robin out of the house and spirit her away to the safety of her mother's arms.

Presently, he just had to get into the house. It wasn't going to be easy. Douglas Spencer had ten armed security personnel and guard dogs patrolling the grounds at all times. And that was just outside of the house.

Caleb had surmised that there were no less than seven full time staff members inside the large mansion including a nanny, cook, two maids, a butler, full time personal trainer, and personal assistant for Douglas.

And Caleb's job was to avoid all of them while getting inside, then getting out with a frightened five year old that had never met him. This was not a simple job, no matter what anyone said.

Caleb moved along the red brick wall until he came to his cut off point. This was the place where he was supposed to head toward the house.

A large willow tree stood half way between Caleb's spot by the wall and the house. Caleb waited for the next pass of the guard then moved quickly to the tree.

Flattening himself against it, he waited for the guard to pass by again. As the guard walked by, leading a large German shepherd on a leash, Caleb was grateful for the special cologne Doc had made for the team. It mixed their unusual genetic makeup with that of natural smells including small wild animals, earth, dirt, and brush. It masked almost everything as long as he didn't sweat a lot.

One more second and then Caleb was moving again. He reached the edge of the house and climbed his way up the side of the house using the natural bricks that protruded from the side of the building.

It took him just a few moments to reach the balcony and get over the edge. He held his breath, not moving as the guard walked by again.

Looking to one side, Caleb waited until the guard was out of sight then silently made his way inside the house. He passed one, then two doors before coming to Robin's room.

Turning the knob, he opened the door. A brief look around showed a little girl sleeping in a large bed, a stuffed bear clenched in her arms.

Caleb moved into the room and shut the door behind him. He listened at the door for just a second before moving over to the bed. As quietly as he could, Caleb knelt on the floor next to the bed.

He covered Robin's mouth as he leaned over and gently shook her awake. "Robin. Robin, le petit, wake up," he whispered.

When the little girl began to move, her eyes widening in fright when she spotted Caleb, he quickly shook his head, holding his finger to his lips.

"My name is Caleb. Your mommy sent me, le petit. She sent me to get you and bring you to her. I won't hurt you, Robin, I promise," he assured her.

“Mommy?” an angelic voice whispered back to Caleb. “My mommy sent you?”

“Yes, le petit, you’re mother sent me to get you. She misses you very much and doesn’t want to be away from you anymore.”

“Did Grandpa say it was okay? He said I couldn’t leave the house unless Nanny was with me. I would be in trouble. I can’t even go outside and play unless Nanny is with me.”

“I didn’t ask him, le petit. I don’t think he’d let you go outside with me, but your mommy said it was okay,” Caleb replied. “So, grab your teddy and we’ll go see Mommy, okay?”

“Are you sure Mommy said it was okay?” Robin asked, her lips trembling.

Caleb caressed the side of Robin’s face as he smiled down at her. “Promise, le petit.”

Caleb wrapped the blanket around Robin and picked her up. He reached down and grabbed her teddy bear and handed it to her before pulling them both against his chest.

“Okay, Robin, you have to be very quiet. You can’t make a sound. We’re going to go outside and climb down the balcony and run across the yard to the wall. Can you do that?”

Robin nodded her head as she pressed her lips together. Caleb smiled at her when she clutched her teddy bear and laid her head down on his chest. He could get used to this.

Caleb pulled the blankets back up over the bed, pushing Robin’s pillow down under them, fluffing them a bit. While he knew it wouldn’t take long for someone to know Robin was missing, the longer he had the better chance they would have of getting away.

He quickly crossed the room and listened at the door. When he didn’t hear anything, he inched it open and peered out. Seeing no sign of anyone, Caleb walked out and closed the door behind him.

It took just a few moments to get back down the hallway to the balcony. Caleb knew that this was going to be the hard part. He had to

hold Robin with one hand, while climbing down the side of the house with the other one.

“Hold on, le petit, here we go,” Caleb murmured into Robin’s ear. He threw his leg over the side of the railing. Holding Robin tight to his chest with one hand, he began climbing down.

Half way down the wall, Caleb heard a loud bang and several shouts. A siren went off and dogs began to bark as guards ran in the direction of the front of the house.

Caleb used the distraction to jump down to the ground. He looked around for any sign of the guards. Seeing none, he sprinted across the yard to the tree, flattening himself and Robin against the cold bark.

After a moment, Caleb ran to the brick wall fifty feet away. The moment he reached the wall, hands reached down and took Robin from him.

Caleb quickly climbed the wall and jumped down to the other side. The moment his feet hit the ground, Caleb reached over and took Robin back into his arms.

He nodded to Nick and Rune and walked away.

\* \* \* \*

Julia folded the last of her laundry and started putting it away. The last twenty-four hours had been the hardest she could remember in a long time. Nearly as hard as losing Robert and having Robin taken away by her grandfather.

Hearing Caleb say he didn’t love her, could never love her, had almost made her want to give up. Thank goodness for Sam. It had taken several hours of talking, but he had finally convinced her that Caleb really did care about her, but he was scared.

Julia still hadn’t figured out what he was scared of, but she was willing to wait a little longer before giving up on him. He did hold her heart, after all.

Whether she could hold his was giving Julia an upset stomach. And here she thought she was done with morning sickness. Maybe Daniel had something to settle her stomach.

Julia left her room and started for the infirmary when the front door opened and Caleb walked in. Julia's pulse quickened at the searing glance he gave her before turning around to look at something behind him.

Julia started walking toward him when she spotted a flash of pink through Caleb's legs. She felt her legs go weak. "Caleb?" she whispered in a shaky voice.

Caleb turned and smiled at her before pulling a small bundle out from behind him. Julia sank to the floor as tears began streaming down her face.

"Rob...Robin?" she cried when she saw the angelic face of her daughter.

"Mommy!" Robin screamed as she ran into Julia's waiting arms.

"Oh my God, Robin," Julia sobbed as she wrapped her arms tightly around Robin and buried her face in her neck, inhaling the sweet little-girl smell of her daughter. "I missed you so much."

"I missed you, too, Mommy. I don't ever want to go to Grandpa's house again. He's mean. He wouldn't let me talk to you, and he won't sing to me at night."

Julia laughed through her tears. "I promise to sing to you every night, okay?" She ran her hands over Robin, just as she had five years ago. Yep, all of her fingers and all of her toes were in the right places. Everything else aside, at least her father had taken good care of her. She looked clean and well-fed.

Robin seemed fine. Julia just hoped there were no mental or emotional problems in the future from her separation and confinement with her father. Douglas could be a mean bastard when he wanted to, which was usually most of the time.

Hearing a noise behind her, she looked up from her kneeling position on the floor to see Caleb standing in the doorway, an envious

look on his face as he stared at Julia's arms wrapped around Robin. Julia could see the yearning in his eyes. Sam was right. Caleb was not as indifferent as he pretended to be.

"Thank you, Caleb," Julia whispered as she ran her trembling hand over Robin's head.

Caleb stared at the two of them for a few more moments, the hunger clear in his eyes, before nodding his head and walking to his room, quietly shutting the door behind him.

Julia wanted to run after him, tell him how much she loved him, but Robin began squirming in her arms, bringing Julia's attention back to her daughter. Caleb would have to wait. She had a daughter she hadn't seen in quite some time. She needed to spend some time with her before trying to reach Caleb's heart, again.

\* \* \* \*

The door had barely shut behind Caleb before tears started stinging his eyes. Bringing Robin home to Julia was the least he could do after hurting her the way he had, but he hadn't thought it would hurt him so much.

He knew giving up Julia was the right decision, but it sure didn't feel like it right now. He felt like his heart was being ripped out of his chest. How was he supposed to be around her day in and day out, and not have her?

