

The MARKSMAN



MARY WINTER





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HER HUNGERS

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Cameron Sommers has always worked just beyond the borders of right and wrong. A military sniper, she retired to work on adventure tours, mostly in the Arctic looking for polar bears. When an accidental shooting left her shaken, she went back to the military. This time she works as a consultant for a European Forces General, and he's sent her to the Arctic. Where she has come face-to-face with the biggest, most dangerous, and the sexiest bears she has ever known.

Kjell Tivet thinks the new sharpshooter is going to endanger the mission and get herself killed. How one curvy, sexy woman who is wicked good with a rifle can help them track down the Russian corporations dumping in the Arctic, is beyond him. But Kjell knows the mission, and he trusts his commanding officer to know what he's doing. All he needs to do is keep one hot sharp shooter safe and make sure he's not left wounded by her lethal charm.

Cam looked up at Bjorn and Kjell as they entered the room. As always, a tiny flare of arousal wound through her at the sight of Bjorn's second-in-command. Though he deferred to Bjorn, Kjell took over the room, easily claiming a prime spot at the table. Trent moved aside to make room for him, the jovial Canadian one of the bright spots on the team. The twins, Marc and Hans, made an imposing pair, though at the moment they consulted maps and notations of local polar bear sightings.

"She's found tracks, Sir," Hans said, pointing to the place on the grid Cam had marked with a red dot. "The last sighting was at least five kilometers from here." His golden blond hair and easy smile brightened the room like the sun.

Cam sensed an attention on her so intent, the hairs on the back of her neck rose. She'd been eye-to-eye with wild animals before, staring at them from her hiding place, and the knowledge that life, and death, hung in the balance created the same anticipatory feeling. She fought the goose bumps rising on her skin.

"Cam?" Kjell asked.

She blinked and pulled out of her reverie. Funny how this European Forces unit set off all her hot spots. She'd been around military men before. Even did some work for a small guerilla force in Russia...Kjell's demeanor hit every feminine nerve in her body and all of them wanted to scream "take me." Too bad he didn't see things the same way or they both could have been pleasantly diverted from the cold and lonely place.

"I'm sorry. You were saying?"

A predatory smile curved his sensual lips. "I asked if you'd followed the tracks to their end."

"Yeah, and that's the weird part. They just disappeared." She paused, wondering how much to say. *The tracks looked like the ones I'd encountered in Canada from a polar bear shifter. Where bear prints ended, human ones began.* They already thought her strange. She couldn't say shit like that here.

Kjell cocked his head to one side. Had he been a bear, she would have sworn he was sniffing the air. He shared a glance with Bjorn.

"Disappeared?" Hans asked. "But where would a polar bear go?"

"A male polar bear, probably around twelve hundred pounds and moving approximately four miles per hour. As to where he'd go, that's why I want to see the surveillance tapes. Where his prints end there appears to be a large churned up area of snow. It's possible he followed the tracks of your vehicle, though I saw no signs of claws or other marring to indicate that had happened." Cam answered.

A surprised look flashed across Kjell's face.

The Marksman

Nanook Warriors Book 2

Mary Winter



PPB

Chapter One

Snow crunched beneath Cameron Sommers' booted feet. Her breath plumed in front of her face. Goggles protected her eyes from the bitter snow, the hood of her parka wrapped tight against them and the scarf she wore. Not a single inch of skin touched the frigid Arctic air. Her foot prints, and those of the men, spread out before her. The working of her muscles, her body's temperature rising beneath layers of silk, wool, and Gore-Tex, provided the perfect start to the day.

The sun hugged the horizon as high as it was going to rise today. Long used to the endless nights in this part of Norway, Cam didn't think too much about the sun. In her white and gray winter camouflage, she stood out as movement against the still, pristine landscape. Wisps of her golden brown hair threatened to come free of her ski mask and hood, tickling around the edge of her goggles. The wicking layer against her skin pulled the sweat away so she never felt the cold.

The steady rhythm of her feet hitting the snow faltered at the fresh tracks crossing her path. She slowed. Small whorls of snow rose from the tracks, marking them as fresh, indeed. Dropping to her knees beside them, she stared at the obvious polar bear signs. Instantly, her inner hunter went on alert, noting their size and shape. A running male, large from the look of the tracks, had crossed this way probably within the last ten minutes or so. The guys back at the base had warned her about polar bears, especially Kjell Tivet. He had been vocal about not wanting her to run alone. She snorted and straightened, debating whether to follow the tracks or not. Kjell had no idea how at home she felt out here. Spending the last few years operating tours out of Chukotka, Russia, certainly familiarized her with polar bears.

A smile quirked the corners of her mouth. A gorgeous day, little wind, temperatures hovering around zero, she'd run and hunted in far worse. Cam stood and changed course, her feet crunching a new path into the snow next to the large bear tracks. Following them might prove to be an interesting diversion, especially when she noticed they seemed to loop back toward the compound.

She checked her mp3 player, the chip she'd rigged telling her how far she'd run. Less than a mile, if she followed the tracks back to the compound she would double that for this morning's run. Unless she decided to take a little detour. Frowning, she debated following the trails on the way back, but a sense of adventure gripped her. The well-worn path would still be there tomorrow, and the day after that.

Her rifle hung against her back, a comforting weight that she could ready at a moment's notice. A small pistol rested at her hip, Kjell's contribution to her run. The oh-so-tall and ruggedly handsome second in command grated on her nerves. With his white-blond hair and snarling attitude, he reminded her of a very pissed off male polar bear and she knew how to handle those. Stay the fuck out of their way.

Her long strides carried her back toward the compound, her curiosity growing with every footfall. Once back, she'd ask Trent to pull the security tapes. She wanted to see how close the bear had actually ventured. She paused as a startling thought hit her.

One of the guys could be a shifter.

She shook her head and picked up her pace. Her run carried her back to the compound where the tracks faded. She knelt, certain that the hard snow concealed proof that the bear had lumbered off into the wilderness. Not even claw marks showed in the ice. It was almost as if the bear had just vanished.

She laughed. The idea that the European Union would station polar bear shifters in the Arctic was absurd. Just because she'd encountered those beings—Cam shut down the memories. No. There couldn't be men like that here. With all the military and scientific personnel, they'd be too visible.

She needed to see those security tapes. She needed to call Vik, the General who had brought her here. Balling her hands into fists, she glanced behind her, torn between continuing her run or finding some answers. Straightening, she walked around to the front gate, only to be met by six-foot-two inches of pissed off male.

Kjell stood, his arms crossed over his chest. He glowered at her, his icy blue eyes radiating anger. A scowl marred his full lips, his face devoid of scarf or mask. He wore a parka, jeans and boots, making her feel inferior in her layers of clothing. Of course, he probably hadn't planned to run five miles in wind chills that hovered around negative thirty degrees Fahrenheit. She refused to list temperatures in Celsius. The Metric system made things colder than they really were.

"What do you think you're doing? Get inside," Kjell barked at her. He jerked his thumb over his shoulder at the gray compound door.

"Coming back from my morning run." She paused, determined not to give ground.

"We have treadmills." Kjell shifted his weight. "It's dangerous out here."

Like it isn't dangerous being trapped inside with five men and Sigrid.

Cam snorted. "You're just worried because I'm a woman." She flashed a devil-may-care smile. "You know, if I weren't capable out here, Vik would never have sent me. Speaking of which, I want to see this morning's security tapes. Looks like we had a visitor."

"Human?"

"Negative. Bear. I've seen the precautions you guys take with your refuse. There's no reason for a full grown, male polar bear to come this close to humans. I want to see what he was looking for."

"You're not here to hunt bear." Kjell's expression soured.

"No, I'm not. But if something has disrupted the local bear population, I want to know. It could be the men we're looking for."

"I doubt it, but if it will keep you inside, go look at the tapes." He gestured for the door. "After you."

"Why thank you. That may be the first gentlemanly thing you've done since I've arrived." Smiling even more at the dour expression he wore, she sashayed past him. She put an extra wiggle in her hips, Kjell's disgusted grunt telling her he noticed. Chuckling, she hurried inside and Kjell slammed the door behind them.

~* * *~

Kjell stormed into Bjorn's office with all the grace of a wounded animal. The door thudded against the wall. Bjorn looked up from his work behind the desk. He laid his pen down and arched an eyebrow. "You knocked?"

"She's still running!" Kjell closed the door behind him with a bit more finesse. "Damn it. She's stupid and foolish and going to get herself killed."

“Cam knows what she’s doing. Vik wouldn’t have brought her—”

Kjell waved his hand in the air, cutting off whatever his friend and superior officer was about to say. “Vik hasn’t told us the whole story on this woman. She used to lead sporting expeditions? My ass! We don’t need a field guide. We need someone to hook up with the poachers and see if they’re with the Russian Corp.” Kjell balled his hand into a fist and pounded it on his thigh.

Bjorn grinned. “I’m sure Cam is more than capable of doing the job Vik sent her here to do. He gave us Sigrid, didn’t he?”

Kjell sighed. “Yeah,” he grudgingly admitted.

“Okay, then. So you don’t want her to run. Go with her. If she’s attacked, by man or beast, you’ll be there to protect her.” Amusement danced in his friend’s blue eyes.

“No!” Kjell barked out a bit too quickly. “That’s not a good idea. We have work out equipment here. She can run on the treadmill.”

“Like you run on the treadmill?” One blond eyebrow arched and this time a full-fledged smile burst across Bjorn’s face.

“I do. Sometimes.” To his own ears, Kjell sounded like a petulant teenager. Damn it, thinking about Cam out there, alone and defenseless, made him flash back to the vacation he’d taken in Canada before this mission. An image of a polar bear’s white fur marred red with blood flashed through his mind. If an adult bear couldn’t defend himself, then Cam had no hope against the foes they faced. Except polar bears couldn’t hold guns. At least not in animal form.

“Look, I don’t like her running anymore than you do. According to her file, Cam is an expert shot with most weapons, and she carries two on her runs. One of which you gave her. She’s not really military, though she answers to Vik. We can’t order her around. If she wants to run...well, we have to let her.”

“Two weapons that we know of,” Kjell corrected. He’d stumbled in on her preparing for her morning and thought he’d seen the hilt of a knife or two secreted on her.

“Vik wouldn’t send us any less than the best. Unless you’re pissed off because she’s a woman.”

Kjell refused to rise to his buddy’s bait. “She could be a goat for all I care as long as she does her job.”

“A goat, huh?” Bjorn picked up the pen and turned it round and round in his fingers. “I don’t think you’d look at her in quite the same way if she were a goat.” He struggled to keep a straight face.

Kjell glared at his friend.

“Face it, and Sigrid might maim me for saying this, but Cam is hot.”

A small growl escaped Kjell’s lips.

“Easy.” Bjorn set the pen back down. “I didn’t say they’d devour her. Just that they look at her that way.”

A second growl emerged before Kjell could stop it.

A soft knock interrupted them.

“Come in,” Bjorn called, the teasing smile on his face shifting into a look of hunger.

Kjell scented Sigrid an instant before she entered the room. Even with Cameron’s scent still prevalent, the other woman’s feminine fragrance was unmistakable since it was combined with Bjorn’s. Taking deep breaths, he relaxed. The two women had become fast friends. No doubt Sigrid would tell Cam if she found him upset. He smiled tightly. Having two women in the all-male compound had proved interesting.

“Hey, *elskede*, is this a good time?” Sigrid stepped into the room and closed the door behind her. She glanced at Kjell. “If you two are talking business, I can come back.”

She wore a lab coat over a sweater and jeans, the soles of her sneakers silent against the carpeted floor. Bjorn stared at her as if she wore a bikini. Hunger darkened his blue eyes.

Kjell pushed back his chair and stood. “We can talk about this later.”

“It’s okay. I won’t be long. I just wanted to see if I could go running with Cam in the mornings.”

“No!” Kjell and Bjorn barked at the same time.

Sigrid flinched. “Hey, I was just asking. If she can go, I thought maybe I could too.”

“I don’t want you out there. It can be dangerous.” Bjorn rose from behind his desk and crossed the space separating him from his mate. Cupping her shoulder, he dipped his head. “I don’t want you to get hurt.”

“But Cam can get hurt?” Sigrid laughed. “She’ll be relieved to hear that. She thinks you’re stifling her.” Sigrid stared at Kjell when she spoke.

“Cam can’t get hurt,” Kjell said, careful to keep a rumble from his voice. His bear roused, angry at the perceived threat to any woman under his protection. “I’ve forbid to her to run.”

“And she knows this?” Sigrid laughed. “Okay you big teddy bears, you can stand down. I won’t go running with Cam. Just thought I’d check.” She pushed her mate away and headed for the door. “Cam wanted to talk to you, but I’ll let her know you’re buried in your bear-man cave and can’t come out.” Still laughing, she opened the door and stepped into the hallway.

“Women,” Bjorn muttered under his breath, and Kjell knew exactly how he felt.

~* * *~

Cam looked up at Bjorn and Kjell’s entered the room. As always, a tiny flare of arousal wound through her at the sight of Bjorn’s second-in-command. Though he deferred to Bjorn, Kjell took over the room, easily claiming a prime spot at the table. Trent moved aside to make room for him, the jovial Canadian one of the bright spots on the team. The twins, Marc and Hans, made an imposing pair, though at the moment they consulted maps and notations of local polar bear sightings.

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A surprised look flashed across Kjell’s face.

Jackass. Though she’d been here only two weeks, they’d done little of the actual work on her mission papers, hooking up with some sort of Russian Corporation. She fixed Bjorn with a steady stare. “I want the surveillance tapes, and I’d love for some remote cameras to be setup.”

“Where do you think the bear went?” Bjorn crossed his arms over his chest, giving the appearance of an immovable glacier.

Cam shrugged. “You tell me. All refuse is on the other side of the compound in containers so bear-proof it’s hard for humans to get into them. No food. To him this place reeks of humans. With no subjective evidence of any bears getting this close before, I want those cameras. It’s possible our male encountered something and was driven here.”

“Our male, huh?” Kjell questioned.

Cam tapped the map. “I want those cameras. And he’s *ours* because he came close to your compound and I saw the tracks.”

Kjell coughed, the noise sounding suspiciously like laughter.

“Do you have a problem with this?” Cam barked. “With me?”

She balled her hand into a fist and pounded it on the table. One minute he acted all macho about how they didn’t need cameras, the next he sounded as if he was mocking her. “Vik sent me here to help you guys. I want the surveillance, and if I think it’s going to help then I need it done.”

"Kjell," Bjorn warned.

"Sorry, something caught in my throat," he said.

"Yeah, your foot," Cam mumbled.

"Cam!" Bjorn snapped back. "I'm willing to get you the cameras. If you say they'll help, then we'll do it. But you still report to me and you'll treat my men with respect."

"Yes, Sir," she said and tried not to sound too resigned about it.

"Good." His smile softened the blow of his words. "Marc and Hans, I want you to set up the cameras. Trent, can you dig up that surveillance footage? I'm going to check with Sigrid and make sure we haven't noted anything on the contamination front."

"Thank you. I appreciate it." Cam said, not really regretting her earlier goading of Kjell. Sooner or later, he'd realize Vik had sent her here for a reason and not because this compound sorely needed a woman's touch. Sigrid spent most of her day in the lab, and Bjorn kept her bundled under wraps the rest of the time. Cam was willing to bet if the twins or Trent ever got out to a bar, they'd probably blow off some steam and leave behind a happy bevy of women.

Kjell cleared his throat. "What about me, Sir?" He asked, suddenly all business-like.

Bjorn grinned. "I think you ought to look over video with Cam, make sure she knows the lay of the land. I'll leave you to it. I need to call Vik." He stepped away from the table and out of the room.

Chairs scraped against the floor as the guys stood up. Trent motioned for her to follow him to the computers set along the back wall, and she noted with some amusement that Kjell followed them. The twins started chatting about cameras and surveillance equipment as they left the room.

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It hadn't taken him long to show her how to work the digital archives for their surveillance video, and a glance at his watch showed that thirty minutes had passed. To Kjell, it seemed like hours. The scent of her perfume, an enticing blend of citrus and sandalwood, tormented his sensitive ursine nose. He struggled against the urge to inhale deeply and see if she smelled that good all over.

His cock hardened. She leaned slightly forward, her lower lip drawn between her teeth in concentration. One long strand of golden brown hair had come undone from her twist and caressed her cheek. It shone in the light from the fluorescent bulbs overhead, and he curled his fingers into a fist to keep from touching her.

She leaned closer, reaching across the table to the screen and said, "There!"

Kjell followed her direction, trying to ignore the swell of her breasts against the wool sweater she wore. The nubby fabric invited him to reach out and touch it, to trace the lines of red and russet so carefully knitted into the garment. It looked handmade.

"See it?"

Her excited tone forced his gaze toward the screen. There, in the gray and white footage of the surveillance camera, a large male polar bear ran into view.

Bjorn.

Kjell frowned. Inching his fingers towards the controls, he bumped the knob, increasing the interference on the screen. Grey static replaced the image of Bjorn standing on his hind legs, his form shimmering as he shifted. When he was certain the display had cleared, he bumped the button again.

"I'll have Trent take a look at the interference on the monitor," Kjell offered.

"That looked like our bear." Cam grabbed a notepad sitting nearby and immediately began jotting down her observations in neat, precise script.

"So what are you going to do?"

The pen stilled against the paper. "I want to track it."

The audacity in her statement shocked him. He knew better than to doubt Vik. Their commander had told him she was one of the best trackers in the business. With his enhanced scents and the fact he knew Bjorn, he could track the bear. Cam, however, lacked his unique abilities. "What makes you think you can?"

She opened her mouth to protest and he held up his hand.

"Wait, you said yourself that the tracks had been obscured. You followed them along the vehicle tracks and lost sight of them. Even more time has passed. Sometimes even experienced trackers have to concede defeat."

Defiance sparkled in her Arctic blue eyes. "I'm the best there is."

His body rose to the power in her words. Deep inside his bear rumbled, content with the woman's faith in herself. Kjell fought the snarl twisting his lips, not at her, but at the fact that his bear had awakened, and with a vengeance.

"I understand that. Even the best have off days." He meant to reassure her. Reaching out, he touched the pad of paper with his index finger. "You make excellent notes."

He leaned closer, immediately regretting the action as he drew in a lungful of her unique scent. Reading over her shoulder, he noted how she described the bear, listing its weight and height. She'd described Bjorn exactly.

"Thank you." She turned, their lips millimeters apart. Her mouth opened, and he heard her breath catch. The subtle scent of her arousal filled the air, making his bear growl with need. His cock hardened, fully erect inside the confines of his uniform pants.

A throat cleared behind them.

A quick sniff of the air announced the presence as Bjorn and Kjell leaped back as if he'd been splashed with hot water. Turning in his chair, he put some distance between them.

"Find anything?" Bjorn's easy question quickly turned the conversation business-like.

"We saw the bear but the tape was faulty and I didn't see which direction it left. I think I'd like to go out there and look around," Cam answered.

"Not tonight. Vik called. There's a sniping mission due to head out at 0300 hours. He wants us there. More specifically he wants Cam there. Kjell, you and Trent will accompany her." Bjorn stood casually in the doorway, his keen eyes missing nothing.

"And our mission?" Kjell questioned.

Beside him, Cam turned in her chair. "My guess would be to find out who they are and report back, right?"

Bjorn smiled. "Something like that. Vik wants you to track them, find out where they came from and who they're working for. He said regular stuff. I take it you know what that means."

"Yes, Sir, I do. This is going to be fun." She scooted from her chair, notepad in hand. "If you'll excuse me, I have some planning to do."

Kjell snagged her arm, preventing her from leaving. "Wait a minute. Aren't you going to fill us in on your plans? Especially since we're going to be protecting you?"

Cam chuckled. "Kjell, you and Trent aren't going to be protecting me. You're going to be a diversion." Pulling her arm free, she sashayed over to Bjorn.

Kjell stared at her firm ass, trying hard not to think about gripping it as he thrust deep into her hot, tight pussy. He gave his head a slight shake, some lucid thought returning. "Diversion? What does that mean?"

She pulled a pin he hadn't seen from her hair and sent it tumbling down her back in rich waves. Looking over her shoulder at him, her attention strayed a bit farther south than was professional. "You're a big boy. I think you know exactly what that means." She focused on his commanding officer. "Thank you. I'll let you know if there's anything I need."

"Oh, I'm sure you will. Kjell, get Trent. I want you in my office stat." Bjorn turned and followed Cam out of the room, leaving Kjell sitting there with a hard-on for a certain sharpshooter and her crazy plans.

Chapter Two

Cam paused in zipping up her snowsuit at the slight knock on her door. She'd already checked her gear twice, though she'd gone out on a mission like this a thousand times. Vik's cryptic words told her everything she needed to know. Get out there, engage these guys, find out where they came from. She hoped Kjell and Trent went along with the program.

She opened the door.

Kjell stood on the other side. He put his hand in the opening. "Can I come in?"

"Sure." She stepped back, letting him into her spartan room. A single bed shoved against the wall. Next to it stood a four-drawer dresser and a small desk was wedged into the corner. A large case containing her rifles and gun equipment sat inside the open, bare closet.

Kjell arched an eyebrow at her furnishings.

Cam paused. Surely all the sleeping rooms looked like this. Hers couldn't be so different from theirs. Cam reached for her pack. "We ready to go?"

Kjell stopped her. His big hand covered hers, pulling it back toward her side. Heat burned through her skin, an unnatural warmth in this cold clime. "I think we need to talk first."

"Okay." She kept her tone light, though Kjell's hand remained on hers.

"What the hell did Bjorn mean when he said we were to be a diversion?"

That answered that question.

Cam arched an eyebrow, not surprised Vik hadn't told the men about her true work. Though hardened military men they might be, she doubted someone in her profession would be welcome. "I'm here to do a job," she replied, her words cold and hard.

"So are we. You didn't answer the question." Kjell stepped forward.

His bulk moved her back. One step. Two. The bed loomed closer. Cam paused. She looked Kjell square in his ice blue eyes. "You can't bully me."

He held out his hands, a too-innocent expression on his face. "I'm not trying to bully you."

"The hell you're not. Vik left out some key pieces of information and now you're mad. You want answers. Fine. I'll give you answers, but you're not going to like them." Cam grinned.

"Don't mess with me. What do you think you're going to do out there?" Kjell crowded her space.

Cam stood her ground. "I'm going to engage the men, find out more about them. Maybe, if I'm lucky, infiltrate."

"You?" Kjell's brows narrowed. "You're going to do that?"

"Don't sound so surprised. You know Vik brought me here for a reason. I can't tell you that reason, but I *can* tell you I'm the right person for the job. I won't do anything to jeopardize the team." She sensed his main concern lay with the men under Bjorn's command—not her.

Kjell snorted indelicately. "Don't do anything stupid."

“Hey!” She stiffened her back. To have this brute of a man telling her what to do grated against her nerves. She breathed deeply, stuffing her anger back into place. “I wouldn’t do anything that isn’t in the mission plan. I told you that before.” She gestured to her gear on the bed. “I think we’re ready to go.”

His gaze darted to the bed, something other than military duty flickering in the depths of his gaze. The heat, quickly banked, faded. “You’re not military. I can’t order you, but I want you to promise me you’re not going to get in over your head.” Kjell inched closer, so close his heat warmed her.

“I won’t,” she answered. With him this close it was easy, too easy really, to close the space between them and see just how delicious his lips would taste. That, however, would be doing something stupid.

Kjell arched an eyebrow. “You won’t promise me?” A snarl curled his lips.

Heat flashed through her. Her pussy dampened. Her clit throbbed at his nearness. A man like Kjell would master her body the same way he mastered everything else.

“I won’t do anything stupid. I promise. Can we go now?” Her nostrils flared. She breathed deep. His musk drew her, made her long to peel that snowsuit down his hard, muscled body and taste him everywhere. Her mouth watered. *Damn, Vik shouldn’t have sent me out here. He knows how horny I get around macho guys.* Maybe that was his plan.

In an instant, Kjell wrapped his arms around her, pinning her in a vice. “Maybe we should seal that promise with a kiss?”

Cam pressed her lips together, but not before a tiny moan emerged from her throat. “I don’t think—”

“Oh, but I do.” Drawing her close, he pulled her against his body.

Even through the layers of his clothing and snowsuit, her curves molded against his hard muscles. “Kjell,” his name emerged a husky whisper.

“If you’re going to go out there and get yourself killed, I’m not going to let you die without knowing how damn good you taste.” He whispered the harsh words against her lips.

Her fingers curled. Every muscle screamed at her to slap the smug smile off his lips. *Bastard! Get HER killed?* “Fuck you.” She flattened her hands on his chest and pushed. The steel bands of his arms held her tight.

“I’d like you to.” His hands dropped to her ass and pulled her even tighter against him. Without waiting for an answer, he slanted his lips across hers. No tentative kiss, Kjell’s mouth moved with a mission. Nipping her lower lip and then sliding his tongue along the seam to make her open to him. He delved inside, possessing her with a thoroughness that left her panties soaking wet.

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His bear demanded satisfaction, rousing from his slumber with a roar to force Kjell into claiming *this* woman. Kjell hadn’t even tried to fight it, simply felt the rush of testosterone. He figured her hot temper meant an even hotter fuck and he plunged his tongue into his mouth, his balls tightening at the first brush of her sweet, honey taste against his senses.

She kissed him back, her tongue stroking along the length of his, drawing it deeper into her mouth so she could suck it. Great Mother, if she kissed like this, imagine how good her mouth would feel on his cock. He moaned, the mental imaginings of her hot, wet lips wrapping around his dick making him harder than a glacier.

The bed bumped against the back of her knees. A soft shove sent her tumbling to it. He followed her, thinking nothing but bracing his hand on the bed, the other reaching for the zipper of her snow suit. Kissing her lips wasn't enough, not now that he'd actually had a taste of her. He nipped her lower lip, and then ventured toward the high collar of her turtleneck beneath her bulky clothes.

The back of his hand brushed against her breast. Through the layers of clothing, her nipple hardened and poked against his palm. He rotated his hand against it, drawing a mewl of need to her lips. Her legs parted, her hips undulated beneath his and he couldn't help but thrust against her.

Too many layers of clothing. Damn the Arctic for it made her bundle up. A thick sweatshirt over a thinner turtleneck, and beneath it silk underwear. He knew the drill. He wore three layers plus his snowsuit. And they frustrated the hell out of him.

He tugged at her shirts.

"Kjell. Wait." Her soft entreaty stilled his hands, sounding so unlike the woman he knew her to be.

His bear growled. The delay frustrated him, denied him the satisfaction of claiming his mate.

Whoa! Kjell reared off of her, releasing her like a too-hot MRE. Not "mate." Never. And certainly not her, the American sharpshooter brought to his unit, because apparently five guys in a military unit didn't know how to shoot. He backed across the room, all the things Vik never told them creating a wall between them.

She sat up, her kiss-swollen lips parted. She blinked and then ran her tongue along her full, lower lip.

Kjell clenched his teeth, still able to taste her in his mouth. His acute sense of smell picked up her undiminished arousal.

"We're not going to finish this are we?" She looked disappointed.

"We have a mission." He slapped the military persona back in place like a splash of cool water on his overheated libido. "We don't have time to finish this."

She stood and crossed the space between them. "Then later?" She trailed her fingers over his chest, tapping the pull of his zipper. "You didn't even unzip your suit. Smug bastard." She hastily pulled her own zipper up, the thick material finally covering the bumps her nipples made against her shirt.

He smiled. "Didn't Vik tell you we were the best?" He reached for the door.

She crossed the space between them, cutting off his exit. Her fingers touched the door knob and she stared at her slender fingers over his larger ones. "Apparently Vik didn't tell either one of us the whole story." Just a touch of venom colored her words.

His bear roused. Deep inside, still snarly from being denied his satisfaction, his bear laughed. Kjell stumbled back, halting himself when he realized what had happened. In his thirty-four years, his bear had never laughed. His soul, his totem—whatever he wanted to call it—was laughing now. At him!

“You tell me your half and I’ll tell you mine. Though I’ll let you guess at the details.” Unabashedly, he let his gaze take in her zipped up suit, the bulky clothing unable to conceal her curves. His bear’s humor emboldened him. Made him wonder if he pushed her hard enough, if she’d have a bear inside too.

He sniffed the air. Her musk enchanted him and told him she was all human.

Cam released the door and stepped away from him. “Look, you came here to tell me not to screw up, right?” She waited only a heartbeat for continuing. “Let’s consider the message delivered and get out of here. The other guys are waiting.”

He turned the door knob and opened it, stepping out into the hallway in silence. Smart retorts hovered on his lips. He forced them away. With the three of them ready to head out on a mission, he needed to be sharp, and needed Cam even sharper. “You know what you’re doing?” he asked as they reached the staging room.

She nodded. “Always.” She opened the gun safe and pulled out a heavy hunting rifle with a long-range scope. She slung it over her shoulder. “I’ve got extra ammo in my pack.”

“No pistol?” He glanced at her hip.

She shook her head. “I’m a sharpshooter. I prefer taking out my quarry before they even see me.” She grinned a toothy smile.

His bear shivered, remembering a shot out of a clear blue sky and a friend down before he could even shout for help. Kjell the man appreciated the sentiment; Kjell the bear found pride in his mate.

Mate. Hell. There was that word again.

“You might want to grab a rifle too. It will make it easier for you to blend in with the surroundings.” She smiled at Trent, who met them in the entryway, a rifle strapped to his pack. “You’ll pass.”

Kjell grunted, but did as she bade. He entertained thoughts about calling Vik once they returned and asking the General what the hell he thought he was doing. Even Bjorn, his commander, knew better than to question Vik.

The three of them paused before going out. Once more, Kjell ran over the mission in his mind. He put aside his personal feelings. As a soldier, he followed orders. Luckily, none so far had run counter to his personal ethics. Following Cam out so she could “hook up” with some poachers came damn close though. Too close for the bear’s piece of mind and he scowled at the bear’s possessive thoughts.

“Ready?” He asked.

“As ready as I was the first time you asked.” Cam shifted her weight from side to side. She looked over his shoulder at Trent. “How about you? Are you ready?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Trent replied.

Smart asses, both of them.

“Good. Let’s go. Trent, I want you in the lead. We’ll keep Cam between us in case of trouble.”

Kjell’s words sent Trent for the door. He paused a moment for everyone to tighten hoods and pull down face masks, then opened it. The three of them stepped out into the Arctic day. The heavy steel door closed behind them with a clang, and he was gratified to see Cam flinch a little. Good thing something got to her. Her impervious attitude would be what got her hurt, or worse, out here. *Not on my watch.* Kjell settled his bear with a thought.

Trent led them to the three snowmobiles, already prepared for this mission. Freed of military logos, the snowmobiles looked like countless others. He watched Cam easily hop on and fire hers up. At his nod, Trent headed out. The heavy gates were already open, and someone, presumably Bjorn, waited until they passed to activate the gates and close them once more. Once they slid closed, the three of them were on their own.

From his vantage point, Kjell admired the way Cam handled the snowmobile. She steered into Trent’s tracks, understanding that in places out here those slender paths meant the difference between life and death. An intercom system linked their helmets, though no one said anything. Apparently Trent had seen schematics, for he drove with determination, heading out to a point that only he knew. Kjell frowned; he’d have to talk to Bjorn about that.

To her credit, Cam didn’t pump either man for information despite the fact their communications were all military issue. Their conversations could be heard only by those at the compound, or so they hoped.

A flash of red on the snow pulled his thoughts to the present and their mission. Images of dead polar bears haunted him. Apparently the last skirmish brought out the best in the Russian Corporation. *If it’s not the Night Demons, it’s those Russians, or now, hunters.* He frowned, wondering if the three were related. Vik thought so and that’s the reason why he’d hired Cam.

Kjell stared at her trim back and tried not to think if she’d handle him as well as she was handling the machine. Surely there were other candidates for the job, besides a curvy, blonde American sharpshooter. Trophy hunter, Vik had said. Kjell found it hard to imagine Cam hunting big game and figured that made him sexist. He muted his mic and chuckled to himself. She’d probably use one of those guns she was so fond of, if she knew what he was thinking.

“Just over that rise,” Trent called. “Let’s ease speed and look like we’re out here for a good time.”

“I should probably take the lead.” Cam pulled her snowmobile up beside Trent’s. “That’s what a good guide does.”

“You think they’re going to believe that you’re our guide?” Kjell hoped the words sounded better to her than they did to him.

“If they’re not stupid, they will.”

Her cryptic comment bothered him. Not considering their gender differences, both Trent and he had a better shot of being the guide than she did. After all, this was technically still Norway. He was on his native permafrost.

“You have the coordinates, right?”

Cam glanced down at her GPS unit. “I do. Don’t worry. Just keep up with me.” She revved the machine and sped into the lead.

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Under other circumstances, Cam had to admit that leading these guys would be fun. Kjell's pointed question rang true. Unless she knew these guys, and damn it, there was a good chance she did, anyone coming across them would think the Norwegian was their guide. The ace up her sleeve involved the three of them, a tent, and some pretty heavy innuendos. After kissing Kjell, Cam resolved to shoot someone before it came to that. After all, this was a pretty distant point for a sexual rendezvous.

She split her attention between the path ahead and the GPS unit. Luckily, though slightly hilly, the path went between several large outcroppings of rock. With a wide road, or what could pass as one, she doubted she'd run them into the side of a hill. She eased back on the throttle as she neared the crest. According to Vik's intelligence, the poachers' camp lay somewhere in a shallow valley. Secluded from all but aerial surveillance, the trespassers hid their camp well.

She paused, waiting for the guys to catch up. Once they were within a few meters, she gestured to the valley below. Up here, even in their camouflage snow suits, they were too visible, and she ducked down along some rock to hide them. She unfastened her helmet and pulled it off, cutting the motor of her snowmobile.

"They're not down there," she said, as soon as the guys' machines quieted. "Their camp may be, but they're not."

"What makes you think that?" Kjell asked.

Cam jerked her thumb toward the pink sky. "They have sunlight, more than enough to hunt by. They'll be out looking for bear." Her stomach twisted, reminding her of past follies. She ignored it. "I suggest we go down, do a little recon, and then find somewhere to make camp where we won't be seen."

Kjell grunted, and taking that as approval, she consulted her GPS. They could hand-walk their snowmobiles over to a small cave and come in on foot. Without waiting, she started to do just that.

Cam fought to control her amusement at the men's grumblings. No doubt they easily steered their snowmobiles through the terrain. Only a light dusting of powder covered the hard packed snow and ice, so it definitely could have been worse. She reached the opening of the cave and saw that several large chunks of ice covered the entrance.

She paused and studied the boulders. There, along the edges, telltale signs of gloves marred the roundness of the ice chunks. Several scratch marks, like from a shovel, testified to the men packing the ice around the entrance of the cave. She frowned, hating the fact that the scarf and face masks kept her from smelling the air. The cool temperatures would keep the rankest odors away, though she still should be able to scent if they made any recent kills. The cave looked more like a place to cache carcasses than to camp. She reached for the top ball of ice.

"Someone put this here." Kjell moved in beside her and started on one of the larger chunks. "There's shovel and glove marks."

She ratcheted up her esteem for him a notch.

Trent worked on her other side, and even with the three of them, it took nearly twenty minutes to clear the opening of the cave. While they worked, she peered into the dark cave. Only the weak Arctic sun cast any illumination inside and she saw outcroppings of rock and ice. She

frowned, not seeing anything that would be worth holing up like this, and surely the topography of the ground prevented the cave from going back very far. Her stomach fell.

Trent moved the last ice chunk aside, leaving them with a clear path into the cave.

Pulling on her false bravado, she'd used it many times before when she'd taken various groups out hunting, she said, "Let's go ahead and put the snowmobiles inside. I want to approach the coordinates on foot."

She caught Trent and Kjell sharing a look, the kind that asked if they really wanted this woman giving them orders. Ignoring it, she pushed her snowmobile inside, pleased when the guys followed.

"Before we go, I need to know what's in this cave." She grabbed a flashlight from a pack on her snowmobile and flipped it on. Before the guys could reply, she followed the scuffs of boots in the snow. Occasionally the imprint of a sole, standard boots for hunting in this terrain was visible. About twenty five feet from the snowmobiles, she paused next to a pair of especially clear prints. She pointed to them, indicating the guys needed to be careful. "Watch this area."

Kjell nodded and remained silent. He reached above him, the cave barely tall enough for him to stand upright and ran his fingers over the ceiling. "It's too smooth."

She stood and found herself right beside him. Ignoring his bulk, she followed the trail of his fingers with the beam of her flashlight. "This isn't natural." She scanned the ceiling, noting the sharp edges made by some kind of tool. The light dipped down. Something flashed in the back of the cave, and she lifted the beam to find herself staring into the open, dead eye of a polar bear.

She wobbled.

Kjell's arm went around her, steadying her as he held her against him.

Taking deep breaths, Cam scanned the creature with the light. A gunshot wound through the chest and into the heart had felled the creature and with the exception of a few flecks of blood at the muzzle, the head would be pristine enough to mount. A huge paw, nearly eight inches across, lay sprawled toward them.

"Shit." Kjell's curse filled the air.

"Yeah," Trent agreed.

Regaining her bearings, Cam pulled free of Kjell's grip. She scrambled toward the back of the cave, determined to find out if more than one bear had been killed. The light beam bounced off the back wall, and she flicked it toward their snowmobiles and the entrance. Damn. She had to be losing it if she'd missed this. Determined to focus on their mission—forget the feel of Kjell's hard body pressed against hers—she dropped into a crouch next to the polar bear. She didn't need to touch it to know whoever did this was a pro. A single shot, not much blood, and the claws hadn't even been scuffed against rocks or ice. These guys were keeping this one as intact as possible. She rose and turned toward the cave's entrance.

"Let's find them." She hurried past the men and their snowmobiles.

Kjell and Trent followed in silence.

Cam glanced over her shoulder, shocked that none of the men offered their opinion. That they fell into following her command so easily shocked her. Sure, Vik had given her orders. He'd

given orders to the guys too. So long as those orders didn't intersect, she figured the guys would follow them. She hoped.

They inched out of the cave, choosing a path that occasionally bore the marks of boots from other travelers. The poachers, most likely, and she braced herself for the first sight of the men. There, on a ridge, something moved. Not bears. At this distance she wouldn't even be able to see them. A flash of color, at odds with the grey and white landscape around them, announced the poachers' presence.

Cam stilled. She motioned for the guys to wait with her. A plan, quickly hatched, formed in her mind. Taking a deep breath, she stepped off the path, crossing the distance between them and the poachers at an angle determined to get them noticed. She sensed the men holding back. She turned to Kjell. "You wanted to know what Vik told me. Come on and don't do anything that will get us killed." Flashing him a smile, she jogged toward the poachers.

Chapter Three

Cam's heart pounded as she approached the rustic camp. Someone had pitched a tarp with a couple of large poles to form some sort of windbreak. Two men, both dressed in gray snow suits, stood around a three legged stove. A small fire burned beneath it, and she wondered if they'd sleep in the cave. She kept her steps strong, her mind focused on her mission. These guys weren't the worst the gaming world had to offer, just probably the most mercurial. So long as Kjell followed her lead, they'd leave here alive.

From behind her, Kjell snagged her arm. "What are you doing?" he growled.

"My job. And if you want to keep us alive then I suggest you do exactly as I say." She yanked away, raising her hand to hail the poachers. "Hey," she called. "Didn't know you guys were out here?"

"Cranky Cam?" The bigger of the two men laughed, his booming mirth echoing across the frozen landscape. A safety orange stocking cap poked out from the hood of his snow suit. Wind chapped cheeks and a thick shock of white hair gave him a Santa Claus look. From working with him, Cam knew he was anything but a kindly old man.

"Gunner. Last time I heard you were somewhere in Greenland." She stepped into the offered hug, clapping him hard on the back. "What brings you here? This seems a bit off your regular path."

"Hey, look who's talking. Last time I heard, you were in Russia," Dane, Gunner's son, said. He was a thinner, younger version of his father, his hair still dark brown.

Cam shrugged, disguising the warning hand she gave Kjell. "Well, you know how it is. One minute they hate the EU and don't need anyone, the next they're enforcing laws. The ice got a bit thin there." She winked at Dane, knowing the younger man knew exactly what she meant. At one time, they'd done more than share information.

"Who's that?" Dane jerked the meat fork he held toward Kjell.

"My client. You know how it is, those rich businessmen want a look at a polar bear. Think they can bring them down." She kept her tone light. When she'd worked with Gunner and Dane before, they'd called those jobs "babysitting" and the two guys knew how much she hated them, especially since her gender made most of the businessmen think they could shoot better than she, even if they'd never held a gun.

Gunnar waved his arm and beckoned them closer to the pot. "Join us for a bit. We were about to go out again, but there's always time to get reacquainted with an old friend."

Cam paused, though not too long. Trent wasn't following them, and she wondered where Kjell had sent him off to and how he'd done it without her knowing. For all his bluster about her getting them killed, from where she stood it looked like he'd be the one to do it.

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The more Cam spoke with these guys, the more Kjell wondered who the hell she was and why Vik brought her to them. He recognized the older man from mug shots of poachers he'd seen at various times. To think that she knew those men...he hated himself for even being attracted to her.

And he'd sent Trent, in bear form, to scout out the poacher's camp. He kept a stony expression on his face, discretely scanning the rock outcropping behind them for any sign of his friend. He'd witnessed first-hand what a sniper could do to a polar bear. Watched someone he cared for drop, his fur red with blood. Kjell smelled the meat cooking in the pot and thought of the bear back in the cave. His stomach churned.

"Where you going?" Gunner asked Cam, his words pulling Kjell back to the conversation.

She gave a suitably vague answer, glanced at her watch and jerked her head in the opposite direction from where they'd come.

Dane paused beside her and rested his arm companionably on her shoulder. "You could always go with us. Be like the old days."

The old days? Who the hell was this woman? His bear roared deep inside, hating the poacher whose arm rested on her shoulders. He stood too close, his body language speaking of a too-familiar relationship. That she would sink so low as to fuck poachers?

"I can't. Contracts. Maybe later?" She flashed an inviting smile.

Damn it, Cam, get the hell away from him! "I'm not paying you to stand here and chit chat," he barked.

She pulled away, leveling a stare that would send a lesser man quaking in his snow boots. "Just getting the lay of the land. If you want to shoot your bear, you'll do as I say." She grinned, and he knew that she'd figured out that he preferred a different sort of game.

"There's some about ten kilometers from here. Ferocious beasts. Man killers. We're going after them," Dane said.

"Really? Might be kind of fun." She glanced at their supply boxes that looked like Russian military surplus. "On your own or for hire? Because if I can get more money..." She let the words dangle like a delicious temptation.

"Hire." Dane unzipped a pocket of his snow suit and pulled out a card. "You finish with your current client and give me a call, okay? I'll take care of you." He pressed the card into her hand, then curled her fingers around it and kissed her gloves.

Cam lowered her eyelids and peeked at him invitingly. "Thanks. I always did kind of like your company."

"Oh, you'll like this one."

"Dane!" Gunner barked.

"It's okay. We're heading back out. Nice to see you guys here. Maybe we'll hook up and work together again soon." She blew Dane a kiss, and ignoring Kjell's grumbling, sent him heading back across the ice field.

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They strode in silence back toward the cave, making sure to take a circuitous route to keep Dane and Gunner from figuring out where they'd hidden their snowmobiles. Trent's disappearance weighed on her, as did the fact that Kjell thought he could issue orders without telling her. She fought the urge to grumble under her breath. Her time in the Arctic taught her not to waste precious energy.

She scanned the horizon for any signs of Trent and saw none. Not that she figured she would see him, someone with as much experience as he would leave as little trace as possible. If he were to keep an eye on Gunner and Dane, he would have to stay close and she should be able to see him. That she didn't only pissed her off.

She paused. Next to the muted prints from her and Kjell were bear prints. Kneeling, she spanned her hand across the print, noticing that the paw had to belong to a male bear. With the carcass close by, she doubted a bear would pass so near. Plus, the smell of the poachers probably carried even farther than the dead bear. Gunner and Dane certainly weren't taking any pains to leave as little trace as possible. Their stew most likely consisted of food brought in. The guys never liked roughing it too much. She frowned.

"See this?" She motioned Kjell over, warning him to stay away from the print. "It's fresh. There's bear around here and there shouldn't be."

"This is northern Norway, sweetheart. There should be polar bears here."

She shook her head and bit her tongue. Kjell's glib response undercut the seriousness of her mission. "Not with the dead one and the camp not far from here. Things are lean, but the sea ice still holds. They should be far away from here eating fat seals, not investigating caves filled with their dead."

"Scavenging?"

Cam shook her head and wondered how stupid he thought she was. "Do you really think so? This time of year all the bears are out on the sea ice and there are only a few things they'll scavenge out there. Why would they come inland?" She snorted and straightened, still not happy that she couldn't see Trent. "Don't suppose there's something you want to tell me?"

"This is your mission remember." Kjell tightened his hood around his face. "If you've seen all you want to see—"

Cam paused for a moment. Vik's orders rang in her mind. She'd accomplished that, made contact with the poachers and thought she knew their direction. The distances matched up to the preliminary material Vik had sent her about the canisters and the Night Demons. She shivered, not wanting to think about such things. Poachers and polar bears she could deal with, but the strange apparitions that she'd received intelligence on scared her witless.

They reached the cave. She plowed through the snow they packed up around the entrance, prepared to chew Trent a new asshole for leaving them. She barreled into an empty cave. Whirling, she grabbed the front of Kjell's snowsuit.

"Where is he?" she barked.

"I sent him out to do some reconnaissance." Kjell glanced down at her hands. "Let go of me."

Reluctantly, she uncurled her fingers, aware that her actions probably weren't the most professional. Taking a deep breath, she stepped back. "We can't leave until he's here. From those prints, we have a male polar bear nearby. It may not be safe for him to come back on his own." She went to the snowmobiles. A quick check showed no trace of Trent or his gear.

"We've got to go back now. Trent can find his way back to the compound." Kjell said.

"You don't leave a man behind. Didn't you hear a word I said?" She sank to the seat of her snowmobile, jostling it against the wall of the cave. The dead bear in the back haunted her,

mocked her with past failings and the severity of the mission. "You're the one who jeopardized this mission. Not me." Outside the wind howled and thoughts of the Night Demons haunted her. "I'm going to have to tell Bjorn about this."

Kjell crossed the cave to kneel next to her. "Trent will be fine. We've got to head back before those men find us." He glanced at his watch and glanced toward the opening of the cave.

"You're worried about him, aren't you?" Cam curled her fingers around the grips on the snowmobile.

"No."

"You're lying. And we can't just leave the bear here. I suppose if you're not going to wait for him we should radio and tell Bjorn what happened" She unhooked her radio.

Kjell grabbed her wrist, keeping her from palming the power button. Pushing it back into place, he leaned forward. "No." He tore aside his mask, then hers, leaning back in again so his lips hovered millimeters from hers. He tilted his head, almost as if he listened to something outside, then closed the space between them and kissed her.

Cam stiffened, expecting the savageness that had occurred in her room earlier. Instead, his lips slid across hers, soft and persuasive. His tongue touched the seam of her mouth. Heat blossomed inside her. It sank low in her body, making her lean into him so that her breasts brushed against his chest. She opened her mouth to him. A tiny voice in the back of her mind told her this wasn't the place or time. She ignored it, reaching up to twine a gloved hand around the back of his neck.

She had arrived here with the intention of following orders, nothing more. A way to make up for the mistakes of the past and build a future, hopefully within the European Forces, EUFOR. The man kissing her reminded her of the distance between them, the fact that when it came to the line between right and wrong, technically they were on opposite sides.

The danger sparked her interest. Both of them held secrets, of that she had no doubts. Opening her mouth beneath his, she invited him deeper. The outer shell of their snowsuits rubbed together, forming a zipping noise in the silent cavern. Thoughts of unzipping him, of finding him hard and waiting beneath the layers of warming fabric sent a flood of moisture to her pussy. She grabbed his shoulders and hauled him against her.

Kjell stiffened. He pulled back, his eyes glazed with passion. His ragged breaths echoed around her, sounding like the harsh breathing of a male polar bear on the hunt. Involuntarily, she curled away from him.

"We've got to go," Kjell said. He straightened up and turned toward his snowmobile.

With his back to her, Cam fought to regain some composure. Never mind that she knew he had a hard, muscled ass beneath the bulky layers or that for some crazy reason, her libido had reawakened for this bear of a man. The dead in the back of the cave haunted her and her stomach twisted. "What about the bear?"

He stopped and turned toward the back of the cave. "We'll leave it."

"We can't. If nothing else, it should be properly disposed of, sent to native people or something. I can't just leave it here for those men."

"At least you have some sense of decency," Kjell snarled. He straddled his snowmobile.

"Of course I do." She shook her head, attributing his surliness to not knowing about Trent and the kiss. Some kind of macho cover-up, she figured, not really interested in getting into a fight with him.

"We'll send someone back for it."

Cam shook her head. "No. Gunner and Dane are going to head out soon and they'll take the bear with them. Probably sell it to trophy hunters." She grimaced. "There were always people looking to buy a paw or something to 'prove' that they'd been out hunting polar bears when they couldn't kill one. I'm not leaving this one to that fate."

"And the others?" Kjell shook his head and turned away.

"We don't have time for this. Trent's out there somewhere. We need to find him and we have to get back to the compound. How long do you think we have until Gunner and Dane figure out that we didn't go the direction we said we would?" She arched an eyebrow at him. "An hour. Maybe two? Probably just enough time to get back to the compound and under lock and key." The business card Dane had given her sat in her pocket, weighing on her conscience far more than a slip of paper should.

"Sorry I'm late." Trent poked his head into the cave. "Wanted to avoid being seen." He headed for his snowmobile.

Cam opened her mouth and then shut it again. Standing here blasting the men for going behind her back would do nothing except blow their cover and that was something they couldn't afford right now. "Glad you're back. Let's go!" She barked the orders as efficiently as any drill sergeant. She grabbed the handlebars and pushed her snowmobile toward the entrance.

The guys followed her, and she noticed that Kjell had carefully set up a travois from their shelter poles and canvas to carry the dead polar bear. As soon as they covered the entrance to the snow cave, Kjell fired up his snowmobile and headed back.

Cam followed, feeling almost like a pallbearer as she rode a little behind Kjell, on his five o'clock. Trent was on his left, closer to the eight o'clock position, the three of them making a sight as they headed for the compound. She let him lead. He needed it after Vik not telling him about her mission, or her background. Shit. She'd have to do it herself. He needed, no the entire team needed, to know. She focused on the trail before her, not wanting to even think about going that far. Not yet anyway.

She called herself a million kinds of selfish as they crossed the white Arctic landscape. On the horizon, the compound loomed, an imposing gunmetal gray building made of the best materials man and the military could make. A huge fence, topped with razor wire, surrounded it, and some kind of crazy ski vehicle sat outside one of the sheds.

The space-age looking transport intrigued her. Built on large skis with a propeller in the back, she bet it held one, or maybe two people at the most, and not a lot of gear. She thought, somewhere, she'd read a news story about a concept car being developed for an exploring mission—

Eerie howls cut off her train of thought.

"Hit it!" Kjell's voice broke over the speaker, breaking their silence. He thumbed the throttle on the snowmobile, hurrying toward the compound. Trent followed.

Movement caught the edges of Cam's vision. She turned her head to look and nearly blanched. The snowmobile skid, sliding sideways, and she struggled to bring the vehicle under control. By the time she sped through the open gate, and followed Bjorn's hurrying motions to drive right into the vehicle storage shed, she swore it'd only been an apparition, some kind of trick of wind and sun against the snow.

She dismounted and tugged off her helmet. "What the hell were those things?" She whirled to find the guys staring at her.

"Get inside," Kjell replied. "I'll be along in a moment. We need to talk."

She grumbled under her breath, but knew better than to disobey the order this time. Civilian or not, she deserved answers. Bjorn and Trent spoke by the polar bear, most likely about what to do with it. Wanting to be in on the conversation and knowing she wouldn't be chafed. She headed to the door and inside. Surely, she'd have her say soon enough.

Once inside the compound, Cam went only as far as the common room. She'd kicked off her boots and left her snowsuit by the back door. Though she needed to go to her room and remove at least one, if not two, of her outer layers, she remained there, tugging at the collar of her too-hot wool sweater. She glanced at the clock. Ten minutes.

"Damn it," she muttered, yanking the sweater over her head. She dropped it by her feet.

"I think it's against regs to strip," Kjell said.

Cam looked up to find him leaning in the doorframe, his arms crossed over his chest.

"It's probably against regs to go against orders too, but that's exactly what you did." Cam rose from the couch to cross the space between them. "I had strict instructions to make contact with the poachers and you were supposed to back me up. Instead, you sent Trent off to do who knows what, and you nearly ruined my cover." She refused to think about those Night Demons. Nothing in her experience prepared her for those things, and if she had to fight them *and* poachers, she clenched her fists to hone her anger.

"And you nearly endangered the mission! Look, I don't know what kind of game you and Vik are playing. I know what he told you, and I know what Bjorn and I need to do. Those things you saw out there, well Sigrid's been working day and night to find out more about them. We've tracked them down to the PCB contamination that's being tossed out there by greedy corporations. Now these fucking poachers come and are shooting at the polar bears. You saw what we brought back. And you think that whatever scheme you and Vik came up with will beat this?" He stepped forward, getting in her face like a drill sergeant. "You are a civilian. You'll do what we say."

Cam breathed deeply, filling her nostrils with Kjell's musky scent. Immediately her nipples tightened. Damn him for being sexy even when he was mad as hell at her. "This is bullshit," she snapped, stepping forward to place them millimeters apart. "Yeah, Vik and I didn't tell you about our plans, because frankly, if you knew who I was, Bjorn wouldn't have allowed me within a thousand kilometers of this place. But you guys didn't tell me anything either. You sent Trent off without telling me, and I had no idea if, or when, he'd show up again." She stepped back and took another calming breath. Screaming at each other wouldn't do anything except piss both of them off. "Look, I'm sorry. I should have told you, but there are things..." Her words trailed off, suddenly too intimate for the circumstances.

She blinked, startled by her sudden vulnerability. Swallowing hard, she managed to snag Kjell's icy blue gaze again and found he'd softened. He'd stepped back, his arms no longer crossed over his chest.

"Next time you need to tell me what you're planning. How can I keep you safe if you don't let me know these things?"

His sudden change in demeanor startled her. "Keep me safe?" She battled a grin thinking that so long as she had a rifle and a clear shot, no one needed to protect her from anything. Except maybe the Night Demons. She wrapped her arms around herself. "I don't suppose those things respond to bullets."

"The poachers probably. Not the Night Demons." Kjell raked his fingers through his hair, making the short strands stick straight up in the air. "Shit. We probably screwed up, didn't we? Vik recommends you, so we treat you like military. Yet, you're a civvie so we try to wrap you in wool. I need to talk to Bjorn after the debriefing. We'll bring you up to speed."

"Thanks." Not quite ready to sit yet, she went to the large window and stared out, before turning back to Kjell. "Go debrief. I'll be here when you get back." His sudden change in heart startled her. Man, he could go from drill sergeant to something approximating human in thirty seconds flat. She turned away and battled a grin. Even in her face and making her furious, she wanted him.

Cam flattened her palm on the thermal glass and stared into the cold, unforgiving landscape. The common room overlooked the back of the compound, the fence a black line against a white world. Meager sunlight glinted from the top strands of wire.

Something moved on the horizon.

Cam squinted at the dark shape, her heart pounding in her chest. It formed, like a human figure, except empty sockets where there might have been eyes and a gaping maw for a mouth. Goosebumps rose on her skin. She curled her left hand into the window still.

The creature stopped, poised between the window and the fence. How it'd gotten in the compound, she had no idea. It opened its mouth then extended its hand toward her. The long claws curled back, fingers crooked as if it wanted her to come out to it.

Not on her life. Going against some of the largest predators on the planet meant she had good survival instincts and right now hers screamed at her not to go anywhere near that thing. "Kjell?" Her voice rang in the empty room.

Surely the guys saw this on surveillance tape. Frantically she searched the room for some kind of intercom or communications panel. She found it and lunged towards it. When she turned back to the window, the Night Demon was gone.

Cam shook. Her teeth chattered. She sank onto the couch, her breath coming in painful gasps. Sharp teeth and fangs failed to worry her. Creatures that had the power to rend her limb from limb didn't bother her, so long as she could look up information and research on them. Those things defied all explanation. She sat back down again with a shake of her head. That thing had appeared and was gone. After what they'd seen coming back, no doubt the guys would call it a hallucination or something. She'd ask Kjell when he got back. And until then, she'd tried not to think about some creature out of legend that apparently wanted her to come to them.

Chapter Four

Apparently she hadn't been needed in the debriefing, because no one came for her. Hungry, she went to the mess and found Sigrid there getting a sandwich. She tried to be friendly, but Cam wasn't interested in much more than the wheel of her own thoughts. As she ate in silence, Cam realized she'd probably passed up an excellent opportunity to learn more about Night Demons, but she and Kjell's conversation earlier in the day haunted her.