Forget watching her fall for some other guy. That just wasn't going to happen. Caleb would end up killing any man who so much as breathed in Julia's direction.

Maybe leaving was his best option. Seeing Julia every day was going to drive him insane. Now with Robin in the mix, he might not be able to handle it at all. She was just as sweet as her mother was. All those blonde curls and that button nose; Caleb had fallen in love with her on first sight. After meeting her, he knew that she was everything he could ever want in a little girl.

And she was a little girl without a daddy. He wanted to be that daddy almost as much as he wanted her mother. How would he feel when the new baby arrived? He was already having a hard enough time now, sharing Julia with Sam. What would it be like after Sam's child was born?

Caleb pulled his shirt off and threw it on the chair in the corner before unbuttoning the top couple of buttons on his jeans. Grabbing a bottle of whiskey off his bookshelf, Caleb decided to get drunk. He wasn't sure there was enough liquor in the world to make him forget Julia, but he could always hope.

He leaned back against the headboard of his bed and opened the top of the whiskey bottle, taking a long swig, feeling the whiskey burn its way down his throat. Yeah, getting drunk right now sounded like a fabulous idea.

\* \* \* \*

Julia tucked the covers more firmly around Robin before giving her a light kiss on her head. She stood up, looking down at her daughter. It was so good to have her back safe and sound.

Each minute she had spent with her tonight had relieved Julia's worries that Robin would somehow be scarred by her time with her grandfather. But Robin seemed like her usual bubbly self, talking about everything and nothing.

It had been several hours since Caleb had brought Robin home. Finally she had fallen asleep, but not before Julia had sung several songs to her while cuddling with her in the bed.

She looked up when the bedroom door opened, allowing Jax to wheel herself into the room.

"Hi," Julia whispered quietly, pointing to the sleeping little girl. "Thanks for doing this for me. I shouldn't be too long."

Jax wheeled herself over to the side of the bed and looked down at Robin. “Oh, she’s so precious. Just look at those long eyelashes. I am so jealous.”

Julia nodded her head. “Yeah, she’s a looker all right. She has her father’s long eyelashes. He could bat those things at me and get me to do almost anything.” She laughed quietly. “And he knew it just like she does. Better be careful, or she’ll have you wrapped around her finger in seconds. She’ll just bat those eyelashes and it’s over. You’ll do anything for her.”

“Oh, I have no doubt. Just wait till the rest of the guys get back. I’ll give them an hour before they are jumping over themselves, trying to please the little princess.” Jax laughed at the thought of all those toughened Navy SEALs around this little girl. “It will be good for all of them.”

“I can only hope she doesn’t have any lasting effects from her time with my father. He can be pretty harsh on an adult, let alone a child.”

“Not to worry, Julia, she’s going to be fine. Just give her lots of love and understanding, a few boundaries, and she will be just fine.”

“Yeah, I guess. But I can’t help but worry.”

“Of course you can’t. You’re a mother. That’s what you’re supposed to do.”

Julia gave Jax a quizzical look. “How did you get to know so much about kids?”

“My mother. She was a wonder. I don’t remember her ever raising her voice to Daniel or me in my entire life, but she ruled our house. Never laid a hand on us, but one disappointed look from her could make us feel like crap for weeks. It was a gift she had.”

“Hmmm, hope I develop that particular gift myself before too long. I’m going to need it with this one. I have the feeling she’s going to get to be more of a handful the older she gets.”

Julia glanced over at Jax, seeing the tender smile on her face. “You ever think about having kids, Jax?”

"Maybe someday. Have to find the right guy first." She wiggled her eyebrows suggestively.

"Why? I didn't. I'm working on my second kid, and I'm still without the *right* guy. Who says you need a man? Besides, if my eyes tell me anything, you have someone wanting to apply for that position."

Jax looked up at Julia sharply. "What do you mean?"

Julia rolled her eyes. "Oh please, you're not that dumb, Jax. Sky's so hot for you he's ready to go up in flames. If I have to look at him mooning over you from across the room one more time, I just might be sick. He stares at you like a starving man eyeing the last piece of chocolate on the planet."

Jax blushed, stammering, "I don't know what you're talking about. Sky barely knows I exist."

"You know, you might be able to fool the rest of the people here, but you can't fool me. You're as hot for Sky as he is for you. God, you should just lock him in a room and get it over with. Better yet, tie him down to your bed, lock the door, and throw away the key. You both need to do something about this...this thing you have between you before you both explode."

If it were possible, Jax turned even redder. "You think so?"

"Honey, I know so. I may seem a bit naive to most people, but even I can tell when a man is interested in a woman, and that man is definitely interested." Julia patted Jax on the shoulder. "Take my word for it. I know these things. Maybe it's *my* gift."

She grabbed her sweater and headed for the door. Holding the door open with a hand, she glanced back at the deep-thinking Jax. "Hey, Jax, if you need any help tying that big guy down to your bed, just call me."

Jax laughed as she gestured to the sleeping girl on the bed. "Well, you do owe me. I'll keep that in mind if I ever do decide to take the big guy down. Now, go have fun. I'll be here all night if you need me."

Do what you need to do to convince Caleb he's the right man for you."

Julia was still laughing as she shut the door behind her and walked down the hallway toward Caleb's room.

Reaching his door, she took a deep breath before tapping lightly on the solid wood. Hearing nothing inside, she opened the door slightly and peeked in. The lights were low, but she could still see the outline of Caleb's sleeping body on the bed.

She tiptoed in and quietly shut the door behind her. Dropping her sweater on the chair over Caleb's shirt, she walked to the bed. A half-empty bottle of whiskey was clasped in his hand. Grabbing it, she set it on the nightstand.

She pressed her hands into her hips and looked down at her sleeping man. He was out cold. Guess she wasn't going to be getting anywhere with him tonight. Julia smiled. That didn't mean she couldn't get somewhere with him when he woke up.

Picking up the phone next to the bed, she dialed her own room, telling Jax where she would be for the rest of the night, in case she was needed. Hanging up, she admired Caleb's long form before grabbing the bottom of his jeans and pulling them down his legs. God, she loved a man who went commando.

She pulled her own clothes off and climbed into the bed, pulling the covers over both of them before snuggling up to Caleb's warm body. She smiled when his arms wrapped around her and one of his long legs pushed between hers.

He might say he didn't want her, but his body said otherwise. Hopefully soon, she could convince Caleb that his heart wanted her, too.

## Chapter 9

Caleb's head was throbbing. Every sound in the room seemed to pound through him. Moving hurt, thinking hurt, hell, even breathing hurt. Now he remembered why he didn't drink very often. Hangovers sucked.

As he lay there wallowing in his misery, he suddenly realized that a very warm body was pressed up against his. He suddenly began praying he hadn't brought some barfly home with him.

Squinting at the sunlight filtering through the gap in the curtains, he glanced down at the sleeping woman next to him. He pulled back the long ash blonde hair covering her face and dropped it back in place almost as fast. It was Julia.

What the hell was Julia doing in his bed? His mind raced over the events of last night, trying to remember inviting Julia to his room, to his bed. After coming into his room and grabbing the bottle of whiskey, his mind was a blank. One more reason not to drink.

What was she doing here? And why was she naked? Had they made love last night? Had he said anything he shouldn't have? This was not the way to go about breaking up with a woman.

However, it did make him realize that being around Julia every day was not going to work. He couldn't be around Julia and not claim her. He definitely needed to leave.

"Julia," he whispered, lifting his hand to tenderly caress her cheek. "*Bébé*, wake up."

Julia came out of her slumber, feeling Caleb's powerful body next to hers, his hand caressing her face. "Mmmm, morning."