Taking a deep breath, she stared out the window and tried to figure out how to tell Kjell that she had been like Gunner and Dane. Hell, when history was written and her file processed, she had been Gunner and Dane. She'd fucked Dane. Only once, and she'd regretted it the instant it had finished, which thankfully hadn't taken very long, but still, she'd fucked him. Maybe Kjell didn't need to know that part.

"Cam." His soft voice filled the room.

She turned, thankful to have something other than the bleak landscape to capture her attention. The Night Demons hadn't returned, and now, she wondered if she'd even seen it at all. Her stomach fell. "Debriefing went well?"

"Bjorn and I talked to Vik. He told us a little more than what he did before. The rest, he said, we had to get from you." Kjell sat down in a large chair and stretched out his legs. "So what didn't Vik tell us?"

Cam laughed. She pressed her lips together, trying to keep her sarcastic mirth from bubbling forth and failed. She went to the couch and sat down, shaking her head to clear it. "A lot," she admitted, not quite sure how to censor the truth. She sighed and gave him a long, hard look.

Kjell glanced at his watch. "Dinner is in a couple of hours. Think you can tell your story by then?" His easy words diffused her worry. Vik knew the truth. He wouldn't have sent her here if these guys would do anything because of her history.

"I can try. Vik probably told you I'm a sharpshooter. I've done work with several Hunting Tourism companies." She spoke slowly, carefully picking her way around the issue that she figured would set Kjell off and make her an anathema to this team. "For the last few years, I've worked out of Russia."

"They don't have very strict rules there." Kjell frowned.

"No, they don't." She agreed with him. "A person like me can make very good money if I choose to lead men out into the wild. That's where I met up with Gunner and Dane. We worked for the same company, the one that they still work for."

She fed Kjell a bit of information she bet they didn't already have. She reached into her pocket and passed the business card to him, another gesture that she hoped proved she remained on their side. "This is the company. I'm sure if you guys run a trace, especially if you have Vik use his contacts, you'll come up with some pretty interesting facts."

Kjell glanced at the card. His eyes narrowed, a look of disgust crossing his face. When he sought out her gaze again, his blue eyes burned dark with hatred. "You know this company? You worked for them?" He barked out the words.

"In a roundabout way." She tucked a strand of hair behind her ears. Every instinct screamed at her to run. She didn't. Instead, she leaned back against the couch and tucked her feet beneath her. A protective posture, one she was sure wasn't missed on Kjell.

"So, how do you know Vik? I'd think that this company and EUFOR would be completely at odds with one another." Kjell crossed his leg and settled back as if readying himself for a good story.

"That's where the roundabout part comes in." Cam smiled. "I'm not exactly a civilian. If Vik didn't tell you, I didn't see a need to tell you either. I'm ex-military. I did sniper work in Kosovo and saw horrors you probably can't even imagine. After that, I went other places. Horrible places, and frankly, by that time I wanted out. Vik got me out. Sent me undercover on special projects and what I did in between times was my own business so long as it wasn't illegal and no one got caught. I did some work for that company, partly for Vik, partly on my own." She paused to gauge Kjell's response.

He smiled. "You're right, Vik didn't tell us. I won't ask about the work you did. I know it's probably classified, and I frankly don't want to know about what wasn't. Bjorn and I know about this company. I'll give this information to him. The fact that they hired those poachers doesn't bode well for what we're facing. Is there anything else you want to tell me?"

I saw a Night Demon and it seemed to want me to come with it. She shook her head. "As long as you know that I'm not incompetent out there. I'm a military trained sniper. I'm good at my job." Something shifted between them. Cam speculated her admission put them on closer footing, more treacherous when it came to romantic entanglements.

"I'll take that as a no. You're not in the military officially now, so you're still a civilian." Kjell rose to his feet. "I'll get this information to Bjorn and we'll probably have a chat with Vik once it's a decent hour to call him. Why don't you go rest for the night? I'm sure we'll have questions in the morning."

"I'm sure you will." She remained seated and watched Kjell leave. At least he hadn't sent her away, because if he did that, she would have no idea what the Night Demon wanted with her.

~* * *~

Rest refused to come. After going back to her quarters and grabbing her workout gear, she headed to the gym. An hour of pounding on the heavy bag left her sore, but no closer to finding any answers. A long shower cleansed the body, but not the mind. She pulled on a loose flannel pajama set and thick socks. She wished for the pair of cartoon slippers she had in a box somewhere. Though the military guys might frown on their frivolity, they certainly kept her feet warm.

She returned to the lounge room, surprised to find it empty. Apparently the guys were elsewhere, maybe even retired to their quarters. The large dark window called to her. A mental image of the Night Demon—she wished she knew more about them—filled her mind. A sliver of a moon cast little light onto the packed snow ground. A shape, too far away to be clear, moved on the horizon. Discreet lights illuminated the perimeter of the building, just enough for security and not to interfere with the wildlife.

Kjell hadn't shunned her. Sure, she hadn't seen the guys, but this wasn't the first night that had happened. He hadn't kicked her out. There hadn't been any confrontations with Bjorn, or Vik for that matter. She pulled a chair over to the window and sat down.

The Night Demons. She held out her hand and tightened it into a fist. Relaxing her fingers, she formed the grip she used on her favorite rifle. Just a twitch, not even a full squeeze, activated the trigger and sent a bullet into her target. Lightning fast reflexes and an accuracy that surprised even her military superiors. She stared at her hand and rested it in her lap.

Movement flickered beyond the window. Cam leaned forward, elbows braced on the low table in front of the window to stare into the darkness. Tall figures formed, seeming to appear out of vapor and air. Their strung out figures appeared more like a caricature of a child's nightmare than any sort of haunting demon. Empty sockets let the pale moonlight shine through where eyes would be, and when they opened their mouths, she saw only pointed teeth and nothing.

Cam shivered. "Why are you here? Why do you show yourselves to me?" Her warm breath formed small foggy circles on the window glass.

One of the demons raised its hand. Its mouth opened, and Cam swore she heard an inhuman wail. She stared, the communications unit on the other side of the room forgotten.

A polar bear appeared around the corner of the building inside the wire fence.

Cam's stomach sunk. No. Not here. She closed her eyes and breathed deeply. Too many memories long buried rushed back to the surface. She wheeled away from the window, her panting breaths echoing in the room. When she turned back, the demons, and the bear, were gone.

Cam drew a deep breath. She stood and braced her hands on the table. She turned toward the door, wondering if Sigrid would be in her lab. The digital clock on the communications panel showed eighteen hundred hours. Cam stepped into the hall and headed for the lab.

She found the door closed, the room dark, when she came to the end of the hall. Lights shone from the gym as she passed, the clank of weights and clamor of the satellite radio playing a popular heavy metal Norwegian rock band whose music she liked. She paused for a moment, bobbing her head in time to the beat, wondering if maybe she shouldn't head into the gym. Maybe she could get information out of the guys while they all pumped iron together.

Cam grinned. If she found Kjell, maybe they could pump something else. Heat flushed her body, centering low in her sex. Her breath caught, her hard nipples brushing against the flannel of her pajama shirt. She hurried past the door and back to the lounge to find it remained empty. Searching out Sigrid probably would be fruitless. If she wasn't in her lab, then she was with Bjorn, and Cam didn't want to disturb the couple. Having been in the military, she knew how precious downtime was.

In her head, she calculated the time. It'd be a good hour to call Vik. No. Her once commanding officer didn't need to know about the Night Demons, especially since all the talk she heard was how Sigrid tried to figure out what they were and how to get rid of them. Maybe they didn't need to go. Like large predators in the wild, perhaps they served a purpose. Cam sighed and rested her head in her hands. Restlessness poured through her. Fight. Fuck. Either one of those options held merit.

"Thought I'd find you here." Kjell pulled out one of the chairs sitting around the table and sat down. "You ought to come to the gym. The guys are sparring and I think Trent is about to get his ass kicked." He grinned and rubbed his jaw.

Cam leaned forward and brushed her fingers across the bruise darkening his chin. "Who gave you that?" Her fingers lingered.

Kjell reached up and covered her hand with his own. "Bjorn. I was distracted."

Awareness leapt between them. "By what?" She pulled back and Kjell's fingers held her hand to his face. Her thumb rested just below his lower lip.

Kjell circled her wrist with his fingers and lifted her hand to his mouth. He kissed the tips of her fingers. "What do you think?" Sensual promise danced in his blue eyes.

She licked her lips, unable to pull away. The banked heat flared to life, moisture flooding her pussy. Perhaps this time, she'd finally find release at something other than her own fingers and imagination. "You know I'm a very dangerous woman."

"Oh, I know." Kjell leaned closer. "But somehow, I can't stay away." He closed the space between them and kissed her. The gentle kiss quickly turned into something more.

~* * *~

The instant his lips touched hers, Kjell forgot all about her past, what he knew, and even the fact that she'd come too damn close to discovering their shape shifting ability. She opened to him, curling her fingers into his biceps and flattening her breasts against his chest. He wore entirely too damn many layers. His loose sweatpants accommodated his growing erection. The military t-shirt clung to him, still damp with his sweat.

Kjell dipped his tongue into her mouth. She tasted like honey. The bruise on his jaw ached with a dull throb. Once, twice, he tasted her, before delving inside to thoroughly possess her. He curled his left hand into the bottom of her pajama top, rubbing the flannel between his fingers. The fabric tormented him, made him want to find out if her skin would be softer. He tugged it up, revealing a strip of skin at her waist.

Cam moaned softly. She reached up and brushed her fingers across his bruised jaw. He didn't even notice the pain, not when she laced her fingers through his hair to draw his lips tighter to hers. With her tongue, she stroked the length of his, and then sucked it deeper into his mouth.

His cock twitched. Damn, he wanted her. No pretenses. Nothing fancy. Just skin against skin and his cock buried deep inside her pussy. His other hand on her waist made it easy for him to pull her across the space between them and draw her to his lap. He palmed her ass. The rounded globe of her buttocks teased him with her softness. Beneath that feminine exterior lay a core of solid steel. He wanted that, wanted to watch such a strong woman come undone at the touch of his fingers against her clit or delving deep into her slick channel. To know that she surrendered to him, to the raw desire that sparked between them made his bear stand up and roar.

They parted long enough to draw shaky breaths, and then his lips were on hers once more. He drank from her. Losing himself in her sweet warmth, he ignored his bear's pressure to mate. For humans, such things came with a bit more finesse, and his inner beast didn't understand why a nip and a rub might not be all that was required for her acquiescence. As his tongue stroked the length of hers and she made little mewling noises in the back of her throat, he knew sex with her would be more than a mounting. He'd take her, slowly, carefully, and oh so thoroughly. He had no doubts that would be happening soon.

His fingers touched her bare skin and found it as silken smooth as he'd dreamed. Warmth seeped from her into his fingers, and he inched them upward to find the rounded globe of one breast. He caressed the bottom swell, just sliding his fingers across her flesh and back again. He found the waistband of her pajama bottoms and slipped his fingers beneath. The elastic waist of her cotton panties met his seeking touch, and he delved beneath them too.

Cam pulled her lips away long enough to gasp and moan his name. "Kjell."

The single word shot fire through his body and wrapped around his cock with the strength of her small fist stroking him. She fisted her hands in his shirt, tugging it upward, even as he found the buttons on her shirt and began unfastening them. Somehow, he found the strength not to rush, not to rip the clothes off her body as one by one, the fasteners slipped free.

He maneuvered the chair just enough to pin her between his body and the edge of the table. Kjell gave a moment's thought, thinking that perhaps there might be somewhere more private, more comfortable they could continue this. Except the demands of his body kept him from moving anywhere but closer to her. He slid open her shirt, revealing her high, firm breasts with their peaked nipples. His mouth went dry.

"Do you like?" Cam released him long enough to cup her breasts and offer them to him.

He nodded, his throat working. Damn if he'd forgotten how to speak. "Yeah," he finally managed to croak. "A lot."

With both hands, he reached for her, gently flicking his fingers across her nipples before palming her flesh. He plumped them with his hands, leaning forward to press his face into the mounded flesh. He turned his head to mouth her skin.

All thoughts turned to her pleasure. He worked his way back over her collarbone, pausing to lave the hollow there before nibbling on her chin. He paid special attention to the left side, where he had his fading bruise, before reaching her mouth once more. "I like all of you," he whispered a moment before he kissed her.

Distantly, Kjell registered sounds down the hall: the thump of booted feet, the boasting of the guys as they came from the gym. Before they reached the lounge, they disappeared into their rooms, promising a bit more privacy. He grinned against her lips. Above him, the HVAC system whirled, the warm air nothing compared to the fire sparking between them. His bear roared. His bear paced. And demanded that he do the very thing he'd wanted to since meeting Cam—fuck her.

He sucked on her lower lip. She writhed against him, making him wonder if he slid his hand down, if he'd find her wet and waiting for him. He dipped his thumb beneath the waistband of her pants. He inched his fingers further and encountered her neatly trimmed bush.

She gasped. Her head tilted back, lips parted she appeared like some kind of arctic goddess come to give him sexual pleasure. Her hips moved against his, each thrust encountering the hard ridge of his cock. She ground onto it, trapping his fingers between them.

"Cam," he moaned when her movements slid his fingers lower. Just the tip found her slick and ready.

"Please," she whimpered.

He grinned and nipped her shoulder. "Of course." He pulled his fingers back, regretting the loss of contact. Gripping her hips, he lifted her onto the edge of the table and stood between her parted thighs. He grabbed the waistband of her pants and shoved them down over her hips. Lifting her, using his bear's strength, he pulled them down revealing light blue, cotton panties.

Kjell claimed her lips in a hard, hungry kiss. He plunged his tongue into her mouth, then lower, to push aside her open shirt to nip the slope of one breast. Deep inside, his bear took over,

growling his need to find release. Kjell moved lower. He dropped to one knee, his face level with her pussy. Leaning forward, he smelled her musk, and he kissed her through the thin material.

Cam grabbed his hair and tugged. Her whimpers drove him on, made him slip a finger beneath her elastic to test her readiness. Her creamy sex enveloped him with heat and he bit his lip. The weeks since his last liaison wore on him, and how the twins or Trent could stand it, he'd never know. He brushed his finger against her engorged clit.

Cam bucked her hips. "Oh God." She shuddered.

Kjell grinned. If she thought he was a god...he drew his tongue along the edge of her panties.

A throat cleared behind them.

Cam gasped. Material swished across his face as she yanked her shirt across her bare breasts.

"Kjell," she said, the warning in her voice finally penetrating his foggy brain.

Bjorn's masculine chuckle echoed in the room. "Payback is a bitch, Kjell. Might as well stand up and give the lady a little privacy."

He cursed, a low pithy mix of Norwegian and English. He stood, aware his cock stood out like a tent pole in his sweats and the bruise on his jaw barely throbbed. Two things the bear metabolism was good for: fucking and fighting.

He turned to find Bjorn looking in his direction with a self-satisfied smile on his face.

"Bastard," Kjell growled. He remembered a night not too long ago when he'd walked in on his commanding officer doing the exact same thing to Sigrid. Bjorn was right. Paybacks were a bitch. He stood directly in front of Cam, painfully aware she readjusted her clothing behind him.

Moments later, she stood beside him, her pajamas buttoned, her pants pulled up, and her hair hastily brushed away from his face. "Bjorn." She greeted him with a curt nod.

Kjell glanced at her and saw the barest hint of a blush across her cheeks. So his little fighter had a softer side. He filed the knowledge away for later. "What can I do for you, sir?" He barked his question in a futile attempt to put some military discipline between them.

"Wanted to make sure you were all right. That was a nasty clip to the jaw." Bjorn lied. Kjell scented it in his words and bearing. His eyes told a different story.

"I'm fine, sir. Thank you. Anything else?" He arched his eyebrow. Vik had given them clearance. Whatever Bjorn had to say could be spoken in front of her, too.

"I wanted to go over some surveillance footage with you if you have time." He eyed Cam. "If you're busy—"

Kjell strode forward. "I'd be happy to." He didn't look back at Cam, didn't want to see the yearning in her blue eyes. He paused.

"It's okay. I'm going to head to bed and try to finish a book I brought with me." She hurried to the door, casting him a glare that said "*alone*" before darting into the hall.

Bjorn waited until she was out of earshot. "Something I need to know about?"

Kjell shook his head. "Not yet, sir."

"Good. Because the tension between the two of you is so thick you could cut it with a knife. Sigrid is convinced the girl is half in love with you, even if she won't admit it to herself. Though

the women have had little time to talk, I'd like to change that. There's been Night Demon sightings, and I think Cam's run can help us find signs of them." Bjorn turned and headed for his office.

Kjell stiffened at the notion that Cam might willingly put herself into danger. "I thought her runs were terminated."

"Try telling her that. No, I want them to continue so long as there aren't any other dangers out there that we need to know about. Besides, I think we can use her." Bjorn opened the door to his office and ushered Kjell through.

Kjell frowned and waited just inside for Bjorn to close the door. "Use her how?" Now that he knew Cam, maybe not completely, but better, the thought of her being poacher bait rankled. Whatever kind of game Vik was playing, he could stuff it. So could Bjorn when push came to shove. Trying to track down the dumping company was bad enough, going after poachers even worse.

"I want you to watch this." Bjorn punched in a few commands on his pc and surveillance video looking at the lounge window came into view. "Watch."

Kjell recognized Cam's slender form in the window, looking out. Something materialized in the snow in front of the window. Kjell's stomach sank. He recognized that too, a Night Demon. It opened its great maw, sending a chill snaking down Kjell's spine. And when it held its hand out to Cam, his blood ran cold.

"What?" He whirled to face Bjorn.

His commanding officer shook his head. "We don't know."

Those three words chilled him more than the Arctic wind. They didn't know.

Chapter Five

Cam sat in one of the chairs in front of Bjorn's desk, Kjell in the other. With her booted feet flat on the floor, and her palms resting on her thighs, she maintained as much military discipline as the guys. Bjorn sat behind his desk, scrolling through images on his computer.

"Our surveillance videos show none of the signs that you reported to us from your run. I wanted you to go over everything you saw again." Bjorn tapped a few more keys on the keyboard, then turned his attention to the two of them.

Cam frown, then quickly smoothed out her expression. Whether in the military or not, she learned it paid to keep her emotions under wraps. Of course, she'd seen the signs. She tracked for a living.

"My run started out normally this morning. I headed west over the trail that I broke a few days ago. Everything looked normal. Once I got just within visual range of the compound, I noticed the blue nylon threads. Rope marks led from the site perpendicular to my track. From the impressions, I believe there were three men, all large. They appeared to be dragging something." She paused and suppressed the roll in her stomach. "A travois with something heavy on it, and what looks like a claw mark following behind." She expelled a harsh breath.

"A bear," Kjell prompted.

"Yes. A bear." The words hung in the air brutal with their finality. Polar bears clung so tenaciously to life that the brutal slaughter happening just under their noses rankled. "If I had to guess I'd say it was Gunner, Dane, and a third man. Maybe their client."

Bjorn jotted down notes, and then typed something into the computer. "That gels with the information we've been given on them, though it seemed that they had maybe been hired by the firm on the card you gave us. Vik ran the company name. It traces back to the same source as the PCB containers. There's one other explanation. They may have been dragging some of those canisters out instead of a bear."

"And the claw mark? I don't think it was the edge of something metal or even manmade." Cam perched on the edge of her chair.

"A Night Demon perhaps."

Kjell frowned. "Following the sled? Like a dog or something?" He shook his head. "I don't see those creatures doing something like that."

"What do you know about them?" Turning the conversation away from her findings, and the possibility of another dead polar bear, relieved her. She inched forward on her chair. Memories of her encounter last night haunted her, the ghostly hand reaching toward her, the gaping maw of the creature's mouth.

"Not much. Sigrid has been working on a way to try and harm them in battle. She's made some progress, but we haven't had a chance to test it yet." Bjorn tapped a pen against a yellow legal pad. "I think there's nothing to do but go out and see what we can find for ourselves. Kjell, you up for a little excursion?" The way Bjorn voiced the question made it sound like a pleasure cruise. Cam bet it would be anything but.

"Yes, sir. Want me to alert the others? I think we might need a full team for this. Poachers and Night Demons. Hell, we thought Vik stationed us on a pretty boring expanse of snow." Kjell gave a toothy grin.

"That would be good. Let's take out the full team. Cam, I want you to stay here with Sigrid. I don't anticipate any problems, but knowing someone good with a gun is with her will ease my mind." He rose to his feet. "Any questions?"

"No, sir." Kjell stood and headed for the door.

"No. Thank you." Bjorn's complimenting her firearms skills took the sting out of being left behind. Not that she doubted the men, surely they knew how to track as well as she did. In reality, she should be the one out there with them. She followed Kjell out of the office with Bjorn close behind. When they got to the hallway, she went to her room to put together a small cache of weapons. Wouldn't hurt to have one or two secreted on her, and then she figured she'd stay in the lab with Sigrid.

Ten minutes later, she stepped into Sigrid's laboratory. If the office belonged to Bjorn, then this room had become the scientist's realm. Two computer screens flickered with data. A large fridge held what looked like cores, and several large whiteboards were filled with more mathematical calculations than Cam had ever seen in her life.

Sigrid stood over a table, staring into a microscope. Her long honey-colored hair hung in a pony tail down her back. Her white lab coat appeared spotless, as did the jeans and sneakers visible beneath the thigh-length hem. A large pink headband held her hair away from her face and she hummed something under her breath. Though built no less slight than she, Cam suddenly felt a need to protect her, with her life, if necessary. She pulled out a chair around a black-topped table between the lab area and the door. "Mind if I stay here?"

Sigrid glanced over her shoulder. "Not at all. Bjorn send you here to watch me?" She smiled.

"Not really," Cam hedged.

Sigrid shifted, the coat pulling tight across her right hip. The outline of a pistol pressed against the fabric. So the scientist wasn't without her own protection after all. Cam liked the woman already. Sigrid pulled a slide from beneath the microscope. "But you're here. That's okay." She moved efficiently around the lab, putting things away, pulling out other samples to place on a slide beneath the microscope.

"Can I ask what you're doing? And can I help?" Sitting around and doing nothing grated on Cam's nerves.

"I'm comparing core samples from where the Night Demons attacked. We've found higher PCB contamination at those sites. Now we think that someone might be feeding them, for lack of a better term."

Cam leaned forward. "Feeding them? What and why?" She shook her head. "This is all strange to me. I confess that Vik just brought me here to shoot stuff. Gunner and Dane gave me a card, and I probably should have shot them. Not that I'm saying my mission is complete, but we're a lot closer than we were." She paused. "What do you know about the Night Demons?"

Sigrid carried a tray of slides back to a large glass-fronted fridge and slid them on the second shelf. She jotted a note down on a sign with a blue erasable marker, and then closed the door with

her hip. Shrugging out of her lab coat, she took a seat across the table from Cam. "Not as much as I would like. They seem to be some kind of perversion of Windigos."

"Like out of fairy tales? Spirits of the snow that kill people and all of that?" Cam wrinkled her brow. The one she'd seen gave no indication of violence. Then again, it had opened its mouth with wicked looking teeth. The meaning of it holding out its hand to her didn't seem to have bad intentions. In her line of work, good instincts meant the difference between life and death.

"Yeah. These are different though. And the when and whys of their attacks seem different too. We've seen some outside the compound, though none since your arrival. We do know the PCB contamination makes them stronger. They thrive on it. And where there's illegal dumping, they tend to congregate." Sigrid paused. "I've been working on a hypothesis, and I know if I told Bjorn he'd think I was crazy. I think they're some kind of new species that we've never encountered before. Something driven out of their solitude life by the fact humans are now living and working above the Arctic Circle in greater numbers than ever before."

"Really?" The intelligence sparkling in Sigrid's eyes underscored the possible truth of the words. Cam doubted the woman, like herself, refused to believe in things she couldn't prove. From what she'd seen, stranger things were possible. "Like ghosts or something more substantial."

"I'm leaning towards something more substantial. Other entities, as it were." Sigrid sputtered. "But that's so far out of the realm of my knowledge that it's probably better left for some crazy paranormal television show." She laughed at her own folly.

Cam glanced at the large clock on the wall. Not even an hour had passed.

"It's hell waiting for them to get back. At least I'm not alone anymore though." Sigrid grinned.

"They would leave you alone?" Cam gasped. "I mean I'm sure you would have been all right," she hastily added with a nod toward the gun Sigrid wore.

"It's okay. It took a lot of target practice and convincing Bjorn I can run the control room just as well as he could to get him to this point. The guys can take care of themselves. If they're tracking something, they might be out for hours."

Cam wished she'd seen the gear the men had taken with them. Perhaps she could have advised them, let them know what worked best for her. "I'm a tracker. That's what I do. I should have gone with them."

Sigrid pushed back her chair. "Get used to it. You're a woman. These guys will protect you with their lives. The best we can do is not worry about them." She went to the fridge and returned with two bottles of water. She passed one across the table.

"I saw a Night Demon," Cam said. Her gut told her she could trust Sigrid.

"Really?" Sigrid leaned forward and propped her elbows on the table. "Where? When?" She jumped up. "Wait a minute. Let me get my log. We've been trying to track sightings."

"Just the other night, just outside the lounge window. It looked like it materialized, or whatever these things do, inside the compound perimeter. The first one stared at me, if you can call it that. Its mouth opened, and it stretched its hand toward me. After a moment, it, and its companion, disappeared." She shrugged and tried to act nonchalant about the whole encounter.

"Really?" Sigrid scribbled furiously in a notebook. "How long do you think the sighting lasted?"

“Maybe a few minutes.” Thinking about it logically helped Cam to focus. “It didn’t last that long.”

“And nothing else happened? The creature just held out its hand to you and opened its mouth. I wonder what it wanted.” She tapped the pen against her mouth. “This is most interesting. Until now, all our sightings have either been disinterested in us or violent. This is the first non-aggressive interaction we’ve had with them.” She shook her head and glanced up at the clock. “I suppose if we call Vik he’ll be in the middle of something. He wanted me to keep him apprised of any new Night Demon information.”

“No. Don’t tell him.” Cam reached across the table and flattened her palm on the edge of the notebook. “Please,” she added. “I’m not sure what this means. I’ll admit, I was hoping you could provide some answers. But I don’t think we should tell him, not until we know more.” Somehow, the idea of the information going beyond the walls scared her. Like it would change everything, and until she could figure out what it meant. She pressed her lips together.

Sigrid sighed. “Okay. I won’t. But if anything happens, anything at all, I want to know. Deal?”

Cam offered her hand to shake. “Deal.”

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Six cold, grueling hours had passed with no signs other than the ones Cam had told them. Even in their bear forms, the guys found nothing. *In this form I can fucking smell a seal from a mile away. You think I could smell some asswipe poachers.* Kjell growled. He rose on his hind legs and scented the air, nothing but some seals to their west. He dropped to all fours with a grunt.

Bjorn jerked his ursine muzzle toward the stash of gear. Marc, Hans, and Trent fell into line, in front of Kjell. He glanced behind him, hoping to see something that might indicate the trail hadn’t gone cold. He bet if Cam had come with them she would have found something. He grinned toothily.

The guys made it back to their stash, quickly changing into their human forms and donning their survival gear. Suitably attired, they took snowmobiles back to the compound. Kjell brought up the rear. Watching the vehicles skim over the snow, he wondered of all the subterfuge was worth it. Sigrid knew they shifted shape. Surely, Cam could accept the news. He frowned.

The cold trail bothered him. If by keeping their secret safe, they jeopardized the mission, he wondered if it was really worth it. Vik believed so. Kjell found no other reason for their commander to bring in civilians like Sigrid and Cam. Unless he thought they needed feminine company so far north. Kjell bit back laughter. One thing was certain, Vik no doubt gave no thought to whether they needed women or not. He sent the best people for the job. Period.

They passed through the gates and onto the compound grounds. Bjorn directed the men into the vehicle shed. They parked the snowmobiles and began taking down the gear. Not much really for a simple reconnaissance mission and they carried everything in. Bjorn sent the twins to put things away, and he left Trent to ensure the snowmobiles were fueled and ready for their next mission. Kjell accompanied Bjorn inside, where they headed straight to the lab, pausing long enough to shed their snow suits and boots just inside the door.

The prospect of leaving both women alone together worried him. The tales they might tell, and Sigrid knew enough about him to really make Cam’s head spin. If he told her about that night...Bjorn opened the door.

Sigrid squealed and jumped up from the table, nearly spilling her cup of coffee. She wrapped her arms around him, giving him a huge hug and peppering his face with kisses. "You're back. Find anything?" She asked when she came up for air.

Bjorn shook his head. "Trail's cold."

Cam frowned.

"Don't I get a welcome back?" Kjell strode forward, toying with her. Bears usually didn't play with their prey, but he had an urge to swat at her and see if she'd react.

"Welcome back," she deadpanned and drank her coffee.

Not quite the response he'd envisioned, though their relationship might be too tenuous for the boisterous greeting Sigrid had given. They stared at each other for long moments.

"So the trail grew cold, huh?" She left recriminations unspoken.

"Yeah." He glanced at Bjorn and Sigrid, still wrapped in each other's arms. "Why don't you guys make an evening of it? I'll fill Cam in on our findings."

"Thanks." Bjorn ushered Sigrid out of the lab.

Kjell dumped Sigrid's forgotten cup of coffee in the sink and left the mug there to be washed later. He pulled out a chair and sat. "We didn't find much more than you did. The fibers appear to have come from somewhere, but they could have easily blown in on the wind for all that we know. A few footprints, nothing substantial, and frankly, given the path you take to run, could have been made by half a dozen legitimate people who use that trail. We're not the only ones out here."

Cam thinned her lips. "I don't suppose you guys would want me to go out there and take a look."

He hated keeping secrets from her. Sooner or later she would find out. Sigrid did. "Look, I know you think that if you had gone out there we'd have clues or at least more information than we did. The fact of the matter is that the trail fizzled out. There's nothing there to track. All of us are experienced trackers. And we needed you here."

"I'm sure Sigrid could take care of herself. I doubt Vik would send anyone out here who couldn't do that." Cam shrugged.

At least she didn't fight him on the cold trail issue. "She has held her own in a few fights. But I know it made Bjorn feel better, which means he focused more on the mission than worrying about his mate." *Oh crap, I just slipped up.*

"Mate, huh?" Cam laughed. "Guess it gets pretty wild out here with you guys doesn't it?" She stroked her fingers along the front of his shirt. "Never mind, you can tell me all you want that by staying behind I'm an asset to the team or whatever military jargon you want to use. The fact of the matter is that I should have been out there. Vik hired me to be tracker. And I don't want to have this conversation with you ever again." Her eyes grew cold and hard.

"We will," Kjell admitted, wishing that maybe she was still hung up on the mate thing and not furious about being left behind. "Bjorn gives the orders around here."

A calculating smile spread across Cam's face, and if anything, the determination in her eyes honed to a fine point. "Really? Because the last time I looked Vik signed all your orders. He's the

one who gives them around here and you guys have to obey. Which means if Vik ordered me here to track then..." She walked her fingers up his chest, her words trailing into silence.

Kjell's nostrils flared. Her ballsy words aroused him. A woman who knew what she wanted had always turned him on and Cam was no exception. With Sigrid and Bjorn out of the lab, they had the large room to themselves. The table loomed between them, a metaphor for their differences. He couldn't argue with her. She was right, not that he'd tell her that right now. Vik had given orders, and out of all of them, Vik's orders had to be followed.

"Vik put Bjorn in charge. What he says goes." Kjell rose to his feet and walked around the table. He leaned a hip against it in an indolently casual pose and shrugged. "I'm afraid I can't go against his orders."

Cam snorted. "You make it sound so easy. I think you and Bjorn do whatever the hell you want to do and as long as the mission goes forward then no one cares." She tilted her head, a smile on her full lips.

To have her red mouth so close to his cock and not do anything about it made his bear impatient. Her tongue darted out to lick her lower lip. He swore she did it on purpose and bit back a groan. Imagining the heat and warmth surrounding his shaft, having her take him deep, and he bet Cam gave blow jobs the same way she did anything else in her life, with gusto.

"That may be. Bjorn is still in charge out here."

"Do you want to call Vik and ask him?" Merriment twinkled in her eyes. "Because I think he'd have a different take on Bjorn's authority. I've been meaning to talk to him anyway."

Kjell stepped forward. A few more inches and he'd straddle her lap. Now that held possibilities. "I'm sure he would." He bent forward and grabbed the back of her chair, pinning her down. "But the fact of the matter is Bjorn is in charge. I follow Bjorn's orders. In this situation, you served the mission best by staying here and making sure Sigrid remained safe." He inched closer to her lips. "Thank you."

Her breath caught. He heard the slight hitch and his bear chuffed with pride. "Don't think you can change my mind."

"Why would I do such a thing?" He stroked his fingers along her chin, forcing her gaze to meet his. "As long as you understand the mission, I don't need to change your mind. The facts will do that for me." He ran his fingers back and forth across her chin and couldn't miss the shiver darting down her spine.

She licked her lips again. *She wants me.* He concurred. Though he kept his body's responses in check, his dick ached to finally sink inside her. A night in Cam's arms wouldn't be dull, that much he knew. He stepped back, not quite sure he could continue to control himself.

As soon as he gave her room, she stood. "As long as you understand why I'm here and my mission, then we won't have any problems. I won't need to change your mind either." She threw his words back at him, though the amusement in her tone softened the blow. She turned away from him and headed for the door.

Two long strides and he caught up with her. His hand on her shoulder, he turned her to face him. "I don't think we're on separate sides here. I think we both have the same mission and that's whatever Vik gives us. I'll speak to Bjorn about including you on future tracking excursions, but I

honestly don't think that your expertise would have helped. The trail was simply too cold and too thin."

She snorted a breath through her nose and nodded. "I suppose you're right." Resignation filled her tone. "That doesn't mean I have to like it."

The late hour pulled on him. Though he no doubt had a few more hours with Bjorn going over their plan and speaking with Vik, he wished he could head back to his room and crash. He stepped back, giving her room. "Thank you. I've got some things to do. If I don't see you again, have a good night." He tried to leave their meeting on a congenial note. If their situations were reversed, Kjell knew he'd be furious. All said, Cam handled the situation far better than he probably would.

"You too." She darted down the hall and his sensitive hearing picked up her footfalls long after she'd gone to another part of the compound.

Kjell sank into a chair and rubbed his forehead. His cock pounded. Every cell in his body screamed to take her right there in the lab. Deep inside, his bear roared, frustrated at being denied the woman he wanted. He needed to talk to Bjorn, and not about the mission. If this was what his commanding officer had gone through with Sigrid, Kjell's esteem for his long-time friend rose. Several deep breaths later, he strode through the halls and found his way to the lounge where Hans and Trent were playing cards.

"Want dealt in?" Hans waved his own cards in the air. "You could always try to win the hundred Euros that you lost last week."

"Sure, why not?" He pulled out a chair and sat down.

Trent pulled a can of beer out of a cooler sitting by his chair and passed it across the table to Kjell. "Don't worry. We won't beat you—too badly." He waggled his eyebrows.

Kjell picked up his cards and surveyed his hand. Not bad. Might not win with this hand, but in a few, he might. And even if he didn't, a night of beer and cards might take his thoughts away from Cam and the fact that he should be in her room making love to her.

Chapter Six

Cam hovered by Bjorn's desk, resisting the urge to peer over his shoulder as the latest intelligence from Vik arrived. Instead, she sat on the edge, her knee bouncing.

"Will you stop that?" Kjell cupped her knee and held it still.

Heat sizzled from his touch, racing up her thigh to settle in her pussy. "Sorry." Deliberately, she grabbed his wrist to pull his hand away. With the new information coming in, she needed to focus.

Bjorn gave them both a stern look.

Kjell made a show of letting his hand fall to his side.

Cam looked away.

Bjorn's computer chirped, announcing an incoming call. Bjorn opened up his browser, the web cam already focused on the three of them. "Hello, Vik," he said.

The gray-haired general staring back at them smiled. "Good afternoon, Bjorn, Kjell, Cam. Glad you could make it. This way Bjorn won't have to relay the information to you."

"We have something new?" Cam interjected.

Vik chuckled. "Impatient as always, Cam." He smiled. "Yes, I have some new information. Bjorn told me you found some old friends when you searched out the poachers the other day?"

"Gunner and Dane. Imagine that. I hope the card they passed was helpful." Cam shook her head. "Those guys would take any job so long as it pays. Real winners."

"And you hung out with them?" Kjell scowled.

"It was a long time ago," she muttered, hoping they could get back to the new information. "So what do you have?"

"Not Gunner and Dane's group, but another small expedition, looks like funded by the same company is looking for a guide. They're not getting any nibbles. Gunner and Dane appear to have moved onto the proverbial greener pastures." Vik continued, naming some people well-known in Gunner's circle.

"None of them are taking it?" Cam straightened, her stomach falling. "What kind of mission is it?" She nibbled on her lower lip, her stomach churning. Some of the things she'd done...she never wanted to go back to that life again, even undercover. But if it meant helping Vik and finding out more information. She sighed.

"None of them. Details are sketchy. I'm trying to get a man inside, an agent to try and broker the deal. It's difficult though."

"Tell them I'll do it," Cam blurted. "I'll take the assignment, undercover, of course. Then I can report back and you can take the information and do what you need to do." In her mind, she'd settled the question. With her abilities, and her reputation, the company would be fools to refuse her.

Bjorn shook his head. "I can't risk a member of my team like that."

Inwardly, Cam preened at being called a part of his team. "I have to, Bjorn." She spoke softly, wanting her expertise to show through. "This is what I used to do. These guys will jump at the chance to have me as their guide. And, you know I'd pass along anything important to you. Once you get your man in place, just let me know, Vik."

He smiled. "I knew I could count on you."

"Wait a minute. We're not sending her out into a dangerous situation," Kjell moved so he could completely face the computer screen. "I don't care. You're going to get the information another way."

"I see," Vik stroked his chin. "You know I'll do what it takes to get what we need. The closer we can get to the Russian Corporation behind the PCB dumping, the closer we'll be to figuring out the Night Demons. If it's necessary, I'll have to do it."

Behind her, she sensed Kjell opening his mouth, then closing it quickly. No use arguing with Vik, not when he set his mind to something.

"I know, Vik. I'm here. Just let me know." Cam donned a businesslike demeanor.

"You will keep us posted," Bjorn tapped his fingers on the desk. "I'll admit that I am as concerned as Kjell is about the situation. We know we're up against some pretty nasty people. And if they're working with, or feeding, the Night Demons..." His voice trailed off.

Cam reflected on Sigrid's words about the Night Demons and her own experiences. Though not wanting to reveal her personal interest in the Night Demons, she nodded. "I think we do need more information."

Kjell sighed. "We do. And you're the commander, Vik."

"I'm glad you remember that, Kjell. You know I won't do anything to put you guys in any more harm's way than I need to. I'll get more information and then get back to you about what we're going to do." Vik terminated the call.

Cam slid from the edge of the desk, to step back and pace off to the side. She shook her head. "I don't like it. I won't lie to you guys. I got out of that world a long time ago and there are good reasons why." She stopped and raked her fingers through her hair. "I may not be military anymore, but Vik's a good friend. You have to know he won't put me in danger if he didn't think that I could handle it."

"So you're admitting that he's going to put you in danger." Kjell stormed to one of the chairs in front of Bjorn's desk. Pulling it back, he sat down and crossed his ankle over his knee.

Cam found her attention drawn to his long legs, lovingly hugged by worn denim. The long-sleeve waffle weave shirt he wore had some kind of abstract rock and roll print. With his short hair spiked, he looked mad, bad, and oh so delicious to know. And she knew. Heat rekindled, her attention no longer focused on Vik's news. Soon, real soon, she'd have to fuck him just to find out if he matched her fantasies.

Kjell smiled as if he knew the direction of her thoughts.

Cam turned to Bjorn. "So when do you think you'll hear from Vik?"

"You can't think that you're really going to go out on that?" Kjell interrupted.

"You heard Vik," Bjorn warned.

Inwardly, Cam smiled at Kjell's reprimand.

"Vik takes his own time. Usually he gets back to us within forty-eight hours. If he has to find an operative to infiltrate their operation as he says, might take longer. I'm sure he'll keep in touch." Bjorn leaned forward. "You sure you want to do this? You don't have to, you know. I agree, you're the right person for the job. But if you're just trying to prove something, then don't do it." Bjorn fixed her with a hard stare of his deep blue eyes. He took her measure.

"I want to do this. My experience will help you guys find out what you need. You need me, and they want me." She shrugged, though inwardly, she preened at Bjorn's approval. She paused, trying to muster the right words. "Vik brought me onto this team. That's all the proof I need of anything." She shrugged, knowing that her words fell short. "I don't have to prove anything." She pressed her lips together, not wanting to get herself into deeper trouble.

Kjell strode closer to the desk. At last, he took the other chair and sat down. "I don't like it. We don't know much about this company, and what we do know is nasty. Sending her in there, hell, sending anyone in there would be a death sentence." He fisted his hands on his thighs. "Vik can't ask that of her, not when she isn't enlisted."

"Vik can ask me whatever he wants, Kjell," Cam reminded. "I may be a civilian, but I'm working for his army."

"It's his call to make," Bjorn reminded his friend. "I think Cam's right. She's the only one who can make this work. You or I go in there, and they'll sense military from a mile away. You can't fabricate expertise."

"I've been doing this for over a decade, in one way or another," Cam reminded Kjell. She reached across the space separating them, needing, no craving, his approval of her actions. If he thought she wouldn't last a minute out there, then he might follow and do something stupid. She couldn't have that happen. "I know what I'm doing and Vik knows that. Otherwise, he would have never made the suggestion."

"I know," Kjell grumbled. "I don't have to like it."

"You worried about me?" Cam teased. "I'm touched." She pulled her hand away.

Kjell caught it, and tugged it back to his thigh, where he covered it with his own. "Damn right, I'm worried about you." His rough voice slid across her senses like a caress from his hand. "I'd worry about anyone sent into that hornet's nest."

"Thank you," Cam said, though his last assertion sounded too little, too late. He worried, all right, but not because he'd worry about anyone. He worried because it was her. She suppressed a grin. "If you don't mind, I'd like to take stock, double check the equipment I brought with me, that sort of thing. I'm sure you understand." She removed her hand from Kjell's thigh and rose to her feet.

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Kjell watched her leave, his bear chafing inside at the prospect of her heading out into danger. He struggled with his beast, tried to keep it contained with thoughts that she knew what she was doing. Vik wouldn't have sent her here if it were otherwise.

"Vik's done it again, hasn't he?" Bjorn chuckled under his breath.

Kjell raised an eyebrow. "Done what?"

“Send us another woman that a member of my team wants to fuck.” Bjorn laughed. “I could talk to Trent or Hans about Cam. Neither one of them give the kind of response that you do. Hell, I can almost feel your bear threatening to shift and protect her.” Bjorn shook his head.

“We’re five men living above the Arctic Circle. Even in Ny-Alesund, female companionship isn’t that readily available. I think it’s a simple fact that we’re men and Vik keeps sending us women. One of us is bound to want to fuck her.” Though he kept his words cavalier, the thought of anyone else touching Cam, kissing her, making love to her, sent a bolt of rage through him.

“I have no intentions of letting her go out there alone. We do have means of following undetected.”

“You know she’s being hired to hunt bears?” Kjell stood and began to pace. “And you’re asking us to follow her, in bear form. Follow poachers. Men who have no morals when it comes to shooting polar bears out of season just for the sport of it.” He lifted his hands, exasperated. “You’re as crazy as she is.”

“It is a way for you to follow her and make sure she’s safe. Besides, you telling me that you can’t elude fat businessmen out on a hunt?”

“She’s the best at tracking.” Kjell pivoted on his foot to stare at his friend.

“Consider it a challenge?” Bjorn smiled and shut down the computer. “We haven’t had one of those in a while, where one of us goes out, lays a trail, and then the rest of us try to follow. If I recall, you always kicked our asses on those training exercises. And it didn’t matter what form you wore.”

“Yeah, I did.” Kjell glanced toward the door. If Cam waited outside, she’d heard a bit too much for his peace of mind. He didn’t think she did. A true professional, and he had no doubts, Cam was a true professional, would be in her rooms going over her gear. “I have your permission to follow Cam?”

Bjorn nodded. “Even if Vik doesn’t authorize it, I will. Being the Commanding Officer has its privileges, especially when it comes to the safety of my team. I want to check with Sigrid and see what she has come up with about the Night Demons. We don’t want to neglect that research.”

“No, we don’t.” Kjell paused for a moment. “If you’ll excuse me?”

“Of course.” Bjorn nodded his head. “I should check with Sigrid anyway.”

“Thanks.” Kjell went to the door and opened it.

“We’ll take care of her,” Bjorn said, as Kjell stepped into the hall. And Kjell believed him. He focused only on the woman his commanding officer wanted to send out in danger.

He scented her in her room. The slight clicks of a weapon being dismantled reached him, as did the acrid scent of gun oil. Thinking of her sitting in a chair, methodically going over her weapons brought a smile to his lips. He lifted his fist and knocked.

“Who is it?” Machinery clicked as Cam presumably put her weapon on the table.

“Kjell.” His hand hovered over the doorknob, waiting for her to invite him inside.

“Come in,” she sighed.

He turned the knob and opened the door, stepping through and closing it in an instant. Cam sat at a low table by the window, one of her weapons pieced out on the table in front of her. A

greasy rag rested on one thigh, and dark smudges covered her finger and rested high on her cheek. Strands of her blonde hair slid from a hastily donned pony tail, and wearing a gray military-issue sweat suit, she looked sexy as hell.

“What do you want?” She glanced at him, then picked up a gun barrel and sighted down it.

“Just wanted to say that I’m sorry if I gave you the impression that I didn’t think you were capable of the job.” Without waiting for any signs, he sat on the edge of the bed. A bit intimate at the moment, and distracting, too. With thoughts of peeling the gray fleece away from her skin and exploring every inch of skin he revealed with his lips and tongue, his cock hardened. He ignored it, not needing the distraction from his body at the moment. “I think that you’d do a damn good job if Vik sends you on one of those missions.” He nodded to the guns on the table. “And it isn’t just for the hardware.”

Cam wiped down the barrel with an oiled rag and replaced the piece on the table. “Well thank you.” Her shuttered expression left him wondering about her feelings. “I’ll do whatever Vik tells me to do.”

“You know that we’ll back you. If there’s a way that we can be there to—” He almost said watch over her, though he guessed she’d take that wrong. “To be of assistance.”

“That’s nice.” She reached for another gun part and then stopped, her hand hovering in the air. Turning toward him, she sighed, the rush of air sending her bangs flying away from her face. “This can’t be easy for you guys. Vik does what he does, and well, those of us under his command just learn to deal with it. But I really am the best person for the job. And I can’t have you, or anyone else, second guessing that decision, or Vik’s authority. When I go out, it will be on the terms set by the client. No crazy surveillance. No shadowing. Antics like that will get me killed and neither one of us wants that.” She stood and strode over to where Kjell sat on the bed. She stared at him for a moment, and then inched forward until she straddled one of his thighs. She cupped his shoulders.

He breathed in her scent, her nearness fueling his desire. Reaching up, he skimmed his hands along her sides.

A shiver wound through her.

Taking a chance he slid his hand behind her neck to pull her lips down to meet his. Unable to resist, he kissed her.

She gasped, and he took advantage of the opening, sliding his tongue into her mouth to deepen in the kiss. Cam moaned in the back of her throat. She sat down on his lap, one hand holding the back of his head, the other reaching down for the hem of his shirt

Inside, his bear rejoiced. At last, a chance to claim her in a way that would mark her as his. He tipped them backwards onto the bed.

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Cam threw caution to the wind. Finding herself sprawled across Kjell’s very hard chest, she wriggled against him. Her eager fingers tugged at his shirt, pulling it free from his military pants. The thin cotton failed to hide the definition of his muscles or the warm flesh beneath. Her knees straddled his hips, his erection pressing against her clothed sex. Her pussy ached to get his thick shaft deep inside her.

At last, she freed his shirt from his waistband to slide her fingers over his rippled abs. The arrow of hair leading back down toward his cock intrigued her and she stroked with short, little flutters of her fingers. She stroked her tongue along the length of his, drawing it into her mouth and sucking. The low groan rumbling through his chest aroused her. Moisture slicked her labia, her clit a swollen bud that demanded attention. She writhed against him, hungry for his touch.

Kjell splayed his big hand on the small of her back. He pressed her against him, arching against her pussy to slide his erection between her labia and Cam moaned. The movement bumped her clit. She reared back and tugged his shirt up beneath his armpits. A bit of maneuvering, and she pulled it over his head and tossed it on the floor behind her. The glimpse of the closed door told her all she needed to know, they had about as much privacy as this place could provide. She doubted a locked door would be needed, not with the groans Kjell made as she lowered her mouth to his nipple and sucked. He bucked beneath her.

With one hand already touching her, he used his other to pull off her sweatshirt, where it joined his on the floor. He cupped her cotton-covered breasts in his hands, her nipples visible against the plain fabric. Deftly, he unhooked the back and it, too, joined their clothing.

The first touch of his fingers against her bare skin sent frissons of heat through Cam's body. Her back bowed, mouth open as she moaned. Reaching behind her, she braced her palms against Kjell's rock hard thighs. Her breath caught in her throat. His calloused hands brushed against her erect nipples. Each stroke brought her closer to that moment when she'd rise over him and impale herself on his cock. She doubted Kjell would give her such control.

With one hand, he cupped her waist, drawing her down against him. His cock stroked between her labia, hitting just the right spot against her clit. "Damn," she moaned. "Can you just fuck me now?"

Kjell's hands stilled.

Cam opened her eyes, unaware she'd closed them and looked down at him. Something dark and feral swam in the depths of his gaze. Her tongue darted out to moisten her lips. Kjell's attention followed it. Against her pussy, his cock twitched.

"Think you can handle me?" A smile quirked the corners of his mouth.

Cam bent forward. She paused, her lips just millimeters from his. "Think you can handle me?" She twisted away, rolling more fully onto the bed, reaching for Kjell.

He moved between her thighs, his hips at the right angle to tease her with the brush of his cock.

She wrapped her legs around him, her heels against his buttocks. Lifting her hips, she took him to her entrance.

Kjell stiffened. "Do you—?"

"I'm covered." She lifted her hips again, contracting her abs to pull her body flush with his.

Kjell sank onto her, his cock sliding with one, long stroke deep inside her body. A groan rumbled from his chest.

Oh so good. Cam closed her eyes. She tightened her inner muscles around his girth, welcoming the way he stretched and filled her. Rolling her hips, she took him deeper, until his head brushed against the place high inside that always set her off. She waited there, savoring him, and then slowly pulled back.

Kjell swept his hands down her back to cup her ass and draw her against him. Unable to let her remain in control, he thrust into her, driving her back against the mattress.

Cam pressed her face into Kjell's neck, stifling her moans against his skin. Her fingers flexed on his back, nails leaving tiny half-moon indents. Her heels pressed into his buttocks. She wrapped herself around him, needing his strength to anchor her in the maelstrom of ecstasy threatening to pull her apart. Gasping for air, she bit back a moan and then Kjell kissed her, his lips hard and hungry on hers.

Frantic, they came together. The bed springs squeaked a counterpoint to the sounds of skin against skin. She tasted his sweat, smelled the musk of their sex. Soft, keening cries erupted in her throat. The first sweet flutters of release tingled at the base of her spine. No one had ever made her feel the need to come so hard, so quickly.

She held back, not wanting to give in to her building release. She licked and sucked the side of Kjell's neck, her mouth moving to his shoulder. With the force from Kjell's thrust, her teeth grazed his skin. She left a red mark, her brand. Kjell's fingers squeezed her buttocks, and with a final thrust, Cam gave into her release.

She cried out, her voice echoing in the room. Her muscles tightened around him, drawing him deeper into her body. The first waves started, pounding in her veins. Like running, like racing in a snowmobile across the arctic tundra, the wind whipping her face and knowing she owned the world. Bliss exploded in her body. The crisp smell of snow. The warm musk of a bear's fur. His name burst from her lips as tiny aftershocks darted through her body.

Kjell thrust deep inside. He stiffened, his hands curling into the bedding on either side of her. His cock twitched, a moment before a low moan rumbled through his chest. He came with a harsh growl, his seed splashing inside her. Each warm blast, triggered more tiny quakes deep inside, and she wrapped her arms around him and nuzzled his chest.

Their raspy breathing surrounded them. In the room, the clock ticked and the HVAC system whirled warm air from vents in the ceiling. Somewhere down the hall, music played. Maybe from the workout room, Cam didn't know. The heavy weight of the man still connected intimately with her, kept her grounded and focused right where she lay. His cock softened, though not much, and he rolled to the side on the bed.

Immediately, Kjell tucked her in beside him. His hand swept down her side, a cuddling that startled her with how good it made her feel. Normally, she rolled to the other side, or better yet, got up and started to dress. Not Kjell, and not her, at least not right now.

She opened her mouth, intending to quip that if he meant to keep her from accepting the assignment, it wouldn't happen. Somehow, that felt wrong. She closed her lips, then turned toward him and kissed his shoulder.

"Thank goodness we're not in the American military," she chuckled. "This would be against regs." She walked her fingers over his chest, caressing the lines of his abs and the flat planes of his pecs.

"You're not allowed to *fukka* in the military? See, we Europeans are so much more civilized."

She grinned at his use of the Norwegian word for fucking. "I don't think there's anything civilized about you." She stroked his cock from base to tip, bringing it back to life once more.

A harsh knock on her door interrupted her. "Cam, you're headed out in the morning. Come see me when you're ready," Bjorn called.

"When you're dressed, he means," Kjell muttered.

Cam ignored him. Jumping out of bed, she reached for her clothing. Duty called, and at the most inopportune time.

Chapter Seven

Hunched in the tent, listening to the snores of one of the Russian men, Cam thought longingly of the compound and of Kjell. In the end, she'd been hired by three Russian sportsmen out to do a little hunting. Or so they said. The way they stomped around made her wonder if they even know which way to hold a gun. She bet if either one of them saw a bear they'd shit their pants.

The tinned food warmed over a small can of sterno sat cold and heavy in her stomach. With the men sleeping, she arranged their packs and prepared their course for another day, and tried to figure out who and what these guys were. Their military surplus meant nothing, not in this day and age of online shopping and governments that needed money. She found no identifying information other than basic id in case they were to get lost or stranded, nothing to indicate what they might be doing here.

Vik's orders echoed in her mind. *Find out who they are and what they're doing. Stay safe. And get the hell out of there as soon as possible.*

The wind howled outside, or maybe it was a Night Demon. She shivered in her many layers, resisting the urge to poke her head beyond the nylon confines of her tent. If a Night Demon stood out there, Cam had no clue what she'd do. According to Bjorn, the Night Demons killed, attacked mercilessly, and guns seemed to be useless on them most of the time. A long knife sat in a sheath on her thigh, a smaller blade at her waist. If bullets failed to harm, she bet hardened steel would too.

Cam studied the topography map, thinking of leading the men toward the coast. It was the obvious ploy, especially this time of year when the bears migrated back to the opening waters. Of course, running into hungry bears created a dangerous situation, one that violated Vik's orders to stay safe.

She traced a route with her finger, debating about working along a ridge closer inland. The migratory path of bears intersected there, also making it good hunting territory. And, they had a path to retreat, one that wouldn't place a bear between them and escape with the open ocean at their backs.

The small tent stifled her. She'd slept in snow caves where the hollow gave her maybe six inches of clearance above her prone form, and she had little room to turn around or even move. Those didn't bother her like this tent, and the two bulky forms of the Russian men. She reached for the tent flap. The zipper rasped loud in the silence.

One of the men snored.

Yeah, like that won't alert the bears to our presence. Smiling, the men's untutored ways in the Arctic would keep her from having to shoot at game, she inched out of the small opening and closed it again. She prayed men like these wouldn't kill her if they didn't find a bear. She hoped.

Cam stretched. Though the slivered moon cast little illumination, she thought she spied a large form walking along a ridge. She stopped and waited. A cloud scudded past the moon, finally slipping away to allow its full light to reflect from the whitish gray snow and ice. A large polar bear, male from the size, stood on the ridge staring down at her. Cam closed her fist, her breathing shallow so as not to make any sounds. Her heart pounded; she feared the bear could hear.

It didn't move.

Go away. I don't want to send these men after you. She raised her hand, fingers extended, though to touch or warn away, she didn't quite know. Hand outstretched, she waited.

The bear remained still. Beautiful, so beautiful with its broad muzzle and thick fur. To reach out and bury her hands in the ruff, to feel the hollow-cored hairs brushing against her skin, her face...she shivered.

The bear rose on its hind legs, nose pointed to the sky. It sniffed the air. Once. Twice. Then dropped down with a short bark and shook its head.

Cam glanced back at the tent. Only the small lantern illuminated the interior, the glow clearly visible from where the bear stood. Most bears would have turned around and fled by now. She'd quickly learned, some polar bears weren't normal. From the uncanny intelligence in this one, though she couldn't clearly see its expression, she wondered if that might be the case. To tell Kjell or Bjorn what she'd seen, what she knew, now that would be giving them all the information they needed. Somehow, she figured Bjorn wouldn't believe her. Or maybe he would, surely he'd seen stranger things in his tour of duty.