Caleb saw a contented smile cross her lips and wondered why she was so happy. Had he said something to her last night? “What are you doing here?”

Julia laughed. “Why would I be anywhere else?”

She scooted up so she could lay her head down on his chest, running her fingers through the sprinkling of black hair.

Caleb tried to ignore the wonderful feeling of Julia’s hands on his skin as he tried to remember the previous night. “Did I say... anything...last night?”

“Like what? Like you love me? Like you can’t live without me?” she asked as she began lavishing his nipple with her tongue. Caleb moaned as the erotic sensations of Julia’s tongue on his sensitive nipple rippled through his body.

“Julia, I’m trying to be serious here!” he said tersely.

“So am I.” She giggled as she once again latched onto his nipple.

“Julia, we can’t do this.” Caleb groaned as he tried one last time to disengage Julia’s lips from his heated skin. He really needed to stop this before it went too far. But his resistance was crumbling with each touch of her hands.

“Why not?” she whispered against his skin.

“Ah, hell!” Caleb growled as he rolled over to grab a condom out of his nightstand, quickly rolling it on. He turned back to Julia, pulling Julia’s body on top of him, kissing her with all his stored-up passion of the last couple of weeks.

He was rewarded by Julia’s legs settling on the outside of his thighs, his cock coming to rest against her soft, wet folds. Just the feel of her wet warmth caressing his hard cock nearly made Caleb’s head explode.

This time, Caleb didn’t ask Julia if he could take her, he just did . Grabbing her hips, he rolled over on top of Julia and thrust fully inside of her in one mind-numbing plunge. He didn’t give her any sweet kisses or gentle caresses. He just began frantically thrusting inside of her tight hold. It was a raw act of possession.

Julia was ecstatic. He finally seemed to have stopped treating her like spun glass and was really making love to her. She couldn't contain her outcry of delight when she lifted her legs and wrapped them around his hips, glorying in the new angle of Caleb's thrusts.

Caleb's fingers dug into her hips as his thrusts became turbulent. Julia knew she would have bruises, but she didn't care. If he made love to her like this, she would gladly accept every aspect of their lovemaking.

A moan of ecstasy slipped through her lips when his teeth nipped her shoulder. She was drawn to a height of passion she had never known. "Caleb!" she screamed as she yielded to the searing need building inside her.

Through a thick haze of passion, Caleb saw Julia's head fall back as her body arched up underneath him. The tight clenching of her inner muscles grasping his aching cock as she came sent him over the edge. With one powerful plunge, Caleb roared out his gratification as his whole being was flooded with hot, pulsing sensations before collapsing onto Julia.

Julia smiled to herself as she rubbed her hands up and down Caleb's back. Finally, he had taken her like he truly wanted to. Now maybe they could start on something more between them. But first, she needed a little nap. Julia closed her eyes, succumbing to the numbed sleep of a satisfied lover.

Caleb's thoughts were much more chaotic as he rolled off of Julia. Oh God, what had he done? He had just taken Julia like an animal, with no consideration for her needs, her wants, her feelings. Caleb felt like a monster. He knew he couldn't face her after this. She was sure to hate him for treating her like a cheap trollop. He couldn't face her well-deserved disgust. It would destroy him. He had to leave.

Caleb carefully unwound Julia's arms from his torso and slid from the bed. He grabbed his clothes and pulled them on, then his boots. Picking up a small bag from the closet, he began pushing clothes into it.

Standing at the side of the bed, he watched Julia sleep for several moments before placing a light kiss on her forehead and walking away, quietly shutting the door behind him. Walking down the hallway, he knocked on Cole's door.

"Hey, Cole," he said in a rush when the sleepy man answered the door. "I'm going to be taking off for awhile. I'll call you when I can and let you know where I am. I don't know when I'll be back. I have some things to work out, and I can't do it here. If you need me, you know how to reach me."

Cole, still half-asleep, just nodded and watched Caleb walk away. He shook his head as he walked back to his bed. "Dumb ass!"

\* \* \* \*

Julia came awake slowly. Stretching her arms over her head, she quickly noticed a few aches and pains that hadn't been there before, but she welcomed them gladly. It reminded her that Caleb had made love to her.

Turning her head, she noticed that she was in bed alone. They had a lot to talk about. A future to plan together. Besides, even though she knew he did, he had yet to tell her he loved her. No man could make love to a woman the way he had and not care.

Julia climbed out of bed and pulled her clothes on. Leaving the bedroom, she went looking for Caleb. She found Cole and Bear sitting at the dining room table, drinking their morning coffee. Seemed these men couldn't function without at least one cup of steaming coffee.

"Hey, guys, you seen Caleb?" she asked as she walked in.

Cole shot Bear a shuttered look before hesitantly speaking. "What do you need Caleb for?"

"I was just looking for him. We have some things we need to talk about."

"Julia," Cole began regretfully, "Caleb left this morning."

Julia cocked her head to one side. "What do you mean he left? Did he have a mission or something?" She watched Cole give Bear another strange look before shaking his head. "Did he leave a note? A message for me?"

Cole felt sick to his stomach at the defeated look in Julia's eyes as he shook his head again. He hated having to be the one to break the news to her of Caleb's departure. He had heard them early this morning. Hell, the whole house had heard them. He knew Julia wasn't expecting Caleb to up and leave after that.

"Honey, he's left, and I don't know when he will be back." He spoke in an odd yet gentle tone.

"Wha...what do you mean?" she asked in a broken whisper. She felt like she was frozen in limbo, where all decisions and actions were impossible.

"I don't know exactly what happened between you two, but Caleb seemed pretty shook up by it. He said he needed to get away, do some thinking. He didn't say when he was going to be back."

Julia absently nodded her head and walked away, a tumble of confused thoughts and feelings assailing her. She thought things had been perfect. What had she done wrong? Had he been turned off by her wanton behavior? Had finding her naked in his bed turned him off? What could have happened between then and now?

Her heart wanted to refuse what her mind was telling her, but she knew she had to face facts. He must have been telling the truth at the hotel room back in Boston.

He really didn't love her. He had just wanted her body, and she had thrown herself at him. Of course he had taken what was freely offered. What hot-blooded man wouldn't?

She breathed in shallow, quick grasps as her chest felt as if it would burst with pain. It was a humiliating, deflating feeling, knowing how she had thrown herself at Caleb even after he had made it clear that he didn't want her. She should have known he didn't love her. It had just been her fantasy, and she had plunged ahead no matter

what Caleb had said, wanting what she wanted and not caring how he felt.

Julia's felt flushed with humiliation and anger at herself. No wonder he had left after she had forced herself on him. She had practically attacked him. He must be so embarrassed.

She gave a choked, desperate cry, her misery so acute that it was a physical pain. She walked back to Caleb's room and crawled into his bed, pulling the covers over her head to block out the world, wrapping herself in a cocoon of anguish.

\* \* \* \*

Cole and Bear watched Julia walked away, her shoulders slumped in defeat. Cole looked back at Bear. "He's finally done it. I was hoping he would get his head out of his ass before now, but he finally broke her. The dumb ass!"

Bear nodded. "I don't know how he's going to dig himself out of this one. That girl loves him nearly as much as we love Mari, and he's throwing it away because he's afraid."

"But why? What's he so scared of?" Cole wondered.

"I'm not sure, but I think he's afraid of her, actually."

Cole took a few more sips of his coffee as he thought over the situation. He just couldn't figure out why Caleb was running away when he should be running toward the nearest preacher. Julia was a permanent type of girl who would give her all to the right man, and Cole was positive Caleb was the right man. Why didn't Caleb know that?

"Well, whatever the reason, we need to do something about it. Those two need each other more than I think they even know."

Bear glanced up at Cole again. "Got any ideas?"

"Nope, not a one." Cole shook his head.

Bear nodded. He didn't have any ideas either. "Think we should call Sam?"

"Hell, no! Sam would kill Caleb if he knew what he was doing to Julia. He's very protective of his little wife. No, we have to do this on our own."

"Hey Cole, you think that could be it?"

"What?" he asked.

"Do you think Caleb could be having such a hard time because Julia's still married to Sam? I know I wouldn't like it if Mari were married to any other man besides one of us. It would drive me crazy."

"Could be, I guess. But with Caleb, who knows. I'm not sure anyone really knows what's going on in that stupid head of his, except maybe his brother."

"Now there's an idea," Bear nearly yelled, slapping his hands on the table.

"What?"

"Let's talk to Rune. Get him in on this. Maybe he can come up with an idea on how to get these two back together. As you said, no one knows Caleb like Rune does. What could it hurt?"

"I see what you're getting at." Cole nodded. "I'll go call him now."

Bear grabbed both their cups and headed to the kitchen as Cole headed off to the office to call Rune. Bear felt better about the whole situation. They would call Rune and get his input, and maybe they could work things out for Caleb and Julia.

Bear washed both the cups then headed for the office. He met Cole on his way out of the room. "Well? Did you get in touch with Rune?"

Cole nodded. "Yeah, he's going to head back to the ranch to have a little talk with Julia and see what's up. He thinks Caleb isn't afraid of Julia, but rather, having her in this life of ours. You and I both know it's a hard life for a woman. We had the same issue with Mari."

"Yeah, but living without them is worse than having them here in this life."

Bear was silent for a moment before asking in a subdued voice, “Do you think we will ever find Mari, Cole?”

“We have to, Bear. We can’t live without her.” Cole patted Bear on the shoulder as they both began to walk outside. “Let’s just hope Caleb figures it out before he loses Julia. We both know what that’s like, and I don’t want him to go through it. It’s hell!”

## Chapter 10

Julia was moping. Everyone could see it. She was depressed and wallowing in self-pity. It wasn't good for her, for Robin, or for the baby. However, no one seemed to know how to pull her out of it.

Nothing they said seemed to make any difference to her. Not even the news that Arthur was in jail for shooting Sam and the police were investigating Douglas seemed to make her happy.

Sam had tried to explain it all while Doc had checked over his simple flesh wound. Even though Julia seemed satisfied by the investigation, she was still in a funk.

Finally, Sam decided to put his foot down and have a long conversation with her. She was starting to risk not only her health, but also that of the baby. He was worried about both of them. It was time for him and Julia to have a talk, and he was not taking no for an answer.

Sam walked up to where Julia was sitting, staring out the window, and picked her up in his arms. He ignored her sputtering, then her cursing, even her small fists beating against his shoulders. He just carried her to the infirmary .

He carried her into the exam room where Doc was waiting and set her down on the table before walking back to lean against the wall near the door.

Sam crossed his arms over his chest, daring her to try and leave the room. He would stop her and tie her down to the exam table if he had to. That was his baby she was carrying, and he cared for it just as much as he cared for Julia. Something had to be done.

“Julia,” Daniel began, “We’ve all watched you mope around the ranch for the last few weeks, and I have to tell you, we’re tired of it. It’s time for you to pull yourself together and get on with your life. Caleb will be back before you know it.”

“It doesn’t matter,” she cried. “He hates me.” If he didn’t hate her, he never would have left. He would have stayed and loved her. But he *had* left.

“Honey, where did you get that idea? Caleb loves you. Anyone who sees him watching you knows that. He has from the first moment he laid eyes on you.”

“It doesn’t matter anymore. I can’t keep playing this game with him. It’s too hard. It hurts too much. I never know where I stand with him. One moment he wants me, the next he doesn’t. I just can’t do it anymore. This last time, when he left, the way he left, it was the last straw. I just can’t do this anymore. No, it’s better if I just concentrate on Robin and the baby.”

“Fine, then don’t become involved with Caleb. If you don’t want him then you don’t have to have him. But you have to start taking care of yourself. If not for your sake, then for the sake of the baby,” Doc said.

“Oh, God, Doc, I know I’m not doing well. I just can’t seem to help it. But it’s not that I don’t want Caleb, because I do. Wanting him has never been the problem. He doesn’t want me.”

Julia turned to look over at Sam. “You know that, Sam. He even said so in the hotel, remember? He said he doesn’t love me. I thought he was lying, that he really did love me, but I was wrong. I know that now. He doesn’t love me.”

“Yes, he does,” stated a voice from the doorway.

Julia, Sam, and Doc looked over to see a sad-looking Rune leaning up against the doorframe, his arms crossed over his chest. Both Sam and Doc breathed a sigh of relief. It had certainly taken him long enough to get here.

"He loves you very much in fact. He's just afraid to admit it," Rune said, looking straight at Julia, hoping she would see the truth in his eyes.

"Why? There's nothing to be truly scared of. Loving someone should be shouted from the rooftops. Yes, it's scary, but it is also fantastic, exhilarating, exciting," Julia replied, so totally confused that she wasn't sure what she should do.

Part of her wanted to find Caleb and tell him how much she loved him. Another part of her just wanted to run away and hide, to hide from the hurt of loving him when he didn't love her. God, she was so pathetic.

Rune slowly walked farther into the room. He glanced briefly at Sam and Doc, nodding to them, then back at Julia's confused face. "Sometimes it's not that easy, honey. Not everyone has the same ideas about love that you do. Some people don't have the insight, the experience, or the knowledge to love the way you do. Some of us have been damaged by those who say they love us."

"Oh." Julia laughed bitterly. "Like my experiences with my family are something to base my opinions on." She looked over at Sam and Doc, then Rune. "Do you know whom I base my idea of love on? Sam and Doc, two gay men. I've seen more love and understanding between them than I have ever seen before. They truly love each other, no matter what."

Julia waved her hand in the air, gesturing towards the two men. "After all the crap Sam put him through, Doc still loved him, still took him back. Now look at them. You can't walk into a room they're in without seeing one or the other of them touching the other, kissing him, loving him, just being near him. That's where I got my ideas about love from."

From beneath his eyelashes, Doc looked over at Sam to see what his reaction was to Julia's words. Did Sam understand what she was saying? How much of a special thing they had between them? Seeing

the quick nod and smile on Sam's face as he looked back at him, along with the love in his eyes, Doc knew he did.

Rune sat down on the bed beside Julia and took her hand in his, giving her hand a soft squeeze. "Let me tell you a little story, and maybe it will help you better understand Caleb." He cleared his throat and took a deep breath before continuing. This was going to be hard for him to get through, but he felt he owed it to his brother to try.

"Our father was in the military, just like us. And he was gone all the time. He spent more time out in the field than he actually did at home. But he loved it. He felt a true commitment to serving his country. But it was hard on our mom. She was left at home to care for us kids, and to tell you the truth, Caleb and I were not perfect little children. We got into our share of messes."

Julia let out a little giggle as she wiped her tears away. She just bet they did.

"But our mom wasn't a strong person, Julia. One day when Caleb and I were just twelve years old, Mom couldn't handle it anymore. Dad had just left on a mission. He expected to be gone for several months this time. Mom begged him not to go."

Rune wiped his hands down his face before looking at Julia again. "He went anyway. Mom lost it. She tried to kill herself by taking a bunch of pills. If it weren't for Caleb coming home early from school, she would have succeeded, too. But she was never the same after that. She was in and out of mental institutions until the day she died."

"What happened to your father?" she asked quietly.

"He tried to stay in the military, but after Mom died, he just sort of gave up. I think she was the love of his life, and he didn't realize it until it was too late. He blamed himself for her condition. It wasn't his fault, really. Mom just wasn't strong enough to be a military wife."