"Go away, bear. I don't want to hurt you," she whispered.

The bear chuffed, a sound suspiciously like laughter. With a shake of its wide head, the creature lumbered away.

Cam stood a little longer and watched it leave. With a heavy heart, she turned back to the tent. She thought about the guys, wondered if they worked out in the gym, or maybe helped Sigrid with something in the lab. Until this mission ended, she wouldn't know and the thought saddened her.

Unable to return to the tent, though she needed to get some sleep, she started to walk in an oval around their camp site, checking for signs and tracks. Not even the dotted tracks of an Arctic Hare marred the snow, though the wind had whipped it into tiny ridges and eddies. She circled their camp a couple of times before inching her patrols out wider. Still no signs, and she wondered how long she'd have to be out here, chauffeuring these overpaid boys until they found their prey. She prayed it wouldn't be much longer.

~* * *~

Kjell watched her circle the campsite wondering how much longer before she started tracking him. From her actions over the last week, he guessed she did everything within her power to keep the guys away from polar bears. Sooner or later that would backfire, and he hoped she could handle herself when it did. He shook his ursine head and backed away toward the small snow cave where he'd stashed his human clothes. Thankfully, he held enough intelligence in this form to be able to carry a small pack, though he'd had to back track and keep hidden while he did so.

Over the past few days, his admiration for her grew. She tracked well, even finding some of his prints, though they always led on dead end trails. He'd toyed with her, creating light trails in the hopes that she would follow. Sometimes, she did. Other times, she visually followed them, but never led the guys down the trail.

He slipped back to his snow cave and shifted, sliding into his clothes before the warmth of his bear form left him. Fully dressed, he hiked across the tundra, back toward the camp. Her

clients still slept, and he barely discerned Cam's form as she marked the perimeter. Interesting that she would mark her territory just as bears did. He grinned as he neared the camp.

He paused at the top of a small rise, certain she saw his bluish-grey coveralls against the whiteness of the snow. He raised his hand, waving to her, his heart giving a little leap when she turned and nodded. She broke off her pacing—he felt certain that's what she was doing—to head in his direction. He waited until she neared, then stepped forward.

"What are you doing out here?" Cam glanced over her shoulder at the tent. "You probably shouldn't be seen." She started to usher him down behind the rise, out of visual range from the tent.

"Well hello to you too." Kjell grinned and allowed her to herd him out of the way. "Just thought I'd come out and see how things were going."

"See if I'm all right is more like it," Cam muttered. She waited a moment, and then threw her arms around him, their bodies bulky in their layers and snow suits. "I'm glad you're here." Though ski masks protected their faces, she pressed her forehead to his.

His arms wound around her, pulling her as flush against his body as he could. His cock stirred, rising to life at her nearness.

"I haven't found out anything yet," she whispered. "These guys seem like average hunters, and bad ones at that. I get the feeling that they're looking for something. That they have some sort of mission, but I haven't figured out what it is yet. I haven't seen any Night Demons and even the bears seem to have been scarce lately too."

"I see," he said, because he really couldn't tell her that there was a good chance the polar bears scented him and stayed out of the area. He only hoped he didn't adversely affect her job.

"I'm not sure they're the guys Vik thinks they are, to be honest. I haven't seen any sign of company affiliation. I've been unable to completely go through their gear, but if they are part of some Russian conspiracy, then they're good. Really scary good." She wiggled closer in his arms.

"They can be, honey," he said, thinking to the men he and Bjorn had fought when they discovered illegal dumping. "I don't want you to let your guard down for a moment." *Even though I'll be here every step of the way.*

"I won't." She inched closer to him, and he sensed her yearning because he felt it too. "Don't worry about me. I just wish there was an ice cave or something nearby."

"Oh?" He arched an eyebrow. "That might be a bit chilly, don't you think?"

"I'm sure you would warm me up." She glanced over her shoulder, and he sensed her disappointment wrapped around her like a cloak. "But not tonight." She paused, her gaze holding his for a long, intense moment. "Do you think our lips will freeze together?" She rose on tiptoe and pressed her mouth to his.

He stiffened for a moment, not expecting her kiss. At least not out here in the open where one of the men could stumble out of their tent and see them. And then, his body took over, his tongue sliding along the seam of her lips, his hands tightening on her waist. All the danger, not the least of which would be their mouths freezing together, and that would be tough as hell to explain to Bjorn, raised his arousal to fever pitch. His tongue plunged into her mouth, possessing her the way he wanted to her body.

Cam arched against him. Tiny whimpers emerged from her throat, and her fingers curled around the shoulder of his snowsuit. Though the chill Arctic wind threatened to cut through them, just having her close, her lips on his, warmed him to the tips of his toes.

Kjell pulled back. His breath plumed in white clouds from his lips. He adjusted his ski mask. "You should go back." His fingers still curled around her waist, their bodies still intimately close. He was so hard, no doubt she could feel the ridge of his arousal through their many layers.

"Yeah, I should." She released him with a soft sigh and inched away from him. "You can't come back. It's too dangerous."

"I love danger." He brushed a quick kiss across her covered nose, and before he could do something stupid, like taking her back to the compound with him, turned and disappeared back toward his snow cave. He needed a few hours sleep before he followed her again.

~* * *~

Groggy from lack of sleep, the last thing Cam wanted to deal with were her pissed-off clients. She stood outside the tent, the thin tendrils of sunlight stretching across the eastern sky. She scanned the horizon, no sign of Kjell, or the bear, in sight.

"You saw tracks yesterday. Why don't we follow them?" Gregor crossed his arms, the bright reflective stripes on the shoulders of his snow suit catching the early morning sun. "We're paying you to find bears."

"Then let me find bears," Cam snapped. She pressed her lips together, immediately regretting the words. Rule number one of being a guide, never piss off the paying client. Though she figured if they up and left, she'd have a better chance than they of returning to base. She stepped back, needing to put some distance between her and the men.

Gregor loomed like a hulking creature over Demyan, the smaller man. More wiry, like a fox, her other client stepped forward.

"You were hired to find the bears. If you're not good enough, we'll find someone else." Demyan spat on the ground.

Cam hated the implications in his words. Not about her competency, being a female guide in a male-dominated business earned her such derision. No, but about the fact that they would find someone else and she had the feeling she wouldn't return from the wild. Her hackles rose. She needed no more convincing that these men weren't what they said they were, two sportsmen from Russia.

She stared at Demyan, getting the impression Gregor followed the smaller man's orders. Muscle and brains, as it were, and she preferred to work with the brains of the outfit. "There are tracks over there." Cam pointed at the ridge. "We can follow them, but they lead away from the sea. This time of year most bears head toward the opening oceans. I think we'd have better luck if we continue on our path."

"Bah, you're soft and want to protect the bears. We follow the tracks. Maybe it's wounded and we can kill it easier." Demyan stepped forward, going toe-to-toe with her. "It would be a mercy to put a wounded creature out of its misery. Yes?" He arched an eyebrow and in the depths of his green eyes something dangerous flickered.

"If we find him, yes," she admitted. "But you hired me to be the guide. Allow me to do my job."

Demyan cuffed her. His gloved hand smacked against her flesh with a soft thud. The thick layers kept it from hurting, though even behind her ski mask her cheek stung. "You do what we tell you to do. That's why we pay you."

Cam stood her ground. A retort, quickly banked, popped to her lips. She took one deep breath, then a second one, trying to find a nice way to tell Demyan and his goon to go to hell. "If you want to follow the trail, we can. However, we will backtrack and lose several days. If that is what you wish, however..." She let her words trail off, hoping she sounded properly servile. She turned to head back to the tent, preparing to break camp.

Gregor grabbed her shoulder, spinning her back around. He squeezed hard enough that without her thick snow suit he probably would have left a bruise. "You do what we say." No pretence of politeness filled his tone. "We want to find the bears."

"Okay, okay," Cam admitted, not liking the bile in his tone. Some hunters would do anything for a trophy. Somehow, she guessed these men wanted something more than a head to adorn their mantle. It was almost like they had a vendetta against the bears for some reason. She pulled away and tried not to storm toward the tent. Once she reached it, she slipped inside, taking a moment to gather her wits. Kjell's warnings about being careful haunted her. If he knew something she didn't, she'd kick his ass the next time she saw him. She yanked her ski mask off her face and took a deep breath.

Most of their gear remained packed, giving her little to do. She tidied up the area, rolling up her sleeping bag and putting it on her backpacking frame.

The tent door's zipper rasped. "What do you think you're doing?" Demyan barked.

"I'm packing so we can head out." She tied the last strap, and then turned.

Demyan backhanded her. His bare knuckles scraped across her cheek, splitting skin. Pain burst from the impact, shooting down her jaw.

Cam bit the inside of her mouth. The tang of blood splattered her lips and she stifled a cry. Falling backwards, she hit her elbow against the backpacking frame, sending a stab of pain up her arm. Gear clattered, hitting the sides of the tent. *Shit!* She hoped nothing tore into the rip-stop nylon. Or if it did, then it lived up to its name and didn't tear.

"What the hell did you do that for?" She scrambled back, and then rose shakily to her feet. Wiping her mouth with the back of her glove, she winced at the smear of blood. She didn't dare reach up to touch her cheek, though it throbbed like a sonofabitch. Kjell would not be pleased, and frankly, neither was she.

"You're stalling. We can camp here." Demyan stepped forward.

"Wait a minute. I want us to be able to follow tracks. Coming back here to camp will make the trail go cold. You want to follow the tracks then we're going to damn well follow those fucking tracks." She reached down and snagged the frame with her right hand, pulling it upright. She'd never unpacked her backpack, which meant she could slide her arms through the straps. "Pack your gear and be ready in five minutes." Without waiting for an answer, she pushed past Demyan and stepped outside.

Her ski mask remained in the tent. Fuck it. She'd get another one out of her pack before she came within five feet of that bastard. Her cheek stung, the icy wind only making it hurt more.

With a shake of her head, she turned toward the tracks, not caring whether her charges followed or not.

~* * *~

Following the tracks carried them back along their trail, something which only pissed Gregor and Demyan off more. They muttered to themselves, stopping to ask her if she really knew what she was doing. Backtracking like this served to make her look incompetent. She doubted the tracks would pan out. They belonged to a large male who seemed headed in a completely opposite direction of his comrades. Whether the bear knew something they didn't, or they'd come across a corpse, Cam didn't know. She hoped the former.

They set up camp a few hundred feet from where they'd camped before, closer to where the tracks circled it. The proximity angered the men.

Cam's cheek throbbed. She'd checked her reflection in the lenses of a pair of mirrored sunglasses, a dark bruise and scrape visible along the edges of her ski mask's eye holes. Out here she lacked concealer or anything to cover it up with and she hoped she wouldn't run into Kjell. She didn't want to be Demyan if Kjell found out about her injury. Hopefully, she wouldn't. Her contract ran at least another week. By then the injury would fade and she could blame it on a fall or something. Except she doubted Kjell would believe her story.

"I'm going to go follow the tracks and see where they lead for tomorrow. Stay here," Cam called to the men.

Gregor grunted and finished putting up the tent. Taking that as assent, Cam headed out to where she last found the tracks. She followed them, noticing a blurring of the snow. Frowning, she knelt. The tracks retained sharp edges; the wind hadn't blurred them yet. A few pointed back the way they came, others directed her onward, retracing steps.

Almost like the bear walked along side them, careful to remain just out of reach and sight.

Cam frowned. She traced one large track with her fingers. Some points looked as if the bear had walked backwards in his own tracks. She frowned. With a small shake of her head she dismissed the silly notion. Bears couldn't do that. At least, not the natural ones.

An image of a man, his form bloodied, lying on the bank of a river haunted her. Where once a bear had stood, in death, a man lay.

No. She bolted to her feet certain her past wouldn't return to haunt her. Not up here, and not surrounded by European Union military forces. A few feet beyond, clean tracks headed for the sea. A small scuffle, a bit of blood, and a tuft of fur from an Arctic hare. She scooped up the evidence, intending on returning to their camp. They'd lost a day, but no more. In the morning, they'd march for the sea once more.

~* * *~

Kjell watched Cam scoop up the evidence of a bear kill with a nod of satisfaction. In his ursine form, his thick fur kept him warm. The pads of his feet allowed him to stand on the ice and snow and not feel the chill. Bundled in several layers, Cam lacked that adaptability. For a moment, he indulged himself imagining her as a female bear. She'd rule the tundra, setting boundaries and keeping all the male bears away. Unless she wanted one closer. His jaws gaped in a parody of a smile. At one time, she'd welcomed this bear into her bed. As soon as she returned to the camp, he planned to make sure she did so again.

He heard the men arguing, though at this distance not about what. The clicks of guns and the acrid smell of cleaning equipment announced their activities. He snarled, thinking about men like that in his wilderness. With no signs of Night Demons, or even the dumping of PCB canisters, he spared a moment of doubt. Maybe the two men were just as they seemed, jackasses wanting to shoot a polar bear. He shook his massive head. If Vik wanted Cam there, they weren't.

Cam stopped just outside the tent, her head cocked in its direction. Listening, he wondered, and when a thunderous expression crossed her face, he waited. She shook her head, reached for the tent flap, and then backed away, barely making any sound. With the men's loud voices booming through the tent, he figured they didn't hear her presence. Which was probably a good thing.

Turning on her heel, Cam stormed in his direction, no longer the stealthy tracker. Anger radiated off her in waves, her fists clenching and unclenching with each step. A distance away she stopped and heaved a sigh. Glancing over her shoulder, she stared at the tent, and then in the direction he was. She lifted her gloved hands to her face, maybe to rub at her eyes or to shield them from the sun, then dropped them. She shuffled in his direction.

Unable to watch anymore, Kjell whirled. He lumbered back to his snow cave, his long ursine strides eating up the tundra. There, he shifted and changed in record time, heading back in her direction, this time dressed as a man.

He saw her standing in a low ravine out of sight of the tent. She squatted, studying the conflicting tracks his paws had made. He smiled.

"You look like a pissed off bear," he said by way of greeting.

She looked up, her eyes wide. She double checked to make sure they were out of visual range, and then rose to her feet. "What are you doing out here? And don't tell me Bjorn sent you on maneuvers that just happened to be by our camp site." She fisted her hands and rested them on her hips.

He shrugged and moved closer. A dark shadow covered her cheek bone an angry mottling of red and purple bruising.

"What the hell happened?" He reached for her, holding her shoulder with one hand, while tracing her cheek through her ski mask with the other.

She jerked away. "What are you doing here?" she asked again.

"Checking on you. That's a nasty bruise, Cam. How'd you get it? And don't tell me you fell, because a tracker like you is too good to fall out here." Kjell curled his fingers over her shoulder, holding her just hard enough that she couldn't pull away. He stepped closer to her. Gingerly, not sure how much the bruise hurt, he pulled the edge of her ski mask down to reveal the bruise. He gave a low growl. "That's the scrape of knuckles. One of those bastards hit you, didn't they?"

With each word a deep anger settled low in his gut. His bear roared, coming fully to life at the thought of someone hurting his mate. Kjell shrugged off the mate-stuff. Any man who hit a woman deserved a few rounds with a polar bear. Any woman. The fact that it was Cam who'd been hit made the situation even worse.

He smoothed the ski mask back over her cheek and shook his head. "You have no reason to protect them. One of those fucking bastards hit you, didn't they?" He vibrated with the force of his anger. He relaxed his grip, his attention scanning over her shoulder. "You want me to kill

them? That'd piss Vik off, but I think he'd understand." He'd intended the question as a joke, something to ease the tension between them. Instead, his bear growled, the need to rend these men apart like a fat walrus thrumming through his veins. He stepped back, his visceral reaction unsettling.

"No. Let me finish my mission. Whatever these guys are looking for, let us find it. Let me complete my mission and get the information for Vik." Cam breathed deeply, her shoulders shaking.

"You can't let them go unpunished." Kjell curled his fingers into a fist. The urge to pull her into his arms and sweep her away from here swept through him. He stepped back, knowing he couldn't act on his desires. "They need to be punished."

"I know." Her voice shook. "I heard them talking. They aren't happy about not seeing any polar bears. And they've talked about sites, wanting to see flat lands where they can dump things. I don't understand half of it. They seem to be talking about something that's very particular to them. But I'm sure it's what you and Bjorn were talking about with the dumping. You think they want to dump their pollution out here and we're not even hunting any polar bears?" She squatted and pounded the tundra with her fist. "I can't believe they'd do something like this out here."

He followed her down. "Yeah, they probably are. Keep doing what you're doing and report back to us. And if they hit you again, I'll kill them."

Cam grinned. "Not if I do it first. I can't, though. That would jeopardize the mission." She barked futile laughter.

"There are more important things than the mission." His voice rumbled ominously. For the first time in his military career, Kjell questioned orders. Returning to the compound and informing Bjorn, and Vik, of Cam's injury would not end in a professional discussion. He knew what Vik wanted. Cam had to find out what these men wanted and act as the perfect guide. His bear questioned the wisdom in Vik's actions, and so did Kjell.

~* * *~

Don't do anything stupid. Cam mentally willed Kjell to behave. "We have to stay on mission," she insisted. Seeing him out here could blow everything, and there was no way he didn't already know that. "I have to go back." She took a step toward the compound.

"Those bastards hit you again, I want you to retaliate. Use force, deadly force, if necessary to defend yourself. They didn't hire you to be their punching bag." Menace swirled in Kjell's eyes.

His cold demeanor scared Cam. She tamped down her emotions, thinking he cared too much too quickly for her. She'd seen that kind of deadly intensity before on soldiers. Usually it ended up with someone getting trigger happy. She breathed the crisp Arctic air. "Don't jeopardize our mission, soldier. I know what I'm doing." She squared her shoulders, her own resolve wrapped around her like a warm wool blanket.

"I'm sure you do. Just remember, so do I." Kjell jerked his chin away from their camp. "I'm not going anywhere. Let's just say I have a little reconnaissance of my own to do." He stepped backwards.

Cam nodded, his movements making her think of the polar bear that had walked backwards in his tracks. "Understood. But if you interfere with anything I do, I'll bust your ass back to the compound and make sure Bjorn and Vik know."

"I expect no less." Before she could answer, he turned and strode away.

Cam released a breath and went in the opposite direction, back to the camp. The overhead conversation nagged at her, reminded her that she wasn't simply leading hunting missions anymore. No, that would be too easy. Get out there, get a clean shot and bring the trophy back to camp. No matter what her morals said, that had been the way to easy money.

As she approached camp, she heard muted conversation happening in the tent between Gregor and Demyan. Not wanting to stand outside and eavesdrop, she cleared her throat loudly.

The conversation stopped.

"Camp is secure for the night," she called, then made a show of unzipping the tent door and getting inside. She tamped down her resistance to sharing the tent with them. Suddenly digging a snow cave would raise flags. Too late in the job to try that. She wished she'd thought of it sooner. She zipped the tent behind her, and then went to her own sleeping bag.

Gregor handed her a can of food, slightly warmed. "You were out a long time. Thought you ran away." He shared a harsh laugh with Demyan, and Cam wished she had. A soldier never abandoned the mission. She'd see this one through to the end.

Chapter Eight

After a tense morning, the first signs of polar bear tracks lifted Cam's mood. Not that she necessarily *wanted* to hunt and track a polar bear, but at least the signs got Gregor and Demyan's attention refocused on the mission and not on their misguided beliefs that she wasn't up to doing her job. The large male tracked relatively close to their camp, though appearing to be on an intersecting path with them. He definitely headed toward the sea.

At least that's some vindication that I was on the right track. Cam hid her smugness behind grim determination. With Gregor and Demyan following right behind her, sometimes muddying the prints they'd just passed, she had no choice but to move head. She paused, a glimpse of movement on the horizon catching her attention. Silently, she motioned for the men to wait, and surprisingly they did.

She checked the trail, veering to the right.

Gregor grabbed her arm. "The tracks lead that way." He jerked his thumb to the left.

"The tracks also loop back." She pointed a short distance away where the bear tracks seemed to form a large arc leading to the right. Her instincts told her they'd meet up with the polar bear if they followed this path. She followed the trail close to twenty yards, the guys following her every step. "See." She pointed to a few drops of blood and a tuft of white fur on the snow. Bending down, she studied it. "Arctic hare."

"Very nice," Gregor replied, his tone softening. "We follow you." He pulled out his rifle and held it at the ready.

"Not yet." Curling her fingers over the barrel she pointed it at the ground. "Over that rise. Let's move slowly. I don't want to startle him." Cam nodded as she took the lead again, bringing the men just up to the ridge. She dropped to the ground and crouched forward on her stomach.

There, in the small bowl depression created by a tumble of rocks, laid a male polar bear. He held a rabbit carcass between his paws, mouthing it.

"Must not be hungry," Gregor noted.

Cam hushed him. Her stomach fell. Though the bear might be able to scent them, with his muzzle full of Arctic Hare, she doubted it. They remained downwind of the bear, furthering their olfactory concealment.

It shouldn't have to be this way. She thought she'd left this life behind a long time ago. *If you even think we're here, run away.*

The bear rose on its hind legs and turned toward the ridge. With its great muzzle in the air, the bear sniffed. It dropped to all fours with a low grunt. Swinging its massive head, the bear strode directly towards them.

Cam stiffened. They'd remained downwind. Both men kept their rifles low. No way for the sun to glint off the barrels of scopes. They kept silent; the bear shouldn't have even known it was there. She frowned.

"Let's go." Running would be the stupidest thing they could do. She also knew if the guys got mauled, she'd have a chance of getting away. Except they were her mission and if they died her rep would be shot to hell. "Damn it." She reached for Demyan.

The smaller man shimmied out of her grip, rising with his gun level. He fired a shot. It went wide.

“Damn it, you’re only going to piss him off.” Cam reached for Demyan again.

“You can run like a little girl. I’m going to kill this bear.” Demyan stepped to the side, jostling into Gregor.

Still the bear advanced. Deadly menace filled its eyes. A huge roar tore from its throat. The sound raised the hairs on Cam’s arms. In all her years as a guide, she’d never seen a bear as pissed off as this.

Demyan fired again. Another wide shot.

Cam inched her way down the slope. “Gregor. Come on,” she ordered, hoping at least one of the men would be wise.

Gregor looked at her, and then looked at Demyan. He shook his head and raised his rifle.

The bear lunged.

Gregor shot.

The bullet swiped across the bear’s shoulder, leaving a wide red trail across the white fur.

Cam cried out, and then shoved her fist in her mouth to stifle any more shouts.

The bear landed, stumbling to the ground. In an instant, it lurched to its feet, spinning on the men. It stood close enough that its hot breath fanned the strands of their hair poking from beneath their stocking caps and masks. Heavy beards concealed their faces, the hair blowing with the heat from the breath.

Both Gregor and Demyan stood motionless.

Cam watched, unable to look away. In a moment, the bear would pounce, rending the men from limb to limb and she’d be powerless to stop it. Her own gun sat in its sling on her back, forgotten. She wouldn’t shoot this bear, not even to save her clients’ lives.

With a snarl, the bear turned and bolted away, its gait limping from the wound on its shoulder.

Gregor backed down the ravine, his lips pressed into a thin white line. “That was closer than I wanted to be, I think.”

Demyan raised his gun. “Shoot it!”

Gregor’s hand fell heavy on his partner’s shoulder. “We wounded it. We can track it later. Or maybe this area is what we needed and the bear can go its own way. Either way, I want to go back to the tent. I am done for today.”

Though his words cemented Cam’s belief that the men were up to something other than hunting, she welcomed their return to camp. “We can head back out tomorrow.” Movement flickered in the corner of her vision. She turned and saw nothing but the tundra.

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Kjell chafed at being away from Cam and her charges. The men deserved far more than what they’d gotten. He fought back his rage at not being able to scratch one of them, to mark them the way they marked him.

"Quit moving. This would go a lot easier if you sat still," Bjorn grumbled. He dabbed a gauze pad soaked in antiseptic on the angry scratch that covered his shoulder. "You're lucky the bullet didn't do more than graze you."

"Wish I'd grazed them." Kjell flexed his fingers, imagining them as six-inch long claws, ready to tear into flesh and bone. "Those bastards are looking for another place to dump PCBs, I bet. That ravine where I found them would be perfect. Pretty secluded, a depression so the canisters wouldn't roll or go anywhere. Might even make a gathering place for the Night Demons."

Kjell winced at the sting of antiseptic on his wounds. "Sigrid any closer to her research?"

"No. The Night Demons give off compounds that aren't quite matching up with anything known. Not even like how meteors have elements only found in space. Apparently these things, whatever they are, don't come from here." Bjorn chuckled and tossed the pad into the trash can. He picked up a handful of butterfly bandages. "Not only do we have illegal dumping by Russians, but now apparently we have aliens. And here we thought we were the strangest things in the Arctic." He applied the first bandage.

"Think I need stitches?" Kjell glanced over his shoulder, the wound just out of sight. He pulled his shoulder forward, drawing a growl from Bjorn.

Bjorn yanked his shoulder back. "Hold fucking still." He slapped another bandage on Kjell's arm. "You probably need stitches there in the center, but I'll bandage it up and you can shift a couple of times. That will speed the healing."

"That's going to hurt like hell," Kjell grumbled.

"Serves you right. You get that close to them again, you might get killed." Bjorn finished bandaging the wound. He wrapped gauze around it, then used an elastic bandage to hold that in place. "Look, I know you want to keep an eye on Cam. I do too, and I'm glad you're out there. But I can't afford to lose you, okay?"

Kjell sobered at the solemn look in Bjorn's eyes. "I was just grazed. It wasn't that bad, was it?" he traced his fingers over the elastic bandage, the gauze poking out along the edges.

"Not this time." Bjorn pulled up a wheeled stool and sat down. The medical room was outfitted like a cross between a doctor's exam room and a surgery. "Look, I know how it is when you get involved with a woman. I kind of lost my head over Sigrid, and she busted my ass for it too. I don't want the same thing to happen to you. Don't get so involved with Cam that you forget that you're still on a mission. Stay alive, okay?" Bjorn pushed the stool back and stood. "Might want to stay here for the rest of the day, let the lidocaine wear off on your arm before you head out again."

Kjell nodded and hopped off the table. He tested his arm, lifting it and rotating his shoulder. A slight pull along the wound limited his motion. Other than that, Bjorn had done a good job of patching him up. "You know I'm going out again."

"I know. Vik would order it, if you didn't." Bjorn grinned. "But I don't think any orders are necessary when it comes to protecting Cam." With those words, he turned on his heel and left.

Kjell waited in the medical room, debating the wisdom of shifting right then and hurrying back to Cam. He strode to the window, looking out over the landscape. He curled his fingers around the window sill and flexed them, still thinking of them as claws. To have Cam out there with those men chafed. The numbness in his arm started to wear off. In a few hours, he'd head

back out. Until then, he hoped Cam would keep herself safe. Because right now, he couldn't protect her, and that scared him more than facing down armed Russians.

Something shimmered on the snow beyond the window. Kjell watched as a dark form coalesced out of the night. He spun, heading for the intercom to see if someone had this on surveillance video. Something stopped him.

Instead, he watched, the form twisting into that of a Night Demon. Though transparent, with no expression, Kjell swore something differed about this one, that it posed no threat.

The woman is safe. She is under our protection.

The thought filled his mind. Kjell shook his head. Surely the Night Demon wasn't speaking to him. He stared out the window, but where it had stood, only moonlit snow remained. The Night Demon's words, if that is truly what they were, circled in his mind. *Under their protection.* Yeah right. Like they were there and stopped one of those bastards from hitting Cam.

He shook his head, too tense to stay there, too numb to shift and head out. Bjorn might think he was crazy, but he had to know. If the balance shifted between the Night Demons and them, then Bjorn needed to know, as did Vik. Taking a deep breath, he hurried out of the medical room. No doubt Sigrid remained in her lab. He thought Trent might be on watch tonight, better check in with him first.

His head spun from the implications that Cam might be under the Night Demons' protection. He remembered their attacks over the canisters, the giant claw marks they'd raked into the metal containers. If some of them were on his side...Kjell lurched into a jog as he hurried to the communications room. He needed to see what those tapes showed.

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Kjell groused over that fact the entire time it took him to shift, pack up his clothes, and head back out to find Cam. Of course the tapes showed nothing. Just as he suspected they had when Cam had seen the Night Demons. Sure, she hadn't said anything to him, not directly anyway. But he had no doubt, if she was, indeed, under their protection as they said she was, then she had seen them.

And we didn't know about it. The secrecy tugged at him, made him wish that they lived in a different kind of world, one where secrets weren't the currency of the day. *I wish she'd trusted me enough to tell me.* Of everything that had happened, her getting hit, his getting shot, the simple fact that Cam hadn't trusted him enough to tell him rankled. He snorted, unable to vocalize his frustration in his bear form.

His large strides carried him across the tundra, the pack with his clothing not too heavy on his back. The need to see Cam again, to maybe even tell her of his encounter with the Night Demons pushed him. He ran, careful to keep out of sight. He skirted one scientific party, not wanting them to notice the highly-trained polar bear in their midst.

Next to the large ravine, he saw three figures. Immediately, he recognized Cam in the lead. She pointed to something off in the distance, too far for him to see. Behind her, the hulking form of Gregor loomed. Demyan brought up the rear, occasionally looking over his shoulder.

His wariness worried Kjell. Until he knew their destination, he needed to remain in bear form and out of sight. For half an hour he followed them, the scent left by her trail a lavish perfume carrying him forward. At last she stopped, dropping the pack and using an ice pick to make holes

to secure their tent. Kjell dipped back down toward the ravine, finding a bank of snow. He burrowed into it, making a small cave where he swiped a clawed-paw across the specially designed latch. His backpack tumbled into the snow. Shaking himself, he emerged looking more or less like a normal polar bear. Keeping, what he hoped, was a safe enough distance from her camp, he started to circle to find a good place to watch.

“Bear!” Gregor shouted, his deep Russian accent booming through the air.

Kjell froze. Shit. He stood his ground as the two men turned toward him.

Gregor raised his rifle.

Kjell spun. His shoulder ached, a dull throbbing that reminded him of how close he’d come to getting shot before. Turning tail and running like a scared rabbit ate at him, but he knew, in this form, he had no other choice. Bears that constantly attacked humans were labeled killers and hunted down. A “man killer” bear in the vicinity put all bears in danger. He wouldn’t bring that kind of trouble down on them.

“Wait!” Cam’s clear voice cut through the air.

“I’m not waiting you stupid bitch!” There was a thud of padded flesh against padded flesh.

Kjell fought the urge to stop, turn, and rip out Demyan’s throat.

“You bastard.” The distinctive click of a round being chambered in a gun filled the air. “Look, you hired me out here. You want to shoot a bear, you follow my orders. You wound a big male like that and you’re only going to piss him off. I don’t want to explain that one, or how both of you got mauled on my watch. Especially if you’re acting like jackasses.”

The last of her words faded away as he made it out of hearing range. He circled around, knowing he shouldn’t leave his pack where it could be found. If Gregor or Demyan decided to scout around, he needed to leave no trace.

The men must have gone back to the camp because he didn’t see anyone when he slipped into the snow cave. Lying down, he managed to wrangle the straps over his legs, and then click together the special fastening. Time to find a better place to hide. And then, find a way to slip in and check on Cam. Because he hadn’t liked hearing Demyan hit her again. No one hit his mate.

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Cam’s fingers itched to pull out the small radio she carried and call someone to pick up Gregor and Demyan and send them back to Russia for good. She couldn’t, not yet. She thought she had the information they needed, and she couldn’t stop the nagging feeling that she was needed out here, and that nothing would happen to her.

After her talking the men out of shooting the bear she retreated back to the tent. Setting up camp left her with little to do so by the time the meager bit of sunlight slipped toward the horizon, she circled the perimeter near the camp. The men sat inside, cooking more tinned meals over a small sterno flame. Their supplies would last only a couple more days. She prayed she could ditch the men then, whether, or not, they were close to civilization or not.

“Don’t move,” Kjell’s voice whispered on the wind.

Cam stopped. She turned, not quite believing she heard him. “Kjell?” She hated the hope that crept into her voice.

“Keep walking,” he ordered.

So she did. Though the land flattened out beyond the tent—they'd chosen this spot specifically for the view it offered—rocks broke through the surface of the ice, and on the other side she bet would be enough snow to make a snow cave. She surreptitiously made her way toward them, not even looking over her shoulder at their camp.

"Are you still there?" She asked after several, long moments.

"Keep walking," Kjell answered.

"You going to get me out of here? Because I'd really like that right now." She stopped, the words tumbling from her lips like some kind of confession.

Kjell sucked in a breath and glanced back at their camp. "Keep walking," he ground out. "Let me get you as far away from here as I can."

Cam nodded, her feet moving one in front of the other, though her mind focused on his words. Get her as far away as he could. Her chest tightened. She stumbled, quickly righting herself. Though it ran counter to everything she believed in and everything she strove to be, letting Kjell whisk her away held so much merit, she nearly allowed him to do that. And to hell with the mission.

She didn't. Instead, she followed him as he led her in a zigzag path away from her camp. A snow cave built in the side of a drift offered little space for one, let alone two.

"Come in," Kjell said. He lay down and wriggled himself inside.

She waited until he disappeared into the bank, and then followed, thankful that he had hollowed out a larger area past the tiny entrance. Here, blocked by the wind, and insulated by the snow, warmth surrounded her.

Kjell flung an unzipped Arctic-weight sleeping bag over her, and then started to unzip the front of his snow suit. "I have to touch you. Keep your arms in your suit. We can work around the rest."

His words fired her blood. Heat pooled low in her body, her pussy already growing slick with need. She unzipped her suit, and then her pants, working them as far down her hips as she could. For a moment, cool air surrounded her, and then Kjell moved over her, his hard cock against her thigh. His heat wrapped around her, making her toasty beneath the sleeping bag and with the snow suit beneath her. She lifted her hips, already ready for him.

Kjell kissed her. His tongue slid between her open lips, delving deep into her mouth. His bare chest pressed against her covered breasts, hot and hard above her. His hips moved against hers, his cock sliding enticingly against her thigh. Tiny moans emerged from her mouth and no matter how hard she tried to stop them, she couldn't.

Cam reached for him, half afraid to believe she'd wake up and find him gone. Spearing her fingers through his hair, she tugged off his cap and sent the hood of his parka falling away. With her other hand she reached into his snow suit and slid it down his back to his buttocks. A subtle shift of her hips and there...the head of his cock brushed against her slick folds.

She pulled away to draw a hasty breath and then nibbled kisses along his jaw. "Yes," she whispered, shifting her hips. "Please."

Her husky words must have wrapped around him for he slid into her, a single, slow thrust. He groaned, his hips flexing as he seated himself fully inside her.

Cam tightened her inner muscles around him, wanting to hold him deep inside. Though snow surrounded them, the warmth of their protective clothing and Kjell's body making it seem as if they were back in the compound. Clothing tangled around her legs and kept her from lifting her thighs along his hips. Braced on his gloved hands, Kjell rested inside her.

"I'll never get enough of this." His lips ground down on hers, a hard and bruising kiss as he pulled away. He plunged into her again, his low moan loud enough to echo in their small snow cave.

She clung to him, fearing that their sounds of passion would carry beyond the snow bank. Not only would the sexual liaison be hard to explain, but no doubt her clients would think Kjell some kind of spy. And in a way, he was. She thrust harder, needing to feel his cock stroking deep inside her. Though she had no doubts her assignment would end soon, she had no idea how long it'd be before she saw him again.

"So good," she whispered against his lips. Her body tightened, drawn tight on the precipice between lust and release. Her orgasm drew near, her body needing everything that he could give her. One more thrust and she came hard and fast, her sheath convulsing around him, drawing him even closer to his own release.

She pressed her face against his shoulder, mouthing his skin to keep from crying out. Still, Kjell pounded into her. As she came around him, he thrust even harder, faster, a punishing pace that she relished. The tightness of their clothing only trapped him closer against her, and soon, she crested the wave once more.

"Cam," Kjell growled. His body temperature ratcheted up, so hot she feared they'd melt the snow cave around them. Each long slide of his cock caressed the perfect place high inside her. She clung to him, her fingers curling into his buttocks to hold him to her.

With a groan, he came. Hot splashes of his seed filled her. He held himself rigid above her, his cock twitching deep inside. With a sigh, he hovered like that for a moment and then rolled aside so they could hastily refasten their clothing. She had been warmer skin to skin.

She caught sight of a scar, puckered and red, across his shoulder as he shrugged back into his clothing. She opened her mouth to ask about it and then closed it again. Whatever had happened, he was fine now, and she shouldn't worry. She finished zipping her snow suit. "You should go," she said, not knowing if her absence had been missed yet, and fearing it would at any moment.

Kjell nodded.

"When—?" She snapped her mouth closed. Out here, she dare not ask that kind of question. "I'll get these guys headed back to Russia as soon as possible. I think they're mostly done." With those words, she wiggled out of the snow cave. And when she stood outside it, she paused to stare once more at the hole in the snow bank before heading back to camp. A moment's respite from her mission. They both had work to do, and right now, she wished more than ever she could finish up hers and get back to the compound, and to Kjell.

Chapter Nine

Somehow Cam had made it back to their camp undetected and the night passed without incident. Considering that her thoughts were focused on Kjell, she wondered how she'd even managed to form a coherent sentence. Her body hummed from his lovemaking and she longed to get back to the compound. The only thing that made this trek bearable was sensing Gregor softening towards her, maybe thinking she was just some dumb guide pulled out to this assignment. Cam worked with the perception, not wanting it to change. She shielded her eyes as they searched.

The new scar on Kjell's shoulder bugged her. It hadn't been there the last time they'd made love. She was sure of that. In fact, she hadn't recalled anything that might have caused the jagged wound, at least not in her recent memory. The puckering around the scar looked old, at least a few weeks. Pursing her lips, Cam paused. Maybe it had happened before she'd arrived. But then how the hell had she missed the scar before?

Because you were too focused on his abs and cock. The droll thought put a smile on Cam's face. True, learning every inch of his body hadn't been her top priority. The only inches she'd been concerned about were a certain eight to nine. His shoulders, aside from hanging onto, hadn't merited too much observation. She'd have to remedy that. As soon as she returned to the compound, she'd stretch Kjell out on her bunk and study every inch of his body. Just to be sure he didn't have any other scars she hadn't noticed.

Cam's smile quickly twisted into a frown. That scar hadn't been there before. She knew it. Deep in her gut, the place that told her to turn away from a track to find a bear and she did, she knew. And the scar looked like a gunshot wound. She'd seen more than a few during her military service. A graze from a big bullet, the size to bring down...she refused to finish the thought.

Cam stumbled. She quickly righted herself, but not before she earned a scowl from Demyan. The memory of a big bear, brought down on an icy beach filled her memory. Red blood marred its coat; death turned its eyes glassy. The form shimmered, wavered like heat waves until it twisted into the form of a naked man. Still dead from her bullet. She drew a harsh breath.

Giving a small shake of her head, she shoved the memory aside. Right now she had no place for it, not with Gregor and Demyan breathing down her neck about shooting a bear and the guys back at the compound counting on her to do something. A depression in the snow caught her attention. Kneeling, she brushed a few stray flakes away from the print.

A male polar bear. And if she didn't mistake the distance between the prints, he limped. Shit.

"What'd you find?" Gregor's voice drew Cam out of her reverie.

“Tracks.” Lying would be useless, at this rate anyway. And she’d dissuaded the guys enough that doing so again would only make them suspect her. She checked them again, noting their direction. “Male polar bear, possibly wounded.” She stood.

“We’re going after it.” Demyan unstrapped his rifle and rested the stock against his shoulder. “I’m tired of waiting.” He strode forward, his boots nearly obscuring the prints.

“Yes, we are. But you’re waiting for me. You damn neared stepped on the prints.” Cam grabbed Demyan’s shoulder.

The Russian whirled around, bringing the gun with him. He swung it down, pointing it directly at Cam’s chest. A smile curved the corner of his thin, bloodless lips. “Unless we go after you first.” He shrugged.

Cam stilled. Looking down the barrel of a rifle was never her cup of tea, but she remained unflinching. “You can shoot me and follow the tracks, but if they disappear, I might be the only chance you have of finding a polar bear.” She kept her words, and her breathing, nice and steady.

Demyan shrugged. “You’ve not helped us with that before. In fact, I think we’ve seen polar bears and you’ve kept us from shooting them. So tell me, what is to keep me from shooting you?”

“Demyan!” Gregor’s sharp retort cut across the ice like the crack of a rifle shot.

“What?” Demyan shrugged. “You think we shouldn’t shoot the bitch guide? She’s not done what we’ve paid her to do. So she deserves a little punishment.”

“We can’t do this.” Gregor stepped forward.

Demyan held out his hand, stopping his partner. “We can’t. But I can.” He chambered a round.

Cam swallowed hard. If a bright flash and this crystal-blue sky were to be the last things she’d see, well at least she’d die in the Arctic, in the one place where she’d felt at home. *If I do die, then I’m sorry I never told you how I feel, Kjell.* She tamped down her thoughts. “The bear went that way.” She jerked her shoulder in the direction of the tracks. “Do you want me to lead you there or not?”

The tip of the gun wavered.

Cam focused on it, struggling to keep her hope in check. Maybe today, she wouldn’t die. Funny how facing death in the military differed from this. There she expected to die, figured the enemy would find her sooner or later, so she had to become a better shot. And she had. Here, unable to reach her weapons in time, she’d die just like the animals they hunted. Defenseless. Senselessly. Irony or something, she figured.

The gun dropped. “One more chance. You find us a bear. We shoot it. And you live.” Demyan turned and followed the tracks.

Cam breathed a sigh of relief. She followed the men, quickly moving out to the side and then ahead of them while they followed the bear tracks. Her mind whirled, trying to

find a way to get her out of there. Contacting Kjell might work. He'd move heaven and earth to get her reassigned if he thought she was in grave danger. Presumably Vik knew the risks. As did she.

She stopped, certain that if they went just a little farther they'd find the bear. The tracks grew deeper as the bear's gait slowed. The little blur on the left hind track announced the bear's wounded state. Her stomach churned and she prayed that if they did encounter a wounded bear, that it would be so incapacitated that shooting it would be a mercy. Pressured by the men at her back, she hurried forward.

The trio ascended a small rise. Cam stopped. She checked the tracks.

"There!" Demyan punctuated his growl by raising his rifle.

Cam stood, careful to keep out of the Russians' way. There, a distance away, shuffled a large polar bear. True to the tracks, it dragged its left hind leg behind it, and although she saw no visible wound at this distance, her mind easily filled in the blanks. They stood downwind.

"Let's move closer. You'll have a better shot that way." Without waiting for an answer, Cam stepped forward. She drew her own rifle, not to shoot the bear, but to make sure she could protect herself in case the guys tried something.

Demyan grunted and followed her, Gregor close behind. Of the two men, she preferred Gregor. He seemed more businesslike, as if whatever they were doing was routine to him. Less prone to temper and with a matter-of-fact attitude, he'd make a good sniper.

The bear lumbered to its feet. Swinging its head, it turned to scan the area.

Cam dropped into a crouch, already sighting down the scope of her rifle. She held her breath. Still downwind, the bear couldn't have scented them. Not yet. Too close though, and out of the corner of her eye, she watched Demyan's finger go to the trigger.

"Wait for it," she growled.

"And get mauled? I don't think so."

Gregor's heavy hand rested on Demyan's shoulder. "She's right. He hasn't seen us yet. Let's go closer. The kill will be better that way."

Better how? Cam refused to ask the question. Maybe because they would have a closer, and thus, cleaner shot. Maybe because they could look the bear in the eyes. Hell, she didn't know, and frankly, she didn't want to. Acting as a military sniper was one thing, at least then the target was clear-cut and the gains easy to determine. Take out the really bad guy, ensure the mission is a success, be the quiet and unknown, hero. Here, killing bears—her stomach churned.

At her nod they crept closer. Still on their feet, lying flat out would be a dangerous situation with the bear so close. She drew a deep breath. *Forgive me, bear. I do not mean*

you any harm. But this is my job, and if I don't fulfill it, they'll kill me. Law of the wild. I'm sure you'd understand.

A strange howling surrounded her. Shivers darted down Cam's spine.

"What the hell?" Demyan's head swiveled as he looked around, a wild look in his eyes.

Gregor grunted, though his rifle remained steady.

Cam stiffened, watching the bear. It, too, halted in its tracks, eyes wide. No fear, just a calm acceptance filled the beast, and she wondered if it came from their presence or the noise.

Night Demons? She swallowed hard, careful to scan for any dark shapes materializing on the frozen snow pack. None appeared, and she held up her rifle.

The howling intensified.

The hairs on her arms and the back of her neck rose. Her gut tightened, and she had the sinking feeling that one of them wasn't getting out of this alive. She clung to the memory of the Night Demon reaching out to her. Surely if it made such a gesture then they wouldn't attack her here. At least, she hoped not.

The bear rose onto its hind legs and pawed the air. Its leg crumpled beneath it, sprawling it onto the snow.

"That's it." Demyan scooted forward, heedless of anyone else. He leveled the gun and fired.

The report of the shot echoed across the tundra.

Demyan fell forward.

The shot went wide.

"Fuck," he snarled. He whirled around, ejecting the cartridge and bringing another bullet into the chamber.

Cam blinked. Whatever had pushed him sent Demyan a good ten feet from where he stood. Both she and Gregor had remained behind, and though she curled her fingers in her gloves, she knew she hadn't shoved Demyan. Apparently Gregor hadn't either, because he took a step back.

Demyan stumbled again. He flung himself to the ground with a grunt, the tip of his rifle diving down into the snow. "Shit." He yanked his gun free. Standing, he brushed snow from his knees. "What the hell—?" He spun around, as if someone had punched him in the jaw. His fingers opened, his rifle tumbling to the ground.

The bear stood completely still.

Gregor turned to her. "What's going on?"

"I don't know." Her heart hammered in her chest. Cam could guess, had guessed, that they faced Night Demons, though she didn't know for sure. "I don't know."

Demyan lay still on the ground, muttered curses spewing from his lips.

Cam debated her next course of action. With the guys still here, turning and leaving wasn't an option. *Give me some sign of what to do.* She sent the thought at the Night Demons, though she had no idea how, or if, they communicated.

A sense of calm descended over her. *Wait.* The thought filled her, made her relax her grip on the gun.

The howling intensified. Forms materialized, as dark and foreboding as Kjell had described them. The Night Demons—Cam knew they were nothing else—rose out of the snow, as inky black as the tundra was white. Their great maws boasted sharp, pointed teeth. Their long-fingered hands ended in wicked looking talons. And their attention focused not on Cam, but on Gregor and Demyan.

Gregor screamed. He turned, bringing his rifle to bear on them and fired several, rapid shots. Demyan did the same, shifting his attention from the bear to fire at them. The bullets passed through, a hole, like dissipating smoke, opening in them before swirling closed once more.

The Night Demons advanced. Cam hurried back, going down and away from the two men. She had no plans, no desire to fight their battle, and frankly, if the Night Demons rendered them limb from limb as the stories Kjell had told indicated, she didn't care. Not one bit.

Cam dropped to the tundra, not wanting to be in the way of the many bullets Demyan and Gregor were firing. The polar bear grunted. Rising to its feet, it shook itself, and then ran full-tilt across the snow. A slight trace of a limp, more of an afterthought, showed in the bear's gait. Maybe adrenaline masked the animal's normal pain responses.

She didn't have time to think about it, because moments later, men emerged on the far side of the frozen valley. They moved with precision, guns held ready. Five men, all dressed in military Arctic camouflage snow suits.

A shiver wound down her spine. Kjell. Deep in her gut, she knew it was him, and knew he walked right into a fight with the Night Demons. She opened her mouth, intending to call out a warning.

The first Night Demon turned toward her. *We will not hurt them.* The form wavered and dissipated, followed by the other two.

"Halt!" Kjell's voice tore across the snow.

"Fuck you," Demyan shouted back. He raised his rifle and fired.

Cam stood, suddenly in her domain. Far away from the men, there was no doubt Kjell's team would miss her. She only had to worry about the Russians. She trained her gun on them, ready to fire if necessary. She suspected Kjell's team had other orders. Ones that she hadn't been given and the prospect pissed her off a little.

A shot rang out. Demyan dropped, cursing. Blood, from a wound low down on his abdomen, splattered his suit. He clamped his hand over it, red liquid seeping between his gloved fingers. At these temperatures, he'd be damn lucky if it didn't freeze.

Gregor tossed his gun to the ground. He lifted his hands in the classic surrender position. "Don't shoot. We're just hunting. Tell them, Cam. Tell them."

She strode closer, still keeping the gun trained on Gregor. She ignored Demyan. Aside from basic first aid, and really, she doubted pressure and compression would help him with a gut wound, there wasn't a whole heck of a lot she could do.

Cam paused, unsure whether to tip her hand or not. Her peripheral vision picked up the Night Demons materializing again. One of them howled, the eerie sound filling the air. She shivered. "I thought they said I'd be safe," she muttered.

Her gun sat heavy in her hand, still pointed at Gregor. On the ground, Demyan moaned. Her conscience would never forgive her if she left him to die. She went to him, dropping to her knees beside him. She lowered her pack to the ground and rummaged around for a towel. She grabbed it and flattened it on his stomach, applying pressure to the wound.

"Thought you were with them," Demyan croaked. "Figured you'd shoot me." He cackled a laugh. A small trickle of blood dripped from the corner of his mouth.

Cam kept her mouth shut and pushed down on the towel. "Hold this!" She lifted Demyan's hands and clamped them over the towel. Praying that helping Demyan wouldn't get her killed, she shouldered her pack once more.

Silence, sporadically broken by the howls of the Night Demons, filled the air. Kjell and his men waited well within rifle range, their attention split between the apparitions and the men.

A stalemate. Cam snarled, inaction driving her crazy. Her fingers flexed around the rifle she'd picked back up again. Finger itching to curl around the trigger. Except that's not how snipers acted and she lacked targets. Taking out Gregor or Demyan might satisfy her for a moment, but only for a moment, and the guilt of taking a life would weigh on her. Demyan might be a bastard. He didn't deserve to die.

Somebody do something. Snow crunched beneath her boots as she took a step toward Kjell and his men. She waited for the Night Demons to move. They didn't. She took one deep breath, then another. Gregor still held his hands above his head, though he, too, started looking warily around. If these guys knew she knew, let alone slept with, one of the military men...well, she doubted she'd make it out of here alive.

"Who are you?" she called in a loud voice. "What do you want?"

At her words, Kjell and his men rushed forward.

Gregor dropped his arms. He pointed his weapon at them, fingers already on the trigger.

One of the guys, she thought it might have been Bjorn, fired.

Gregor dropped, the red blossoming stain on his chest a silent testament to Bjorn's accuracy. His eyes turned glassy. His head lolled to the side, and his gaze captured Cam's. "I was the good guy," he rasped, then fell silent.

Keeping up pretences, Cam let her gun point in a neutral position. She waited, wanting the guys to come to her, to explain just what the hell they were doing out here. Anger, as thick and vicious as the blood pouring out of Gregor, welled up deep inside her. Gregor had been right. Between him and Demyan, he'd been the better man. And he'd been about to shoot the man she loved.

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As soon as Vik gave the word to stop Cam's operation, Kjell hustled Bjorn and the guys out there as fast as he could. Bjorn let him lead, and silently Kjell thanked his friend. While Kjell knew Bjorn would do everything to bring Cam back safely, he liked knowing that her safety lay mostly in his hands.

The Night Demons changed everything. They just stood there, wailing, like they waited for something or someone. He scowled at the dead man, wondering if Vik would be too angry that they lost one. His last words, "I was the good guy" made Kjell wonder if they'd shot the right man.

At Bjorn's nod, he rushed forward, heading straight for Cam. She dropped her weapon, figuring out that she didn't need to pretend anymore. "Kjell," she said, her voice a ragged sob. He opened his arms, and she ran into them, pressing her cheek against his chest.

Damn protocol, he held her, crushing her against his hard frame. Inside, his bear roared with possessiveness. No more. He longed to drag her back to the compound and make love to her for a week.

Bjorn coughed from a distance away.

Kjell released her and stepped back. "You okay? You didn't get hurt?" He eyed the blood on her gloves, though he guessed it came from the fallen man.

"I'm fine." Something cold and hard glinted in her eyes. She glanced at Bjorn, watching him secure Demyan on a make-shift travois. Trent wrapped the other man's body in a tarp. They had a hell of a lot of baggage to bring back to the compound. At least Vik had sent men there to pick the Russians up, so they wouldn't be staying long.

The Night Demons remained. He clenched his fist, memories of his earlier fights with them still fresh in his mind. "Vik said to tell you good work," he said, turning his focus back to Cam. It felt eerie, damn eerie, with the Night Demons watching, but let them.

"Thanks," she said.

Something had shifted between them, like a piece of sea ice breaking off and floating into the ocean, and he had no idea whether he liked it or not. He reached out to her,

letting his hand drop back to his side. "We have a vehicle waiting. It won't be long until we return to the compound." At her curt nod, he turned and went back to the team.

Only to find out he wasn't needed.

The twins helped Bjorn secure the wounded man, while Trent took care of the corpse. He turned back to Cam and found her staring at the Night Demons. The rapt expression on her face sent shivers down his spine. He strode toward her, moving carefully as if he stalked a seal. He didn't want to be seen, not if it would turn the Night Demons' wrath against him. He stopped beside Cam.

She didn't acknowledge his presence.

A buzzing, like white noise, tickled the edges of his awareness. He sensed words, felt like they were just out of hearing range, which was silly because he clearly heard the guys working with the two Russians and the slight gusts of wind. His ursine hearing picked up more than the human ears ever could. He sniffed. Nothing smelled out of the ordinary.

"You talking to them?" he whispered.

Her head jerked once, a nod in the affirmative.

"What are they saying?" He stared at the Night Demons, noticing these looked less fearsome than the ones they fought. Maybe it was because their pointed teeth and clawed hands weren't being used on him or his men. Or maybe it was because they talked to Cam and didn't attack her. "Can I talk to them?"

Cam tilted her head, listening. "No. You have another you talk to." Her brow furrowed. She turned to face him. "What does that mean?"

His bear. He stiffened, his body running hot and cold at the prospect of revealing his true nature to her. "I don't know," he lied. *Yes you do.* His bear chided him for lying to his mate. If he shifted, and she rejected him, he couldn't take that. Not right now. Not with so much shit happening between the Russians and the Night Demons. Besides, Vik specifically brought her here because of her background. She had *hunted* polar bears. He knew that now. Her military sniper training had been but one facet of her beautiful and deadly personality.

Cam shook her head. "I can't," she said out loud. "No!"

He touched her shoulder. "What is it?" Damn it, standing on the outside of a private conversation bugged him. He waited for her answer, and when she remained silent, he backed a step away. "We have to go." A glance over his shoulder showed the men making the final preparations to go back to the vehicle. "Come on."

Cam held up her hand, stilling him. A frown marred her beautiful features, a sadness so profound in her eyes he wanted to wrap her up in his arms and never let go. His bear chafed, not knowing what affected his mate, only that something did. A cry, half-sob, half-moan, left her throat, and she pressed her gloved hand against her ski mask to still it. "You don't understand," she whispered, the words wrought with anguish. She swallowed hard and squared her shoulders. He watched her composure return, figured it was part of

her inner strength and military training, that removed all trace of sorrow from her face. She turned and nodded. "I'm ready."

"Let's go," Kjell said. He welcomed her presence as she fell into step beside him. His bear rumbled the truth. No matter what happened, Cam needed to know everything, just as he needed to know the same about her.

Chapter Ten

Cam paced the small conference room the unit used for debriefing. Aside from a long table with eight chairs, which made her wonder who else came out here and why, and a media-type center with a large white board and television with a built-in DVD player, she had nothing at which to look. No windows gave her a view of the tundra. A few network jacks were situated low on the wall behind one of the end chairs, probably for someone to plug into the compound's network. Other than that, she had nothing but white walls.

And she hated it.

The guys were having some sort of powwow. She'd seen the look pass between Bjorn and Kjell, a I-need-to-talk-to-you sort of look. There'd been discussions of a phone call to Vik, of communicating with the team to come take Gregor's body and Demyan away. Demyan's bullet wound had missed his internal organs. If it hadn't, he'd be dead instead of cursing at them in Russian all the way back to the compound. Her stomach churned thinking about bringing the poacher here. There'd been no other choice, aside from leaving him to die and become polar bear food. While she appreciated the irony, apparently Demyan's demise hadn't been in the mission plans.

The door opened. Kjell strode through and solemnly closed the door behind him. He pulled out a chair at the end of the table, probably not his usual seat and sat. He gestured for her to do the same.

Cam remained standing. "I could have put the men in a better position for a raid if I'd known of your plans." She crossed her arms over her chest. "You realize we killed the wrong man. Leaving Demyan alive is going to bite us in the ass."

Kjell sighed and raked his fingers through his short, white-blond hair. "Yeah, I know. Vik ripped us a new one. Apparently he would have preferred to have Gregor."

"For what?" The question popped from her lips.

"Intelligence. Fact finding. Debriefing. Like you said, we left the wrong guy alive and pissed off at us." Kjell flattened his hands on the table and stared at his spread fingers. "We need to know everything you know about the Night Demons. You were having a conversation with them. One of them tried to talk to me."