He patted Julia's hand softly. "I think that's what Caleb is afraid of, that you won't be strong enough to be a military wife. You know and I know that, underneath that small, delicate surface of yours, you are probably stronger than even Caleb. But Caleb can't see that. All

he can see is our mother and how she cracked under the strain. He doesn't want to do that to you. He would rather live without you than destroy you, Julia."

"That's horse shit, and you know it," she replied vehemently.

"Is it, Julia?" asked Doc. "Look how you are coping when you think he doesn't love you. You've stopped eating, you're losing weight, you're endangering your health. What are we all supposed to think?"

"That's the difference. If I knew he loved me, I could take anything. If I knew he was coming home to me, that he wanted me, I would be fine. But none of that matters. Caleb doesn't love me. He never did."

"Yes he does, Julia. What do I have to do to convince you that he does?" Rune asked, nearly pulling his hair out in frustration. Maybe he should just lock the two of them into a room until they admitted that they loved each other and worked this all out.

"Bring him home," she whispered softly, surprising everyone in the room. They just stared at her until Rune started laughing.

"Yeah, I can do that." He smirked, already starting to make plans for retrieving his wayward brother. "How soon do you want him here?"

"The faster the better, don't you think?" Daniel asked, gesturing toward Julia as he began taking her vitals. "Too much longer, and I may have to hook her up to an IV."

"Just bring him home, Rune," Sam replied.

Julia watched in silence as Rune walked out of the room and Doc took her vitals. They made it all seem so easy. Just go and find Caleb, bring him home, and everything would be okay. But Julia knew it wouldn't be that easy. She still didn't believe Caleb actually loved her, but she was willing to wait and see how things went.

Caleb meant too much to her to give up on him. But this was the last time. If he didn't love her after this, she was done. She couldn't keep putting her heart out there like this. It hurt too much.

\* \* \* \*

Rune opened the door of the motel room he had tracked Caleb to and nearly fell over from the stench. The room reeked of stale alcohol and dirty socks, and if he was not mistaken, cheap perfume.

He shut the door behind him and walked to the sleeping figure on the bed. Caleb lied naked, half on and half off the mattress. He had one hand wrapped around a bottle of cheap whiskey, the other wrapped around his flaccid cock.

Seeing the smudges of red lipstick on his jaw, Rune just shook his head. "Man, what have you done to yourself?"

He grabbed the bottle of whiskey out of Caleb's slack fingers and went to pour it down the sink in the bathroom. He looked around the room and found two more bottles, and poured them down the sink as well.

Grabbing a garbage bag he began cleaning up the room. While there wasn't too much garbage, the clothes that Caleb had been wearing the last six weeks weren't worth saving. He'd buy Caleb some new ones tomorrow.

Finally, when the room was cleaned up, he went into the bathroom and turned on the cold water in the shower/bathtub combo. Walking back into bedroom he heaved his brother over his shoulder and walked him back to the bathroom, dumping him in the tub.

He knelt beside the tub and held Caleb down with a hand on his chest. This wasn't going to be pretty. It took a few seconds but Caleb suddenly started thrashing, trying to knock Rune off of him.

Rune laughed when Caleb started cussing up a blue streak but continued to hold him under the spray of cold water from the showerhead. He held him there for a few more minutes before turning the water from cold to hot. Standing up he grabbed a bottle of shampoo and tossed it to his brother.

"Get yourself cleaned up and join me in the other room," he demanded firmly before turning and walking out of the room, shutting the door behind him.

Hearing his brother's grumbling made him smile but he knew Caleb was washing up. He and Caleb may have been twins but Rune was still older, if only by a mere three minutes. Caleb usually listened to Rune on some level.

Rune quickly changed the sheets in the room and called room service to order up some food and a large pot of black coffee. Once that was done he began surveying the room for any missed alcohol.

Opening one of drawers on the nightstand he was surprised to find a faded wrinkled picture of Julia. "Well, this is telling," he murmured to himself before placing the picture back in the drawer and shutting it.

He turned when he heard the bathroom door open and Caleb stepped out, a towel wrapped around his naked hips.

"Caleb," Rune said.

Caleb looked up when he heard Rune. "So you're the asshole that put me in the shower. Any particular reason you felt the need to ruin my fun?"

"Fun? You call this fun?" he asked as his hand swept over the room. "Do you even remember who you fucked last? Was she the one wearing the red lipstick? Or have you been too damn drunk to remember any of it?" he charged.

"I didn't fuck anyone last night, or the night before that, or even the night before that. Hell, I haven't fucked anyone in six weeks," Caleb yelled at Rune.

"The lipstick I found on your face this morning says otherwise."

Caleb sat down on the side of the bed, dropping his face in his hands. Rune heard him say something but couldn't quite understand his mumbling. He walked over and sat down next to his brother.

“What, Caleb?” he asked quietly as he wrapped an arm around his shoulders. Rune was shocked to see the misery etched on Caleb’s face when he lifted his head and looked over at him.

“I haven’t been with anyone. Every time I try I can’t stop thinking about Julia. Hell, the first woman I brought back here nearly killed me when I called her by Julia’s name. I can’t even get hard for another woman, no matter what I do.”

“Hmm, seems to me you have a problem.”

“Gee, you think? You’re a lot of help. What the hell are you doing here, anyway?” he asked as he jumped up and began going through the drawers in his dresser looking for another bottle.

“You’re not going to find one. I dumped them all down the sink before I even woke you up.” Rune knew what Caleb was looking for and he hoped to keep him from it. Caleb needed to sober up and deal with his life before his life walked out the door.

“Why would you do that?” Caleb growled as he began looking for his clothes. Damn, where were they?

“You won’t find any clothes, either. I threw them away with the rest of the garbage. They smelled awful. I don’t know how you could stand to wear them.”

“So, if you got rid of all my alcohol and threw away all of my clothes, what am I supposed to do now?”

“I don’t know...sober up?”

Caleb threw his hands up in the air. “And why the hell would I want to do that?”

Rune jumped to his feet and stormed over to stand nose to nose with Caleb. “Because you’re about to screw up the best thing that ever happened to you, you imbecile. That girl loves you more than anything in the world and you’re throwing it away. And for what? A bottle of booze? A cheap fuck with a woman you don’t even remember? Have you completely lost your mind?”

"I don't need you to tell me what to do," Caleb yelled at Rune, pushing against his chest with his fists. "You don't know what you're talking about, so shut your damn mouth."

"Oh, really?" Rune said as he walked over to the small nightstand and pulled out the faded picture of Julia. "So, you won't be needing this then, will you?" he said as he tore the picture into small pieces.

Rune knew he was goading his brother but he was unprepared for the ferocity of his anger as Caleb leapt across the room and began pummeling him with his fists.

Not willing to be Caleb's punching bag, Rune swung back, connecting with Caleb's jaw and rib cage. No slouch himself, Caleb got in a few shots, too.

Several minutes later both Rune and Caleb slumped to the floor. Rune was leaning up against the wall by the door, Caleb against the bed. The room was in a shambles with broken chair pieces and blankets all over the floor.

Rune wiped the blood from his lip as he watched his brother crawl over to the discarded pieces of Julia's picture. He didn't say anything as Caleb carefully tried to fit the pieces back together. He watched as Caleb's hands trembled, touching each piece like it was a precious jewel.

He felt tears come to his eyes when Caleb's shoulders slumped in defeat and he gathered up the small torn pieces and cradled them in his hands. Rune winced when Caleb turned his tear filled eyes toward him.

"Why would you do this?" he cried gravely. "This is all I had of her. Now it's gone. How could you do this to me?"