"And what did it say? That you're an insufferable jackass who needs to tell a valuable member of your team what is happening so she doesn't get shot?" Cam's voice rose. She breathed deeply, trying to bring her anger under control. "And speaking of getting shot, how did you get that scar on your shoulder. It looks fresh. Like you were grazed with a bullet." Speaking the words out loud built the truth in her mind. She knew. Until now, she refused to believe. "Like we shot that polar bear."

Kjell's eyes widened. "Let's make a deal. You tell me what you know about the Night Demons, what they said to you, and I will tell you what they said to me and then explain the scar." He held out his hand. "Deal?"

Cam stared at his outstretched hand. Did Kjell really think she was going to shake it like they were transacting business? Frowning, she stepped forward and pulled out a chair. She sank into it, getting the feeling that this wasn't going to be a quick, or easy, conversation. She nodded. "Deal." She lunged across the table and kissed his cheek, a far better way, in her mind, to seal the deal.

She pulled away, ignoring the heat filling her limbs at the brush of her lips against his stubbly cheek. Sitting down, she tamped down her arousal. Right now she needed the truth more than she needed sex.

"You first," Kjell ordered.

"Fine," Cam grumbled. "I don't know much. The Night Demons want me to convey information to you. Apparently they can't talk to you or the other guys and Sigrid doesn't leave the compound long enough for them to talk to her." She drew a deep breath, trying to sort her thoughts. "I haven't been told much. Just that not all Night Demons are evil and you are doing good work in going after the corporation dumping the pollution. They call it drugging energy. Apparently it does something to them."

"I think we saw that during the attacks," Kjell muttered. "Did they say why they can't talk to me or Bjorn?" His brow furrowed. He clenched his hands on the table in front of him and leaned forward. Tension radiated from the taut lines of his arms and shoulders.

He's hiding something from me. "You already talk to someone else." Cam sat back, her gut tightening. She schooled her expression, knowing she couldn't give away the puzzle pieces of her thoughts. The picture they made created a truth she didn't want to hear.

"I see."

"Maybe it's Vik or EUFOR?" Cam tossed out the question even though she suspected the true answer.

Kjell shrugged. "They say anything else?"

"No. Mostly they tell me that I'm not supposed to fear them. That the attacks on you aren't of their doing. And I am to continue my runs, continue listening, because they can help you find out the truth." She sank back in her chair, relieved to finally have told him everything. "That's it."

"That's it?" Kjell frowned and released his hands. He sat back in his chair. "That's all they want to tell us?"

"Yeah. I'm sorry it wasn't more. I'm a bit underwhelmed myself." Cam reached for him. Resting her hand on his arm, she stroked him with her fingers. "I won't keep things from you. So, I guess it's your turn to tell me about your scar." She brushed her fingers across the back of his hand, and then pulled her hand away.

Kjell grabbed it and squeezed her fingers. "Why don't you come outside?" He brought her hand to his mouth and kissed it, a warm, sensuous brush of his lips across the backs of her knuckles. Releasing her hand, he shoved back his chair and stood. "You'll know

everything once we get outside.” He strode from the room, the door closing behind him before she could answer.

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Cam battled trepidation as she stepped outside to find Bjorn and Sigrid standing to one side. Kjell stood straight in front of her, a short distance away from the others. Closing the compound door behind her, Cam took as deep a breath as the cold air would allow.

“You said you’d tell me everything outside. Is there a reason why we’re not warm for this conversation?” She’d meant the words as a joke, a way to diffuse her own worry and fear over the fact that she may have been right. She couldn’t figure out how to work polar bears into the conversation.

“I will. Thank you for meeting me out here.” Nervousness radiated from Kjell in waves, so at odds to his hunky in-charge exterior, she wondered what could be so awful. *Except he knows my past. He might think I’d shoot him or something.* She crossed her arms, tucking her hands beneath them to try and stay warm. *I wouldn’t do that. I don’t do that anymore.*

Silence stretched between them. Bjorn wrapped an arm around Sigrid, a protective gesture that set Cam’s nerves on edge.

“There’s a reason why I have the scar on my arm,” Kjell finally said. He pulled the zipper down on his snow suit. “It’s the same reason why I was able to follow you and the Russians while you were tracking the bear.” He stepped out of his snow suit.

Cam opened her mouth, and then shut it. Surely he knew the dangers of the cold weather, and while it wasn’t brutal winter cold, the temps still were low enough to cause frostbite. He toed off his boots and stepped onto a small rug that had been placed to cushion his feet from the snow.

“If you’re doing what I think you’re doing, I’ve seen it before,” she blurted. Maybe if she stopped him, she could continue in ignorance and delude herself that Kjell was just a man.

Kjell smiled. “I don’t think you’ve seen this.”

But I have. She drew a breath to protest his words, and the sight of Kjell’s bare chest stopped her. She hungrily devoured the sight, following the trail of blonde hair down beneath the waistband of his long underwear. Those, too, he stripped, and for a moment, she had a glimpse of his glorious naked form. Then, he shimmered.

“No,” she whispered. Memories slammed into her, of a man naked on a Canadian shore, blood rushing from a bullet wound in his chest. Of turning, and fleeing, not wanting to be branded a murderess, when she’d only been legally hunting bear. “Oh god.” She pulled her gloved fist to her mouth, stifling her pained moan. “It can’t be.”

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Kjell watched distress flash across Cam's face and wished like hell he could take this stupid stunt back. Maybe he should have lied about a training mission. Except he couldn't do that to Cam. Not when she meant so much to him. Deep inside, his bear relished the thought of showing off for his mate.

An instant of cold flashed through his body before his bear form took over. Instantly, thick pads on his paws shielded his feet from the tundra. His fur captured the warmth and enabled him to survive such brutal temperatures. Instantly, he scented her, so soft and sweet compared to the smell of Bjorn's bear and Sigrid's antiseptic lab smell. His body tensed and he curled his claws into the hard-packed snow.

Her gasp echoed around him. She shook her head, though it wasn't disbelief he saw on her face. She acted almost apologetic, as if she faced some kind of memory she didn't want to remember. *It's okay.* His ursine mouth couldn't form the words or speak, and he wondered if walking up to her and wrapping her in his front legs would scare the hell out of her. He understood her past, that she used to be a wildlife guide. If she remembered all the bears or other game she helped kill, he wished he could erase the pain from her.

He couldn't. He could only stand there and hope she didn't run away. His mouth gaped into a sharp-toothed grin, and he quickly closed it. *I'm here. It's me.* He remained in one place, muscles trembling beneath the thick fur praying she wouldn't turn away.

Her soft gasp halted his thoughts. Her hand dropped slowly to her side, and she took one step forward. Then another one.

"May I?" she asked Bjorn.

"Move slowly. He's still in there. I'm sure he wouldn't do anything to hurt you, but sometimes the bear takes over. You'll be safe. It's not like you haven't seen a bear before." Kjell heard the smile in his commanding officer's voice. Yeah, if anyone knew how to keep a bear calm, it had to be Cam.

"Thank you," she whispered. Her boots crunched against the snow. The rustle of nylon as her arms brushed against her sides in the snow suit filled his ears. Such soft sounds, and yet powerful ones, because they meant she moved towards him and not away.

She stopped an arm's length away and stared at him. Behind her scarf, he saw her lips part. "I've seen—But I've never..." She lifted her hand and then let it fall back to her side.

Kjell tilted his head in what he hoped was an inviting gesture. He curled his claws into the snow in an attempt to resist the urge to lift his paws and invite her forward. Instead, he waited for her to make the first move, and hoped like hell she did.

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Cam stared at Kjell, as a bear, for a moment. Her heart pounded. Her breath came in quick pants. Both were the classic signs of fear, and instinctively, Cam struggled to tamp them down. Except, if Kjell remained aware in his polar bear form as Bjorn said, and she kept her head about her, she'd be fine. She took a deep breath, relaxing the tension out of

her body. All her years of hunting polar bears, and with the exception of the kill, she'd never been this close. Curiosity flared to the surface and suppressed her fear.

One step, two, her feet moved one in front of the other until she stood by Kjell's shoulder. His hot breath blew against the hip of her snow suit, warmth seeping through the layers to her skin. Slowly, not wanting to startle him, but dying to feel, she pulled off her glove. It dropped to the snow.

She stroked Kjell's fur, marveling at the soft texture of the hollow guard hairs. This close, she saw his black skin, and it radiated warmth as it drew heat from the sun. She pulled off her second glove to get a better feel. His long hairs hid her hands as she tunneled her fingers through his fur. She stayed near his shoulder and ruff, not wanting to hit a ticklish spot.

Kjell lifted his head. He closed his eyes, a low rumbling sound coming from his chest. Rubbing his head against her hand, he clearly told her without words that he wanted her to stroke him.

"I've never..." In her mind, she'd imagined herself as a polar bear, running across the tundra. When she hunted, she knew she cultivated her predatory instincts, and in doing so, longed to take a carnivorous form. Closing her eyes, she lowered her head to his fur and sniffed his musk. She rested her cheek against the top of his shoulders, wishing, just for a crazy moment that she could sit astride him and ride. To cling to his ruff, feeling his powerful muscles moving beneath her. Just the mental images took her breath away.

And this close, she had no doubt the powerful muscles all bears possessed. Kjell stood like a statue, and she ran her hands downward, over his shoulders, venturing along his top line and to his abdomen. Every inch of him was packed hard with solid muscle, just like the man. No flab, no blubber. In the wild, though he stood larger than most male polar bears, he'd probably be considered on the leaner side. No doubt his human form made up for his more streamlined appearance.

She lifted her attention to find Bjorn and Sigrid watching her. The scientist wore a soft expression on her face.

"Are you?" Cam asked, thinking the scientist might be remembering doing much the same thing to Bjorn.

He nodded. "I am. We all are."

"I see." Her past washed over her with the shame of hunting and tracking these great creatures. Sure, much of her work had been done for camera crews, the only shooting that occurred was that of the photographic kind. That she'd taken assignments such as the one for Demyan and Gregor haunted her.

Kjell turned his head and rested his muzzle against her hip.

Cam patted his broad head, wanting oh so much to ruffle his small ears. She didn't, thinking that might not be the thing to do to any polar bear. She heard the rustle of snow

suits and when she looked up, Bjorn and Sigrid had gone inside, leaving her alone. She guessed they deemed it safe enough.

“This is amazing. You are amazing,” she whispered, hoping that he understood the words. Impulsively, she crouched down in front of him and wrapped her arms around his neck. Pressing her face against his chest, she hugged him, wanting to surround herself with him. “Can I call you my teddy bear?” Through her scarf, she pressed a kiss to the cool tip of his nose.

His form shimmered. Cam released him. She backed away, wanting to give him room to return to his human form. She watched as his bear form seemed to fade away, lifting into his human one. Though his outline remained blurred, she sensed him there, molecules and atoms rearranging to become human once more. When his body focused, he stood naked. Quickly, he scooped up his clothes and started to put them on. When at last he was attired for the climate, he grinned at her.

“Yes, you can call me your teddy bear.” Kjell held out his hand. “And you’re the one who is amazing.”

“You heard me?” She rushed into his arms and hugged him to her. Fitting her head just beneath his chin, she closed her eyes. “You really could understand?”

“Yeah, I could.” He flattened his hand on her back and swept it down to her buttocks, pulling her against him. “You have no idea what it means that you accept my other form.”

She smiled against his chest. “I do. I—” Standing here, wrapped in his arms, didn’t seem to be the right time to reveal everything about her past. She accepted his bear. The problem was, she had no idea if he’d accept the fact that she murdered one of his own. Drawing a deep breath, she shivered and blamed it on the cold. “Can we go in?”

“Yes.” His voice rumbled through her, and though he pulled her against his side, he didn’t release her as they went back into the compound. Once inside, they shed snowsuits and protective outer clothing, silent the entire time. He reached for her and tucked her against him as they walked down the hall. To his room or hers, she wondered, and didn’t have long to wait before Kjell opened the door to his room. It had been closer.

He closed the door behind him, and Cam’s heart thudded. She flattened her palm against his chest, expecting him to turn and pin her against the door. He didn’t. Instead, he led her to the bed, sat down, and then pulled her into his lap. Kjell ran his fingers through her hair and pulled her to him for a long, leisurely kiss.

Cam snuggled against him. Closing her eyes, she opened her mouth beneath his and invited him deeper. No walls. No barriers between them. Just her, and him, together, naked, and loving each other. That sounded so good, and until he knew the truth, she’d cling to the illusion that created.

His heavy shirt bunched beneath her hands. Curling her fingers around the olive drab fabric, she tugged at it until she freed it from his pants. A bit of fumbling and her palm flattened on his smooth, bare back. Cam gave a tiny moan.

The kiss deepened. Kjell cupped her breast, his thumb massaging her nipple. Leaning into his touch, Cam gave herself over to the magic of his hands and mouth. Though she remained clothed, each caress drew her sensual pleasure higher. For long moments, she simply kissed him, reveling in his human form, in the fact that he held her. The fact he allowed her to see him as a bear moved her. Deep inside, she knew he probably hadn't done that for any other woman.

At last their lips parted. "Kjell," she sighed his name as she shifted on his lap.

He lay back on the bed, taking her with him. A bit of adjustment, and she straddled his lean hips. Rearing back, she pulled off her sweater and silk camisole then reached behind her to unhook her bra.

Kjell groaned as the pale blue silk fell away, leaving her torso naked. He reached for her, using both hands to cup her breasts and brush his thumbs across her nipples. Such a soft action, one that made her feel wanted and cherished. She tugged at his shirt, getting him to bend enough so she could pull it over his head. When his chest was naked, she leaned forward to press her bare breasts against his skin.

A happy sigh bubbled from the back of her throat. Cam rubbed against him, working her way down his body until her knees slid to the floor. She knelt between his legs and flipped open the buttons on his pants. Sitting back, she untied his boots. She pulled first one, then the other, off, before sliding his pants down his legs. His underwear followed until he lay there naked.

"Shouldn't you do the same?" Kjell gestured to her pants and boots.

Cam shrugged. Being dressed while he was naked put the power in her hands, and she planned to use it. She stood over him, her hands braced on either side of his hips. His cock jutted at her, thick and hard. A drop of fluid emerged from the head, and Cam lowered herself to lick it off.

Kjell groaned. He reached for her, his fingers tangling in her hair for a moment, before falling back to the mattress. "Do it. Suck me."

His order vibrated through her body, settling low in her sex. Her clit throbbed. Her slick labia ached for his touch. Cam drew a harsh breath. She waited, wanting to draw out this moment. Her gaze caught and held his, the arousal in the vivid blue depths of his eyes making her give a little moan. Slowly, so slowly that she thought she might shatter from it, she lowered her mouth to his shaft. She covered the head with tiny licks, wanting to drive him as crazy as he did her.

Kjell held himself still, not reaching for her or clenching his fingers in the comforter. Instead, he watched her, his gaze hot enough to tighten her nipples into tiny points.

Her harsh, panting breaths echoed in the room around them. Finally, she wrapped her lips around the tip of him and took him into her mouth. The salty heat of him rested on her tongue, filling her, making her think of a deeper penetration.

Fondling his balls, Cam continued taking him until her lips rested against his base. She relaxed her throat, allowing him to just slip past, and this time, he groaned. His hips flexed and pushed him deeper.

Cam pulled back. She lost track of the motion, only knew drops of his salty essence fell onto her tongue and tasted like ambrosia in her mouth. Somehow, she had to find a way to show him how much his revelation meant to her. Not that she figured a blow job would, but it was a start, a very delicious one at that.

Beneath her, his hips bucked. The deeper she took him, the more she swirled her tongue around that little bundle of nerves, and she sensed his struggle to keep from fucking her mouth. At last, she pulled her lips away, their absence making a little popping noise. She rose and crawled back onto the bed, then over his body. His greedy hands reached for her and he curled his fingers into her buttocks. He found her slick heat and traced his index finger along her labia.

Cam moaned. All plans for seduction flew from her mind. Instead of going to his mouth as planned, she settled back against his hips, his cock riding the crease between her buttocks.

“Need to be inside you.” His fingers tightened on her hips and he thrust. “Damn, you’re so wet.” One hand fell between her thighs and his fingers found her vaginal opening. He dipped his fingers into her once, twice, and then strummed her clitoris.

Cam moaned. Tiny whimpers erupted from her throat. Shuddering, she willed her body to behave, to stay with her until she finally ended this. She rose over him and with her fingers circling his base, poised him at her entrance. A single slide downward and he fully filled her. Cam let her head fall back and moaned. Nothing, and no one, had ever felt better than this.

Chapter Eleven

Kjell groaned at the long, slow slide of his cock into Cam's body. His big hands cupped her ass and held her against him. For several heartbeats, he lay there, savoring her wet heat and her acceptance. Until she'd stridden toward him and buried her fingers in his thick fur, he hadn't known how she would react. She had hunted polar bears. Faced with a real, life one, a bear that also happened to be someone she was sexually attracted to...Kjell appreciated her genuine wondrous response.

He smoothed his hand over her buttocks, sweeping them up along her ribs to brush the undersides of her breasts. The urge to move inside her nearly propelled him forward. Instead, he savored the moment, her acceptance and her understanding.

Cam rotated her hips. "Please," she whispered. Her head tilted back, her lips parted; she offered him more than just her breasts and body. He struggled to hold onto the thoughts, though the demands his body tore them aside. Feeling as if he drowned in her warmth, he flexed his hips to penetrate her even more deeply.

The low moan emerging from her throat drove him on. His hands fell to her hips and he held her, helping her rise upward only to lower her back over his cock once more. Being at her mercy like this stilled his bear. Though his beast longed to flip her over, Kjell forced the creature into submission. Not tonight. Not right now. Maybe later he'd love her the way his bear wanted, in truth, the way *he* wanted. At this moment, he let Cam dictate the pace.

She tormented him with slight undulations of her hips. Her breasts bounced, their sway drawing his attention from her parted lips. Her lithe body worked over his and Kjell knew he'd never seen a more beautiful sight.

He let one hand drift down between her legs. Her juices created a slippery trail to her clit, and the swollen bud begged for his touch. A couple flutters of his fingers against it had her shuddering. Inner muscles clamping down, she stifled her cries. Unable to resist, Kjell sat and took a puckered nipple into his mouth.

He groaned as she shuddered against him. With his feet remaining on the floor, he thrust into her. It wasn't enough. It'd probably never been enough. He rolled, using his weight and momentum to flip her onto her back. He rose over her, his bear rejoicing in finally being able to claim his mate. Her heels came up and pressed into his buttocks, driving him deeper. The flutters of her inner muscles rippled along his cock.

"God, you're hot," he ground out a moment before he claimed her lips once more. She parted beneath him, and he thrust his tongue into her mouth.

Cam flexed her fingers. Her nails scored along his back. The sting served to heighten his arousal. Balls tightening, he plunged his tongue into her mouth; certain he was going to come hard. Pressure built, the urge to spill himself in her, to mark her as his own. The need for air parted them, and he licked and sucked hard, open-mouthed kisses against the side of her neck. He found the sensitive place where her neck met her shoulder and laved it with his tongue. His bear knew a clamp of teeth and a shake of its big head could break a seal's neck. With his mate, he'd be extra careful.

She whimpered beneath him. Her pussy clamped down on his cock so hard he thought he saw stars. Sensual moans erupted from her lips, and then she screamed his name as her orgasm pummeled through her. The shudders racing through her body only brought him closer to his own release. He stilled, buried as deep as he could be inside her, and waited for her tremors to subside.

Looking down at her, Kjell marveled at her strength and femininity. Maybe this was how Bjorn felt about Sigrid. When at last the tiny aftershocks faded, Kjell thrust again. He kissed her, long, cherishing kisses with little tongue. Feeling her nipples brush against his chest, he battled the thought that her mission neared its end. She'd stay. Sigrid did. Surely, she'd stay.

And then he thrust once more and gave himself over to the rapture pouring through him. He spilled himself into her, the pulses racing through his cock and balls enough to bring a shout of triumph to his lips. The muscles in his arms shook and still he held himself over her. Then, at last, when the violent eruption ended, he slid onto her, needing a few more moments, because then, he had questions to ask.

He kissed her, a soft brush of their lips, and rolled to his side. He slid from her, the loss of contention reluctant and painful. He kissed her temple, loving the way she snuggled into his arms. "You're amazing. You know that?"

"Mmm." Cam cracked open an eyelid. "Why do you say that?"

Kjell toyed with a strand of her blonde hair, twirling it around his finger then smoothing it straight once more. "Most people would have seen my bear and ran. You didn't. You stayed, and you even touched me. It's almost like you accepted it."

Cam stiffened in his arms.

Kjell frowned, wondering just what he had said to make her react that way. "It's okay. I'm glad." He kissed her again, hoping to feel her ease against his body once more. She did, and he passed her reaction off as simply being startled about his beast.

"You all have them, don't you?" she asked. Her voice sounded strangely pained.

"Yeah, we do. Sigrid knows."

"I guessed that when she stood there with Bjorn." Cam fought to grin. "She's a scientist. If she hadn't known, I'm sure she would have stopped you from stripping in the brutal cold."

"Yeah." His voice was gruff. Sigrid had seen him naked once before, just as, if things worked out, Cam would see Bjorn naked once. An offering to their commanding officer and a gesture of trust, he and Bjorn had decided long ago if a woman decided to join their group, that they'd share her for one night.

~* * *~

Though Cam had found some of the answers she sought, others, mostly about the Night Demons, eluded her. She laid next to Kjell on the small bed, his warmth already a comfort to her. Finding out he really was a bear shifter should have answered all her questions. It didn't. Now, she wondered how he would react when he found out she'd shot one of his kind in Canada.

She rose from the bed and padded over to the window. Cracking open the blinds, she stared into the dark night. A few pinpricks of stars hung in the sky, the rest obscured by a heavy cloud bank. She watched an eddy of snow snake across the landscape. There'd be a storm tomorrow.

"There's more the Night Demons haven't told me," she said, at last.

Kjell turned onto his side. He reached out and patted the space next to him. "Come back to bed. They'll speak when they're ready. We waited this long for the information you have."

Cam shook her head. Urgency propelled her to find her clothes. Maybe, just maybe, if she found out some vital clue, then Kjell would forgive her past. She nibbled on her lip as she dressed. "I have to go now."

She made it to the door before Kjell's bulk stopped her. Somehow, he'd managed to pull on a pair of shorts. "I'm going with you."

Instinctively, she shook her head and took a step back. "The Night Demons said they won't talk to you because of your bear. I think this is something I have to do alone."

"The hell it is," Kjell growled. "By the time you're ready to go out, I'll be there. I'll stay back. I won't interfere. But I've seen what they can do. You are not going out to talk to them alone."

Cam stared at the wall of Kjell's chest and his fist resting against the door. "Even if I wanted to, I don't suppose you'd let me." She reached beneath his arm to turn the doorknob. The door opened a crack.

"Damn right." He straightened. "Wait for me before you go outside." He opened the door wider and waited for her to leave.

Cam did, already formulating a plan to get outside before he could reach her. Her room lay farther down the hall, and she jogged to her door. Once inside, she dressed for warmth, grabbing dirty clothes out of the hamper. Her snow suit went on next, and by the time she shoved her feet into her boots, she heard Kjell's door close.

"Damn," she muttered. Hopping on one foot, knowing she'd never beat him out that way, she finally managed to get her feet firmly inside her boot. Darting down the hall, she reached the entry way, picking up hat, mask and gloves, and then went outside.

She didn't see Kjell.

Cam breathed a sigh of relief. She hovered not far from the door, wondering if perhaps Kjell fooled her. Any moment he'd step out from the shadow to tell her that he won, like a little boy on the playground. She smiled at the thought.

The Night Demons. Cam forced her attention back to the matter at hand and scouted for a good location to meet them. A clearing just beyond the gate looked likely.

The air shimmered. Inside the compound fence, three forms materialized. The Night Demons stood there. Cam moved toward them. Behind her, the compound door opened and Kjell emerged, stopping to stand just beside the building.

Cam moved slowly until she was standing before them, wondering how to address them. "You're here," she said, feeling somewhat foolish for stating the obvious.

We're here. We have decided. It's time to tell you what we know, so that those who live here can help us find answers.

The words echoed in her mind, and she turned to see Kjell walking up behind her.

"I hear them," he said. Wonder filled his voice.

We speak to both of you so that you may witness.

“Thank you.” To be honest, Kjell listening in on the conversation relieved her. Now she wouldn’t have to worry about relating the information or getting things wrong.

You have nothing to fear from us. It is another group that causes the attacks. They desire the power the forbidden substance brings. And they will work with those who provide it. We wish to go back to living as we were, alone up here. Away from humans. We do not think our days of solitude will come again, but we will wish for them nonetheless.

“What are you?” Cam asked.

Think of us as spirits, guardians of the snow. We know you are working to make this a safer, better place for those who live here. You no longer hunt the bears, our brothers made flesh.

The Night Demon turned to Kjell. It reached for him, long tendril fingers sliding across a scarf-covered cheek. Kjell held himself rigid, and Cam sensed he struggled not to flinch away from the spirit. She’d have to get used to addressing them as such.

Did you know that your people, and ours, were once one? And that those such as you were made to try and convince the pure humans to do us no harm. Now, you hide and cannot act like the bridge you were meant to be. We are sorry. The spirit’s fingers trailed away.

“It—it’s okay,” Kjell said. “We didn’t know.”

No, and that is our fault. Our brothers made flesh bonded to you and gave you their strength and power. They also dictated that we must not talk to you. We are now, only because the need is so great. Our need is great. You must stop those who seek to feed our brothers. Stop them.

The spirit stopped. Its form shimmered and wavered, giving Cam the impression that someone didn’t want it talking to them. A cold chill raced down her spine. “Let’s go in.”

~* * *~

As the compound grew smaller behind them, Cam relished her feet pounding into the snow. She’d missed her runs, and it had taken a week after seeing Kjell shift to convince the men that it was safe for her to leave. The steady rhythm of her running served to clear her mind. All of last week’s revelations swam in her head, and she needed the easy rhythm of exercise and the bleak Arctic landscape to help formulate her thoughts. She could hardly believe everything that had happened. Vik had brought them more disturbing news of the Russian corporation’s machinations up here, including trying to dump in the site that she’d helped Demyan scout. No Spirit sightings—she refused to call them Night Demons anymore—meant she couldn’t count on help from that quarter, if she even could have. And Vik’s orders kept Kjell too tired to do little but fall into bed for a few hours.

Sigrid kept pace beside her, the woman surprisingly fit for spending most of her time in the lab. Of course, with the fully equipped fitness area, no doubt she had everything she needed except the Olympic-sized pool. The scientist grinned and her long, easy strides moved over the ground. “Feels great to get out of the lab,” she said.

“I’m glad you were able to convince Bjorn that I’d keep you safe.” Cam patted her trusty .45 resting in its holster on her hip. “Those guys think they’re the only ones with the protection-mojo.” She grinned.

“Yeah, silly men. You seem to have Kjell wrapped around your finger though. Never thought that guy would fall so hard.” Sigrid eased her pace while they ran, though they still jogged probably a decent seven minute mile.

Cam fell into step beside her, easing back, though she knew she could have continued. "Really?" She yearned to learn more about Kjell, especially from a female's point of view. Yet something kept her quiet on the topic of their relationship. Probably the fact that while she knew what she wanted to do, in the end, she worked for Vik and went where he sent her. Today it was this place. Tomorrow it might be Canada or Greenland.

"Yeah. I think it pissed him off when I came out here, especially when Bjorn and I got together. Seeing him with you, I have a huge case of the, 'I told you so'. Of course, that probably wouldn't be the most professional thing to do."

"Maybe not, but I bet it'd be fun." Cam consulted her watch. Tied into a sensor in her shoe, it told her how far she'd gone. She'd left her mp3 player back at the compound, knowing that she would be chatting with Sigrid. "Let's turn around and head back. By the time we get there, it'll be three miles."

"Don't you usually run five? I don't want to hold you back." Sigrid picked up the pace. "I'm good for another couple of miles."

Cam smiled at the woman's bravado. "That's okay. I'll do some strength training or run on the treadmill. Being out here and dealing with the terrain takes a bit more out of you until you're used to it."

"Okay." Sigrid executed an easy turn, and the two of them jogged back to the compound. No doubt with the small GPS component built into both of their shoe sensors, the guys watched their progress. In fact, she'd expected a terse order in her ear to bring Sigrid back about five minutes ago. Bjorn's restraint impressed her.

The whine of snowmobiles cut through the sounds of their breathing and the crunching snow beneath their feet. Cam glanced over her shoulder. Three men headed straight toward them. Though he hunched over the controls, Cam recognized Demyan. Cam judged the distance back to the compound to be too great. Besides, there was no way she could outrun the snowmobile, and if she couldn't, then Sigrid definitely couldn't.