Rune crawled over to Caleb and wrapped him up in his arms, letting him cry. "Oh, Caleb, you can have her. What is the real thing compared to a picture?"

"I can't have her. I can never have her. Don't you understand that? I would give up everything to be with her but it's never going to happen."

“Why, Caleb? Why can’t you have her? She loves you. She’s waiting for you. All you have to do is go to her.”

“You just don’t understand!” he bit out fiercely. Caleb jumped to his feet and started pacing around the room, still holding the torn picture pieces against his chest. “Why can’t you just leave me alone?”

“Is that what you want?” Rune asked as he climbed to his feet. “What you really want?”

“Yes! I just want you to leave me alone. I want you all to just leave me the hell alone!” he yelled.

Rune shook his head regretfully. What he was about to do would probably cost him his brother if it didn’t work but it was the only thing he could think of to get his brother to get it together.

“You know, I tried, I really did. But you sit here whining about not being able to have Julia when she’s just waiting for you to come home and love her. You have someone waiting for you, someone that loves you, and you’re throwing it away. I have no one. Do you know what that’s like? I don’t have anyone to go home to. You do!”

Rune pulled some money out of his pocket and threw it down on the floor at Caleb’s feet before walking over to the door.

“Well, fuck you! If you’re too stupid to take what you have, I’m not. I look enough like you that I’m pretty sure Julia won’t mind. She’s a beautiful woman and I think I would be a good match for her. Since you don’t want her, I’m going to take her and you can just go to hell!”

Rune left Caleb standing there with his mouth open in shock as he walked out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

Caleb stood there for all of ten seconds before he started swearing, “Oh, hell no! Over my dead body will you be touching a hair on her head.”

He grabbed the sheet off the bed and wrapped it around his hips before picking up the money Rune had thrown on the floor and stomping out the door. He needed to find some clothes and fast. He had to stop Rune from taking his girl.

\* \* \* \*

Rune watched from his car on the corner as Caleb left the room and hurried down the street toward the local store. He looked ridiculous in a sheet. Rune just hoped he didn't get arrested before he could find some clothes.

Pulling out his cell phone, he quickly took a picture of Caleb stomping down the street in his sheet, one hand fisted around the money, the other holding up the sheet, and doing a bad job at it. Rune could see part of one butt cheek peeking out from the sheet.

Caleb wouldn't appreciate it now, but Julia might. It could help convince her that Caleb really did love her. Why else would he walk out in public wrapped in a sheet?

He chuckled as he dialed home. "Hey, Cole, it worked. He should be home in about a week, give or take. And man, is he pissed."

"You two going to be okay?" Cole asked, worried that Rune may have caused problems with Caleb.

"Oh, we'll be okay eventually. I still expect to be the best man at his wedding. He's just really pissed at me right now. I tore up his picture of Julia and told him I was going to go home and marry her. Figured I looked enough like him to pass mustard as far as Julia was concerned."

Cole blew out a breath. "Oh, man, that was harsh."

"Yeah," Rune laughed, "but it worked. He's rushing down the street as we speak...wrapped in a hotel sheet."

"A sheet?" Cole guffawed. "Oh, I hope you get a picture of that."

"Hell, yeah I did. I'm going to frame it and give it to him as a wedding present."

Cole started laughing again. "Ouch! You are so cruel. He's gonna be even more pissed at you when he sees that. I want a copy though."

"No problem, my man, anything I can do to remind my brother of what an ass he's been."

“That’ll probably do it. So, okay, you need to get your ass back down here so we can make wedding plans. We still have to convince Julia to go along with this. She’s pretty broken up.”

“Yeah, okay, I’ll be there soon,” Rune replied sadly. He felt really bad for Julia and that only made him angrier with Caleb. Julia loved Caleb so much and he was giving up on her. Rune still wasn’t all together sure why. No one was.

But none of that mattered to Rune. He knew his brother loved Julia with all his heart and he was determined that they be together, no matter what Caleb’s fears were. A life without love was cold and lonely. Caleb had no idea where his life would head without Julia in it. Rune did. It was the same cold and lonely place that he had been living in for years.

## Chapter 11

Caleb parked his motorcycle in the driveway and turned off the motor. Pulling off his helmet he rested it on the seat in front of him, folding his hands over the top. Lifting his head he looked toward the house.

It had taken two weeks to get home, far longer than he had hoped. But he was finally here. He just hoped he was in time. It had only taken a couple of days for him to figure out that Rune was feeding him a line of crap. He wasn't really going after Julia for himself. Rune had just wanted Caleb to get his head together and do the right thing.

Caleb still wasn't sure what the right thing was but he knew that ultimately he needed Julia in his life. He loved her and needed her more than he needed to breathe. However, after everything he had done, all the ways he had hurt her, he knew he had a long way to go to prove himself to her.

He watched as the front door opened and Rune walked out crossing his arms over his chest. He kicked the door shut behind him and walked to a porch post, leaning against it. He just stared at Caleb without saying anything. Well, at least he wasn't throwing punches this time.

Caleb climbed off his bike, setting the helmet on the handlebars, and walked slowly toward Rune. He wasn't too sure of his welcome. He had pretty much been an ass the last time he had seen his brother. He wouldn't put it past Rune to throw a punch his way. He knew he deserved it if he did.

He stopped when he was standing at the bottom of the steps in front of his brother. "Rune." Rune stared at him for several moments,

seeming to be looking for something in Caleb's eyes. Apparently, he had found what he was looking for.

"Caleb," he nodded. "She's out back in the garden."

Caleb nodded and started around the side of the house before stopping. He didn't turn around but still knew Rune was watching him.

"Thank you, Rune," he said quietly.

"You're welcome, bro. I've got to tell you that you have your work cut out for you, though. She's pretty mixed up about all of this. You're going to have to jump through some mighty big hoops before that woman forgives you."

Caleb turned and sent his brother a small grin. "I love her."

Rune smiled back at his brother. "That's all you need to do. Now, go get your woman."

Caleb nodded before heading around the side of the house to the garden in the backyard. Coming to the edge of the yard he looked around until he saw Julia walking among the flowers.

She looked beautiful, glowing. She was wearing a tank-top style baby blue gingham dress that gathered under her breasts and fell softly to her bare feet. Caleb could just see her pink colored toes peeking out from under the hemline of her dress.

Her long ash blonde hair was pulled back in a loose French braid that fell down her back, leaving wisps of hair curling around her porcelain face.

When she turned Caleb could see the soft swelling of the baby under her dress. She seemed to be absently caressing her stomach as she leaned in to smell a flower here and there.

Caleb's chest felt as it would burst as he drank in her sweet form, wishing he could turn back time and take away these last two months. His life had been hell since leaving her. He knew now he should never have left. He really was the idiot everyone called him.

He watched her every movement as he walked over to stand a few feet behind her. Now that he was here he wasn't sure what to say to

her. So many different opening lines went through his mind that his head hurt. Not a single one seemed appropriate.

How did he tell the woman he loved that he didn't really mean it when he said he *didn't* love her? How did he tell her that he had left her in the middle of the night because he was afraid? How did he tell her that she was his soul?

"Julia," he whispered softly.

He watched as her body stiffened. She seemed to stop breathing for a moment before taking a deep breath and leaning down to smell the yellow rose in front of her. She straightened up and moved on to the next flower that caught her interest, leaning down to smell that one also.

Caleb followed behind her, picking each flower she smelled and gathering them together in his hands after smelling each one as she did. Except for the stiffening in her body she didn't acknowledge his presence in any way.

"Aren't you going to say anything to me, Julia?" Caleb said, his voice breaking with huskiness. "Please, *bébé*? Won't you look at me?" he implored when she didn't say anything.

Again, Julia ignored him as if he wasn't there and continued to go from flower to flower, Caleb trailing behind her picking each one she smelled. After awhile he had a whole handful but Julia just kept smelling flowers and Caleb kept picking them. Finally, Caleb decided he needed something to carry the flowers in and ran up onto the porch to find something.

Julia felt like crying when Caleb walked away. She knew she should have said something to him when he had first spoken to her. Now she wouldn't get the chance. She had just wanted to make him suffer a little for the way he had hurt her, not make him leave. Once again she had done the wrong thing. Could she ever get this right?

Rune had explained to her that Caleb was coming back for her. She hadn't believed him anymore than she had believed Cole and

Bear, but she had hoped. She couldn't help it. She loved him and that meant she could forgive him almost anything.

However, seeing him face to face was something altogether different. When he had called her name she had no idea what to say, how to apologize for her wanton behavior. So, she had said nothing. Apparently that had been the wrong thing to do.

At first it had seemed to be fine. She had even smiled at the way Caleb had picked every flower she smelled. But then he had walked away. Now what was she supposed to do? Should she go after him? Beg him to forgive her? She knew she could sometimes be too clingy. Men seem to hate that.

With butterflies in her stomach Julia turned to follow after Caleb, only to stop suddenly when she saw him bounding down the back steps carrying a wicker basket in his hand, filled with the flowers he had picked. He had a happy-go-lucky smile on his face.

Julia hid her grin by turning back to smell another flower. Maybe things weren't so bad after all. She heard Caleb walk up behind her, carefully picking the flower she had just had in her hands.

"You're going to have to find a lot more baskets to carry all the flowers I want to plant around our house, Caleb. I love flowers and Bear has promised to help me plant as many as I want. I especially like dried flowers. I will want baskets of them throughout our home."

Caleb swallowed hard. Was Julia saying what he thought she was saying, what he hoped she was saying? "I'll get you as many baskets as you want, *bébé*," he replied softly, playing the game the way she seemed to want to play it.

"And you'll need to make sure that they build the nursery right off of our bedroom. I will want to be as close as possible to this baby if he or she needs me. And whatever other children we have. That's important, don't you think, Caleb?" she asked hesitantly as she turned to look up at Caleb, hope and uncertainty all over her face.

"Yes, Julia," Caleb whispered though the lump in his throat. "That's very important. A baby should always be close to its mother."

“And its father, Caleb? What about its father?”

Caleb knew what Julia was asking him. She wanted to know if he was willing to make a commitment to the baby as well as to her. That was never an issue for him. And he needed to let her know that he accepted the fact that she came as a package deal.

“Yes, Julia, it is very important for a baby to be close to its father too, especially little girls. They need to be as close to their father as possible. Little girls need to know that they are loved by both their mother and their father,” he responded with a wide, open grin. Julia knew that he was referring to Robin and she couldn’t be happier.

“Yes, Caleb, it’s very important for little girls to be close to their father. They need to feel safe and secure, to know that their father loves them, unconditionally.”

“And the mother of those little girls? Do they need to know that they are loved, too? Loved unconditionally?” Caleb asked, his breath very nearly caught in his throat as he gazed intently down at Julia.

Julia blushed slightly as she replied to Caleb, her voice so quiet he very nearly didn’t hear her. “We always need to know we are loved.”

“Then maybe now would be a good time to let you know how much I love you, Julia. I know I haven’t proved it. I’ve done everything I could to push you away.” He set the basket down on the ground and pulled Julia into his arms. “I’m sorry, Julia. If I could go back and change it all, I would, but I can’t. There is no way for me to ever make up for all the hurt I have caused you.”

“Why did you do it, Caleb? If you loved me, why did you push me away? Did you not want me? Not love me? Was I too forward that last night? Should I have waited for you to come to me instead of climbing into bed with you? Was it wrong?” Julia asked, desperately trying to understand his behavior.

“No, *bébé*, you did nothing wrong. Never think that expressing what you feel for me is wrong. If anything, you should be asking my forgiveness for that night. I had no right to take you the way I did.”

“You’re joking, right? It was perfect. You finally stopped treating me like a china doll and made love to me the way you really wanted to. Didn’t you?” She suddenly felt doubtful again. What if she was wrong?

“*Bébé*, you don’t understand. I wasn’t in control that night. I didn’t care about anything but having you, taking you, being inside of you. I didn’t care if you wanted me, if you wanted what I was doing. All I knew was that I had to have you. It shouldn’t be like that. That’s why I left. I had to get away from you, from the feelings you create in me,” he said hopelessly.

“I don’t understand, Caleb.” Julia began crying. “How can what we did be wrong? You didn’t hurt me. I didn’t hurt you. We both enjoyed it. I wanted you to do everything you did to me. I want you to do it again. Is that wrong? Does that make me a bad person?”

“You...you wanted me to...do what I did? You’re serious? You don’t hate me for what I did? How I treated you?” Caleb was amazed that Julia wasn’t spitting in his face for what he did. Women like Julia were supposed to be loved softly, gently. Not taken like he had taken her that night.

“Caleb, I love what you do to me, to my body. The way you want me, you have no idea how that makes me feel. It doesn’t matter if you are making love to me slowly or if you’re just taking me. I love it, all of it. It lets me know that you want me, desire me, that you need me. How can that be wrong?” she tried to assure him.

Caleb pushed her hair back from her face as he softly caressed her face. Julia could see tears in his eyes as he answered her.

“No, *bébé*, it’s not wrong. It’s never wrong, I guess. You’re so small and delicate and you have to admit that I am a big guy. I’m just so afraid of hurting you. It’s amazing to me that you aren’t mad at me for the way I treated you.”

“I am mad at you for the way you treated me!” she snapped at him.

Caleb closed his eyes in anguish at her words. Had he misunderstood her? Was she really angry with him for the way he had taken her? Was she lying when she said that she liked what he had done to her?

"You left me!" she yelled as she began pounding on his chest. "You made love to me and then you left me! How could you do that to me?" she demanded.

Caleb couldn't keep her from hitting him so he just pulled her into his embrace, her hands trapped between their bodies. "I know, *bébé*, and I am so very sorry. I promise I will never leave you again. I love you so much and I know that I have a lot to make up for. And I will, I promise. You will never—"

"Caleb!" Julia interrupted as she placed her fingers over his lips, "Shut up!"

Caleb cocked one eyebrow up at her words. Not many people had gotten away with telling Caleb Boudreux to shut up. Now this tiny slip of a woman was doing it and she didn't seem to have a scared bone in her body.

"All you have to do is love me. That's all I need from you, Caleb, your love, nothing else. No promises, no apologies, no explanations, just your love. Everything else we can work out, together."

Caleb grinned down at Julia, his smile lighting up her world, before he swung her up into his arms and started for the house.

"Loving you I can do, Julia." He chuckled as he carried her into the house, down the hallway to his room, and dropping her on the bed before turning to lock the door behind him. He grabbed a condom out of his nightstand and tossed it onto the bed.

Julia watched with a wide expectant grin as Caleb began taking off his clothes before reaching for hers. Within seconds, Julia was as naked as he was, his body settling down between her legs, but leaning slightly to the side.

Caleb, being careful of her swollen belly, buried his hands in her hair as his lips claimed hers. He tried to convey all his love, need, and

his apology in his kiss. Running his tongue over the edge of her lips he gently coaxed her mouth open, only to dip in and explore the recesses of her mouth before running his tongue along hers.

Julia felt every emotion he was sending her with each touch of his tongue on hers. She felt it all the way down her body. Wanting more she grabbed his hair and pulled him closer, groaning when he pushed his chest against hers, the soft hair on his chest tickling her nipples.

Caleb's hands were everywhere, touching, caressing, and loving her. Breaking away from her lips he followed his hands down her body. His lips gently tugged on her nipples before swirling around the little pebbles pulling a deep moan from Julia's lips.

Pulling her thighs farther apart, Caleb scooted down her body, licking every inch of exposed skin he could find as he worked his way down her body to the heart of her feminine heat.

"Caleb?" Julia cried out when he stopped moving, staring at her soft glistening folds.

"Oh *bébé*, you're so pretty here," he whispered, causing Julia to shiver when his hot breath brushed over her heated skin. Caleb leaned in and licked just the tip of her, gently running his tongue over her swollen clit. "Oh, and you taste so good," he whispered before he took one large deep swipe, tasting her.

"Oh, Caleb," she cried out.

"Caleb knew she was enjoying what he was doing by the way her fingernails were digging into his shoulders. He knew she would be embarrassed by her excitement, but he didn't care. It told him that he was giving her enough pleasure to drive her wild. He loved it and wanted more.

Lavishing Julia with his tongue, Caleb sucked and licked until her body went rigid, her back arched, and Julia screamed out her pleasure. Not wanting her to feel anything but the pleasure he was giving her he continued his ministrations, not stopping even when he felt her climax again and again, until she was totally mindless with desire, softly whimpering when she could no longer scream.

Caleb grabbed the condom off the bed and tore it open with his teeth. Before he could roll it on, Julia grabbed it.

"Let me," she whispered.

Caleb's teeth ached from clenching his jaw so tightly as Julia rolled the condom down his cock. The light delicate touch of her hand made Caleb tremble. He prayed that he wouldn't explode before he had a chance to make love to Julia.

As soon as Julia dropped her hands and lay back against the pillows, Caleb crawled up to kneel between her thighs. He pulled her legs up over his arms and pushed himself slowly into Julia's sensitive folds, inch by slow inch until he was seated to the root inside of her, connected to her in the most intimate of ways.

"Julia, *bébé*, look at us," Caleb whispered as he gazed down at where he was pushed inside of her. "Look how beautiful we are together." He watched his cock move in and out of her, the wetness of her tight grip paving the way for each thrust he gave her.

"Oh, *bébé*...you're so tight...so wet..." he groaned, his head falling back on his shoulders as his thrusts became faster, his breathing harder. The feeling of Julia wrapped around him was unlike anything he had ever felt. He couldn't believe he had almost given this up.

He knew he was getting close, he could feel his balls drawing up, tightening, ready to blow. He wanted Julia with him. He wanted her to feel what he was feeling, the closeness he felt when he was in her like this.

Before he could express his feelings he felt her move against him. Looking down, he saw Julia's delicate fingers had encircled his hard cock where he was pumping inside of her. Seeing her hand on him, her fingers softly grazing her swollen clit, it was more than he could take.

"Oh, fuck!" he yelled as he slammed himself into her once, twice, three times as he erupted, filling her with his seed. His head fell back,

the muscles in his neck clenching as Julia continued to stroke his shuddering cock, milking every last drop of cum from him.

Caleb pulled out and collapsed beside Julia, wrapping his arms around her sweat drenched body. His breathing was still harsh. He didn't feel too bad. Julia's breathing wasn't too even either.

"I love you, Julia," he whispered into her hair. "I want you to divorce Sam and marry me, have more babies with me, spend the rest of your life with me."

Caleb didn't know what to think when Julia giggled up at him. "Do you honestly think I would do with you what we just did if I didn't have every intention of marrying you?" She was still laughing at him as she pushed her way onto him to straddle his thighs with hers. "I have you exactly where I want you and I do not plan on letting you go again."

"Oh, really?" he asked as he laughed, lifting his hips suggestively. Right where she wanted him, huh? He could do that.

"So listen to me very carefully, Mr. Boudreux, if you ever leave me again, the missions you go on will seem like a cakewalk. I will hunt you down, hog tie you, and drag you back. Do I make myself very clear? And don't think I can't do it because I can, even if I have to get help to do it. I will!" she said sternly, her hands thumping him on the chest with each word.

"Yes, ma'am," he replied, feeling himself grow hard against her. Caleb loved it when she was fierce.

"No more of this running crap. If we have a problem we will talk about it. If I do something you don't like, talk to me. If you think I can't take something you want, ask me about it. You'd be surprised what I can take, what little fantasies I have in my head. Don't dismiss me because I'm small, Caleb."

"Fantasies? What fantasies? Sexual fantasies?" he asked, curious and excited at the same time. Julia had fantasies? Caleb could feel himself harden just thinking about Julia's fantasies. He seriously hoped he could fulfill each and every one of them.

“Caleb!” she yelled, trying to get his mind out of his crotch and back into the conversation. Men!

“Sorry, *bébé*, you were saying?” he asked as his hands began to roam over her body again, paying special attention to her breasts. They seemed larger than the last time he had been with her. Had to be the pregnancy. He could get used to that.

“Oh, you men are all alike! Mention the word fantasies and your brains pool in your pants!” She growled, disgusted by Caleb’s lack of participation in their conversation. Here she was trying to make him understand that he couldn’t just leave every time they had a problem and he couldn’t stop thinking with his cock.

Caleb grabbed the hair at the back of Julia’s head and forced her to look down at him. His face was very serious as he said, “Julia, I love you. I am never going to leave you again. I learned my lesson, all too well. I will never do anything that might cause me to lose you again.”

Julia’s eyes watered as she smiled down at Caleb. Maybe he had been listening to her. “Really, Caleb?”

“Yeah, *bébé*, really.” He pulled her head down to give what Julia thought was the softest, most loving kiss she had ever received. His kiss told her that he loved her, that he wanted her, needed her, would never leave her. She felt it all the way to her soul.

She started laughing at the devilish twinkle in Caleb’s eyes as he looked at her again. “Now, about those fantasies...”

## Chapter 12

Julia leaned back into Caleb's strong arms. His hands rested lightly on her large rounded stomach. They were both gazing out the window at Rune, who was walking around the garden, his hands deep in his pockets, his head bent in quiet contemplation.

"What are we going to do about Rune?" Caleb asked, a worried frown on his face. Rune looked so lonely standing out there all by himself. Having experienced that kind of loneliness when he thought he had lost Julia, he didn't want his brother, his twin, to go through the same thing. It was no way for him to live.

"I have the perfect woman in mind for him," Julia replied with a wide grin. She had a lot to thank Rune for and she was going to do everything within her power to see that he got exactly what he needed, even if didn't know what it was.

"Oh?" he asked, looking down at her smiling face. What was going on in the gorgeous mind of hers? He could see from the Cheshire grin on her face that it was something big.

"Yes, and she will drive him crazy before she lets him love her."

Caleb laughed softly at the look of humorous anticipation on her face. Caleb turned Julia in his arms to face him.

"Are you sure that's such a good idea? He's been through quite a lot."

Julia laughed as she nipped at Caleb's chin. "Oh yes, she's perfect for him. She will drive him to distraction, make him work for every inch of her heart. But in the end, she will make him almost as happy as you make me."

"Almost?" Caleb asked, one thick black brow raising up.

“Yes,” she said as she lightly graced his lips with hers. “It’s not possible for anyone else in the world to be as happy as you have made me. It’s just not possible.” Julia turned back toward the window and settled into Caleb’s arms.

“So,” he asked as he settled his chin on her head, “who is this paragon of virtue?”

Julia laughed. “Have I ever told you about my friend Hannah?”

# THE END

[WWW.STORMYGLENN.COM](http://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](http://www.stormyglenn.com)



**Siren Publishing, Inc.**  
**[www.SirenPublishing.com](http://www.SirenPublishing.com)**