"Shit," she growled. On either side of him drove the other two men, making a scoop formation to quickly surround the women. "They want me. I'm the one who pissed them off. Run as if your life depends on it and tell Bjorn what happened. They'll have the data from my sensor and I'll signal them."

Sigrid didn't move.

"Go!" Cam ordered.

The woman paused only for a moment, then spun and raced back toward the compound.

She lifted her hand to her face and slid it into her hood. She tapped the button for the two-way radio. "Mayday. Mayday. Sending Sigrid back. Mayday." She left the line open, figuring she could bump it off if she needed to. She touched the gun on her hip, reluctant to fire. The three snowmobiles continued toward her. Drawing fire might get Sigrid wounded. Cam didn't dare glance over her shoulder. Instead, she stood there, hoping the men might just be random hunters or something.

"What do you want?" She kept her fingers close to her gun, knowing she could draw and shoot if necessary. The guys were coming close enough now that she'd be in range.

"You didn't finish your contract, bitch," Demyan snarled. "Time for you to work." He eased up on the throttle.

Let Sigrid get away. "You could have called." She kept her stance tense, her fingers close to the trigger. Give me authorization to shoot.

"Don't shoot. Vik says go with them," Kjell's tense voice echoed in her ear. "We've got you. Now shut the communications off."

"I'm taking my hand away from my gun," Cam called, lifting her hands to either side of her head. She brushed the communications unit as she did, and heard the click as her connection with the compound went dead. If Vik wanted her to do this, she would. She refused to show her fear and hoped like hell the guys came and got her soon.

~* * *~

In a blink of an eye, Demyan had tied her hands behind her, and then secured her ankles together once she had been forced onto the back of the snowmobile's seat. A rope connected her wrists to her ankles, effectively keeping her from flinging herself to freedom. As they bounced across the frozen tundra, Cam struggled to keep her balance. She had no fucking idea what Vik thought he was doing. And frankly, the more bruises her ass acquired, the more she figured the last thing she wanted was to even see him right now. She thought Demyan and his muscle were heading back to the basin they'd scouted out, and she wondered why.

Now would be a good time for those Spirit attacks Kjell was telling me about. Thankfully Demyan hadn't blindfolded her, though she didn't know if that was a good thing or not. The heavy skies hung leaden over the horizon, and nothing but the endless white and grey landscape met her gaze. No Spirits. No rescuers. Not even a polar bear.

Kjell should have shot Demyan. Staring at the wiry Russian's back, she wished he, instead of Gregor, had died. Apparently his gut wound had healed, or if his injury still plagued him, he showed no sign. If it had been a clean shot, and it sounded like it had, then seven days would be plenty of time to heal.

Come on guys. A little interference would be nice.

The farther the trio sped, the more Cam struggled to keep her hope for immediate help up. She lifted her shoulder in an attempt to bump the earpiece back into place. With the roar of the snowmobiles, she doubted she'd hear anything. It was worth a shot, and if she saw a landmark, she'd be able to relay it to the guys.

She contemplated throwing herself off the back of the snowmobile. Aside from the possibility of injury, she'd still be tied. With her ankles tied to her wrists, she rode the snowmobile strictly by balance. She dug her knees into the side of the seat, trying to stay upright. She nudged the earpiece again. It slipped on her ear.

Damn it! The piece of plastic swung against the shell of her ear, teetering precariously. One bump, one wrong move and she'd lose it.

The snowmobile hit a rock.

Cam swung forward, cracking her chin on Demyan's shoulder. A cry escaped her lip. She bit down, tasting blood. The ear piece slipped from her ear. Pinched between the cotton stocking cap and her skin, the slick plastic slid down. It landed on the edge of her hood and hung precariously.

Don't fall! Don't fall! Cam feared even using her shoulder to try and toss it back into her hood. Once there, she might be able to fetch it.

The snowmobile hit another rock.

The earpiece tumbled to the ground, and in moments, was buried beneath a fine spray of snow.

No! She bit back her anguished cry, figuring Demyan would take pleasure in the fact that she'd lost her lifeline. Cam closed her eyes and focused on her balance. Getting safely to wherever Demyan wanted to take her took priority over anything else. Once there, she could determine her next course of action. And at least she still had the GPS tracker in her shoe.

Chapter Twelve

As soon as Sigrid entered the compound gates, Bjorn rushed forward. He drew Sigrid into his arms, giving her a huge bear hug. Lowering his head, he tucked her against his shoulder and held her for a heartbeat. Then, he released her. "I'm glad you're back. Let's go inside."

Kjell followed the two of them, anxious to get out there and get to Cam. If Demyan had been the one to get her, he'd rip Vik from limb to limb. Fuck orders. Fuck non-lethal methods. That bastard had lived and had come back for Cam. No one, and nothing, would stop Kjell from getting him now. "Tell me what happened? I want to know everything." A dangerous growl underscored his voice.

They hurried into the building. "Trent, take Mark and go get the snowmobiles ready. We have Cam's position on the GPS tracker in her shoe," Bjorn ordered.

"Thank God, she agreed to that," Kjell snarled. Before she had been able to take Sigrid outside, both women had to agree to wearing the GPS chips. He chafed at the moments they were losing.

"We were turning for home and all of a sudden these guys on snowmobiles came at us. She sent me back and I didn't look. I just ran like hell." Sigrid's voice caught. She took several deep breaths.

"It's okay, baby. We'll get her back." He gave Sigrid a quick squeeze. "You can watch us in the control center. We're going to head back out. Hans will be here to meet the new Finnish biologist. You won't be alone."

"Just go. Get her," Sigrid ordered. She gave Bjorn a not-so-lighthearted shove. "Bring her back." Sigrid pressed her lips together, and Kjell could almost read the thoughts running across her expressive face.

"You didn't do this. It isn't your fault. That Russian bastard would have done this even if you weren't out there." He cupped Sigrid's arm, wanting her to understand the importance of his words. "You may have saved her life. We'll bring her back." His bear gave an answering inner roar and Kjell released her. He turned to his commanding officer. "Let's go."

By the time he opened the door, the low whine of snowmobiles filled the air. Trent and Mark each towed an already-packed snowmobile behind them. Bjorn went to get his from Trent, and Kjell got his from Mark. The two men double checked settings, made sure their equipment was secure, then from inside, Sigrid opened the gate and the four men sped away.

Kjell rode just behind Bjorn, far enough back so as not to get snow in his face. Trent and Mark flanked them, and the four rode like desperados across the tundra. He knew how dangerous these guys were. Vik's terse reply of, "Get her!" echoed in Kjell's memory. If their General knew anything more about what Demyan wanted her for, or what he wanted to do, Vik said nothing.

Now would be a great time for those Night Demons to attack. Even if they were the faction that was against the good guys, they'd distract Demyan. Or at least Kjell hoped they would. Frankly, he had no clue what the Night Demons would do to the Russians, especially since as far as he knew, Demyan didn't have any PCBs to dump. He growled and hit the throttle on his snowmobile.

"Easy. We'll get there." Bjorn's voice came through the in-helmet microphone.

"I know. I just want them dead." Inside, his bear agreed, hoping to use his six-inch long claws to rend Demyan into pieces so small not even an Arctic Tern would want them. "I can't believe they fucking took Cam."

"She's the one who turned on them. I told Vik that this was getting in too deep, but he authorized the mission. We'll get her back," Bjorn said. He consulted his GPS unit. "She's not far now. They appear stopped."

Kjell's stomach knotted. At least on the back of a snowmobile Demyan couldn't do anything to Cam. Once they were stopped however...if that Russian bastard hurt so much as one hair on her head, he was dead. The hell with Vik, Bjorn, or the rest of them. Kjell would see to Demyan's execution personally.

"We're stopping here. Kjell and I are going to shift, get the lay of the land. Mark and Trent, stay here and watch the GPS. Radio me with anything. I'll be wearing an earpiece."

Kjell prayed Bjorn's plan worked. They'd toyed with affixing ear pieces to the polar bears, even going so far as to having Vik send them some made out of gray and white plastic to try and blend in with the heavy coat. Kjell removed his helmet. "We've never tested those." He turned off his snowmobile's engine and then started peeling out of his snow suit.

"No better time than the present." Bjorn concentrated for a moment and shifted.

Kjell followed suit, and let Mark fold up his clothes to stick them in the pack. He waited while Trent secured the ear bud into the heavy flap of Bjorn's ear, and saw the plastic blended in quite well with the white fur.

"If you can hear me, nod your head," Trent said.

Bjorn lifted his muzzle up and down, a very human nod for his ursine body.

"Good. I'm going to put one on Kjell too. That way both of you will have the information." Trent went over to Kjell and performed the same bit of wiring.

Kjell stood still, his bear not liking the human so close to his ear. Deep inside, Kjell reassured his beast, though the plastic felt odd. He repeated the nod test, showing Trent he could hear. Then with a toss of his nose and a low growl, Bjorn led them away from their site.

Kjell followed. Already his nose picked up the varied scents of his party as well as the Russians. Lying low, they headed in the last known direction; Trent's words the only thing to guide them.

As he followed Bjorn, Kjell let his bear partially take over. Not completely though, Kjell needed to retain some spark of humanity so he wouldn't simply go berserk on Demyan and his men. He followed the trail, filling his nostrils with Cam's scent. Fear tinged the fragrant odor, fear and worry, and Kjell's bear clung to the scent as tenaciously as he would that of a fat seal.

"You're doing good. Keep on your same heading," Trent's voice filled Kjell's ear.

Kjell grunted his agreement, though he knew the men wouldn't be able to hear. Bjorn would though, and his commanding officer kept a strong, yet steady pace. Behind them, the whine of snowmobiles sounded barely audible.

The one thing his polar bear form lacked was a way to communicate beyond the natural grunts and growls. Language, one that lent itself to discussion and planning would go a long ways. The Night Demon's words hovered in his memory, that his people had once been a union

designed to improve relationships with the pure humans. His bear barked, as if laughing. Yeah, look how well that one turned out. Pollution dumped in the Arctic, if it didn't arrive on the winds anyway, poachers killing polar bears, and one of the most powerful, if not the most powerful, land carnivores on the precipice of extinction because of climate change. Somewhere along the line, either his people or the Night Demons had messed up. He was betting on both of them being the culprits.

"Turn to your one o'clock," Trent's voice interrupted Kjell's self-incriminating thoughts.

Immediately, Kjell recognized the change in terrain as the place where he'd tracked Cam while she guided Gregor and Demyan. The topography shifted. Not a lot, but enough so it wasn't completely flat and provided hollows and valleys where goods and people could be hidden.

"Stay on this same heading," Trent continued to provide the directions. "Wait, are those Night Demons on our three o'clock?"

Kjell appreciated the direction and looked to his side. Dark shapes emerged and faded in the direction Trent had indicated. Maybe Night Demons. Maybe just swirls of snow worked up by the increasing wind. A storm or Night Demons, they didn't need either. Unless it was the good guys, the ones that spoke with Cam. Maybe they sensed her in danger and meant to interfere. God, he hoped so. If they helped, with their claws and teeth, they'd make his and Bjorn's jobs a lot easier. Not to mention leaving Mark and Trent out of the fighting.

Kjell trotted up to keep his muzzle even with Bjorn's shoulder. The other bear didn't even look at him, just kept going. They turned a bit, not needing Trent's instructions now that the demons had appeared. Wherever the Russians and their pollution were, usually it drew the Night Demons. And there, Kjell knew they'd find Cam.

"Okay, we're coming into visual range. We're going get as close as we can before coming in on foot." Trent spoke a moment before the sound of the snowmobiles veering off announced their movement.

Bjorn stopped. He pointed his muzzle in front of them, up a small hill that concealed the nearby valley. Every muscle in his body went tense, and Kjell knew, there they'd find Cam.

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The snowmobiles stopped at what looked like a small city filled with tents and large canisters stacked on their sides. All the canisters had mottled grayish-white paint designed to make it blend into the terrain. A green logo that looked kind of familiar was stenciled on the side of each canister.

Demyan swung his leg over his snowmobile, barely managing to keep from kicking Cam in the face. She ducked, forgetting her bound state for a moment, and tumbled off the back of the snowmobile.

Demyan laughed.

Cam spat, tasting the tang of blood where she'd bit her lip. The loss of her earpiece haunted her. Curling her toes, she prayed the GPS tracker in her shoe still worked. If so, then the guys were coming for her even as Demyan viciously yanked her up. He used a wicked looking knife to cut the cord tying her bound wrists to her ankles, and she fought the wave of dizziness that washed over her.

Dark shapes hovered on the edge of the camp.

Spirits? She tried to focus on them, a wave of nausea forcing her to look away. She swallowed hard in an attempt to keep from puking on the inside of her scarf.

Demyan grabbed her arm. "Come on. Now the fun begins." He tugged her toward a large tent.

Cam dropped to her knees. It wasn't difficult to do, not when her world still spun, and she knew, once Demyan got her into the tent, she'd be concealed, and in a place of warmth. She didn't want warmth. She wanted cold and snow, things that kept them both clothed and wrapped in layers.

Demyan kicked her side. "Get up you stupid, bitch."

"Give me a minute." She wheezed for breath.

Demyan snarled and lifted his foot, but didn't kick her again.

Cam made a show of swallowing hard and rolling onto her knees. With her hands now tied behind her back, it wasn't easy. She knelt there for a moment. "What do you want me for anyway? I did what I was supposed to do, help you find polar bears."

"Stand up," he snarled. "You got my partner shot with your stupid EUFOR friends."

Cam stood, not having to feign the shaking in her knees. *Come on, Spirits. Attack.* She sensed them, though she couldn't really see them, hovering just at the edges of the camp. *Now would be a damn fine time for a rescue.* In her mind, she calculated the time for human intervention, and the guys hadn't had enough. Maybe an hour until they could rescue her. She didn't know if Demyan would let her last that long.

~* * *~

The sight of the camp with the canisters stacked on the east and north sides chilled Kjell to the bone. Several small tents, their dark canvas walls designed to absorb the heat, sat in a semi-circle around what looked like a fire pit. A line of snowmobiles sat opposite the canisters, and between them large tarp-covered piles contained anything from more pollution-filled canisters to firearms. Somewhere down there, they had Cam.

The silence in his ear disturbed him. Though his human mind knew Trent and Mark needed to secure the snowmobiles and come on foot, his bear chafed at not being down there. Bjorn stood not far away.

The air shimmered. Kjell stiffened, his fur standing on end. Along the south end of the camp, Night Demons materialized. He curled his claws into the snow. *Go after her. Get her out of there.* The Demons swore they were on Cam's side, which put them on their side. No doubt the Demons had the ability to get Cam out of there. Kjell moved closer to Bjorn. Kjell pointed his muzzle in the direction of the Night Demons. Bjorn grunted, indicating that he saw. The big bear started backing down the hill.

With a shake of his head, Kjell stepped toward the ridge.

Bjorn swiped his paw, stopping Kjell's progress.

Kjell snarled. The speaker in his ear crackled, keeping him from making any further actions. He paused and listened to see if they had further information. When nothing but static filled his ear, Kjell turned on his commanding officer. He'd wait. In spite of the bear fur, he was still a good soldier. He'd do as he was ordered. That didn't mean he had to like it. Turning back to the

compound below, he watched, trying to get a sign of the lay of the land. People moved like ants between the tents. Some guy with a big truck appeared to unload more of the canisters. A blue tarp was pulled back, revealing smaller canisters, painted pitch black with vivid red symbols. A sickening feeling churned in his gut. Something wasn't right about those. He bet Sigrid would like to get her hands on whatever compound the canisters contained.

The Night Demons continued to wait.

The speaker in his ear crackled again. The hell with waiting. Bjorn might be afraid to do something, but he wasn't. His woman—his mate—was down there somewhere.

"Getting transmissions. Hold position." Trent's voice in the ear bud sounded closer now. A glance over his shoulder showed Trent and Mark walking up behind them, heavy rifles slung over their shoulders. Without military insignia on their snow suits, they looked like hunters. Kjell knew better. He chuffed a breath. Anyone who mistook the men for hunters deserved what they got.

Trent crouched down between the two bears. "Listen to this," he said. He flipped a switch on the receiver he held, increasing the volume.

"We have twelve tons on the ground and room for at least a hundred more," the crackling voice came through thickly accented. "No problems."

Kjell knew little Russian, so the reply was garbled due to the language barrier and static. The reply also came in Russian, and Kjell cursed his lack of linguistics. More words, sounding like directions, barked through the connection. Then, it went dead.

"There we go, boys, the information Vik wanted. We need to see if we can figure out where Cam is being held, then go in. I think we're good." Trent slipped the receiver into one of the many pockets on his snow suit.

Kjell growled. The hell with waiting for Vik. Barely restraining his impatience, he waited three heartbeats for Trent or Bjorn to do something.

The Night Demons moved first. From their position on the south side of the camp, the figures flickered in and out of sight, so quickly that they might have been wisps of smoke. The Demons floated toward them and Kjell forced the fur on the back of his neck to lie flat. Bjorn and Trent saw them too, for Trent kept one hand on his gun. He still knelt on the snow, Mark a little distance behind.

Kjell's memory flashed back to the night he stood with Cam inside the compound fence when the Night Demons had come to visit. The ones then insisted they were Spirits, though Kjell couldn't quite make the mental transition. His bear rumbled, not quite content with waiting for the Spirits, though Kjell sensed a deeper, more intense connection between his bear and the creatures moving toward them.

Easy. Kjell struggled to reassure his bear. *They won't harm us.* At least, he didn't think so. Though these had the wicked long talon-like fingers, and he bet if they opened their mouth they'd have the same pointed teeth, these Spirits felt different from those that attacked. Nothing physical differentiated them, just a sense that somehow, they would come out of this meeting okay.

"Should we let them get close?" Mark asked.

Kjell nodded. He'd discussed what had happened back at the compound with his team; they all knew about the factions. Though he had no idea how to tell them apart, he listened to his gut and gave the affirmative signal once more to be sure.

"Okay. You know them better than we do." Mark shifted until he stood about ten feet from Trent, covering their sixes in case something decided to come up the hill. "The ones before attacked a lot more quickly than this," he said, and Kjell wondered if he reassured himself or them.

For Cam. He did this for Cam. Going in there half-cocked and ready for blood would probably only get her killed. She was a capable woman, a military-trained sniper. He needed to give her credit for getting her own ass out of a sling, though he'd do everything within his power to save her. Watching the Night Demons move towards them, he hoped they had an ally. They didn't need any more enemies.

Yes, you indeed have an ally. The voice, clearly coming from the Spirits, filled his mind. He turned to find Bjorn studying the Spirits.

"Did you guys hear that?" Trent whispered.

All of you heard us. Kjell knows who we are.

All at once, Kjell found himself the focus of both human and bear attention. With his clothing back where Trent stashed the snowmobiles, there was no way he could shift and defend himself verbally. And he'd told Bjorn all he knew. Everyone had been in the conference room, even Sigrid and Hans, when he'd relayed the information. Still, Kjell guessed it came as quite a shock to actually hear the Spirits mentally communicating.

"I did," Mark confirmed. "And yeah, Kjell told us what you'd said. Don't know as I believe it, but yeah, he told us."

Kjell focused his attention on Mark, hoping the younger man didn't blow this opportunity. He sensed a reverence coming from his bear, an acknowledgement that they had once joined forces to try and do something right for the humans. *You need to help us get Cam.* He focused his thoughts on the Spirits, hoping maybe, by some chance they'd hear.

Not help you rescue her. But we can keep watch.

Look, my mate is down there. Somehow she's the one you can talk to because we all have bears. I get that. I really do. But if you want to save her, then you need to do something more than watching. A dull throbbing began behind his eyes, his bear's mind warring with the human's need for full sentences and words. Underneath his human words, his bear had only one thought: save his mate.

You have weapons. You are better suited to saving the woman.

"She isn't the woman," Mark said. "She's Cam, and she needs your help. You can't tell me that you don't have weapons. I've fought things like you. I know how well equipped you are to get in there and get Cam out." Mark stepped forward, Trent's hand on his arm stopping him.

You are right that we can fight. Those that you fought are not on our side. Tell me, human, are you on our side?

Kjell's hackles rose. To even question where his loyalties lay...the Spirits had no right. *We are on the side of the Arctic. The men are bringing in more PCB canisters. We're trying to stop them.* He mentally bit off his thought to question them on what they were doing to help this land.

Kjell is right. Bjorn finally spoke. *We seek to stop the pollution. We could use your help, if you would stand against the group of Spirits that attacked us.* His mental voice held more authority, more restraint, than Kjell could ever muster at the moment. Maybe that was why Vik had made Bjorn the Commanding Officer.

We can stand watch. At the moment, it is all we can do. The Spirits sounded resigned.

We will accept that. Bjorn turned back to the camp, and Kjell had a feeling his friend had a plan.

Chapter Thirteen

Threatening to rape her had been Demyan's first mistake. Leaving her alone in the tent had been his last. She'd bent backwards, thanking the fact that she regularly practiced yoga and used her fingers to worry the ropes on her ankles. They fell away, leaving her with just her bound wrists. Listening for sounds outside the tent, she reached back and started to hack away at the rope on her wrists. The spikes on the tips of her shoes that she used for traction provided the perfect edges to split the ropes. Eventually they frayed and fell free.

The tent flap opened.

Caught in the obvious position of being untied, Cam knew she had to take a chance. Without her weapons, she had only her body. Bouncing to her feet, she swept at the man's leg. She hooked it, sending him tumbling to his back. He fumbled for his gun, only barely managing to get it in his hands.

Cam pounced on him. She jammed the heel of her hand against his mouth. If he bit her, she could use her gloves to protect her fingers. Along his side, she fumbled for his gun.

He batted it away. Using his strength, he pushed her off of him.

Cam tumbled. She scrambled to her feet, only to duck again as the man swung the gun in her direction.

He fired.

She winced, though the bullet went well over her head.

"What the hell is going on in there?" Demyan snarled from outside.

Hunched over, Cam barreled forward. She hit her assailant square in the chest, sending him tumbling backwards out of the tent. The gun fired again, harmlessly into the air this time.

If you're out there, now's the time to come to the rescue boys.

She kicked the man's wrist, sending the gun spiraling to the snow. Not caring about anything, she raced for the camp's edge.

A hand clamped around her ankle and dragged her down. Cam hit the ground with a thud, a spray of snow stinging her cheek. She bit the inside of her lip, a soft cry escaping her mouth. She started to wriggle away.

"Not so fast."

Cam kicked out. Survival instinct hammered at her, everything she'd learned at the military honing in her mind. Her greatest strength lay in her legs, and she clipped Demyan's cheek with the heel of her boot. She hoped like hell a spike got him in the eye.

Blinking, she saw Spirits at the edge of the hollow. *Help me.* She could use their claws and talons that Kjell had spoken about. She scanned for polar bears and saw none. A slight pang grabbed her heart, quickly shoved aside. She didn't have time to worry about where they were, not when Demyan rose over her.

She kicked out again, bouncing up to the balls of her feet. Cold air stung her lungs as she breathed deeply. The gun lay several feet behind him, sunlight glinting from its blued steel barrel. She could use that about now.

Twin options hammered at her. Turn and run, presenting a nice broad target for her back, or stay here and scramble to find a weapon. And, possibly get hurt in the process. Without any polar bears in sight, Cam knew she needed to stay alive and get out of there. She dove for the gun.

Her fingers curled around the cool grip. Her thick gloves made her fumble for it, and she struggled to get her finger around the trigger. A tip of her wrist and she fired. Demyan howled. The bullet tore through his calf, coming out on the other side and leaving his leg bloody pulp.

Not waiting, Cam rose to her feet, holding the gun out in front of her.

Demyan lay on the ground, writhing in pain.

She fired between his legs, deliberately missing. "Just let me go, okay?" Cam started backing toward the hill.

"We can't do that," Demyan said.

In a telling show, none of his men approached her. One barked something in Russian. Demyan shook his head. "Nyet!" He snarled. He spoke more rapid-fire Russian words, each one giving Cam a chance to take one more step out of the ravine.

Any moment now, come on. She kept her attention focused on the guys before her, trying hard not to think about the ones that were supposed to be coming up behind. The GPS tracker still remained in her shoe. She guessed it still transmitted signals.

One of the men lunged.

Cam fired. Her bullet caught him square in the chest, dropping him in his tracks. "Anyone else?" Her stomach churned. The Spirit's wails created an eerie cacophony, reminding her of the ones Kjell spoke about, the ones that weren't on their side.

"For Gregor!" Demyan yelled. He rolled to his side and started to scramble to his feet.

Three bullets to the chest dropped him to the ground.

An eerie silence fell over the encampment. Cam's heart thundered in her chest. She tried to block out images of her alone, making her way back to the compound without the help of a snowmobile or Kjell. She cursed her lost earpiece.

The whine of a snowmobile engine split the silence.

“Shit!” Cam zeroed in on the lone figure whipping through the encampment headed straight for her. The speeding vehicle and his helmet and windshield made the shot difficult, but not impossible. Focusing, Cam aimed. She squeezed the trigger. One shot, a bit wide, clipped the edge of the windshield. He didn’t slow down.

One of the Russians picked up a black canister. “Let her go,” he growled, his English heavily accented. The large tank clipped the edge of the windshield, ricocheting back to hit the man square in the chest. He tumbled. The snowmobile veered off to one side, racing straight for the tent.

Cam ran to intercept it. Grabbing a handlebar, she swung herself aboard, and headed up over the hill.

~* * *~

The gun shots galvanized Kjell into action. Not caring about orders or the Night Demons, or anything except the need to get his woman the hell out of there, Kjell turned and raced toward the camp. Bone-chilling growls emerged from his throat. The low series of rumbles vibrated through his body. Spreading his paws to glide across the snow, he bounded forward.

A snowmobile, a lone, thin figure hunched over the controls veered erratically past. Kjell paused. Though bundled up, he swore he recognized Cam’s figure. He paused, but only for a moment. Knowing the men would take care of her, he hurried into the fray, and moments later Bjorn appeared right beside him.

The scene in the camp was pandemonium. A man lay on the ground, another Russian lying beside him, blood coming from a thigh wound. In death, Demyan sprawled on the ground, his bullet wounds clearly Cam’s work. Other men rushed forward, only to skid to a stop at the sight of the two full-grown male polar bears.

Kjell grinned ferally. He lunged at the throat of the first man, using his weight and heavy paws to bring him down. All shred of humanity evaporated. All the bear knew was that these bastards had taken his mate. The discussions with the Night Demons, any orders he might have received, faded.

“We got her. She’s safe.” Trent’s words barely registered.

Kjell swiped his claws across the throat of the downed man, a quick, clean kill. Far better than he deserved. He turned to find another man, and another. The haze of battle took over.

Kjell blocked out everything, including the numbers of men. A gunshot rang out, going wide. A grunt and another shot, then one of the Russian’s fell dead. Their harsh words surrounded him, though he understood none of them. A second man fell beneath his deadly claws and teeth.

Trent shouted something in his ear. “...Russian, red cap... don’t kill.”

Kjell snarled. He bounded over a snowmobile turned on its side to get the gunman lying in wait behind. The red haze of fury tinted his vision. The man curled up into the fetal position, the smell of urine seeping through the layers of clothing.

Kjell swiped at him. Not a clean kill or even an attempt at one. For the bear, his thoughts and memories combined with those of the man, this prey wasn't a fat seal made for feasting. No, this prey had tried to hurt his mate and deserved to pay in every heinous way possible. He made no noise. Moving silent and deadly, Kjell batted the man between his great paws. Around him, Bjorn still fought. The sound of snowmobiles, undoubtedly some of the Russians tried to make an escape, filled the air. A few quick retorts of gunfire filled the air.

A snarl in his ear pulled Kjell away from the man. He looked up at an unfamiliar polar bear. Preparing for a fight, Kjell bared his teeth. The stranger made the symbol for "dead meat", a curl of his lip and swinging his muzzle toward the sky like a human turning up his nose at something, and then jerked a paw toward the fighting still going on. Taking the stranger's meaning, Kjell followed him back into the fray.

Three men huddling behind a stack of black canisters received a far kinder fate. The stranger warned Kjell away from the canisters, and especially from the pool of sickly sludge seeping from one that lay not far from the toppled snowmobile. The two bears went to the tent, the air redolent with Cam's scent. Fear tinged it.

She's safe. The mental slap did little to ease Kjell's anxiety. Not when he stood in the center of the tent and saw the ropes she must have cut on the spikes of her boots to get herself free.

The other bear ransacked the belongings, looking for something. A small pack tumbled out of a locker to land at the bear's feet and with a triumphant snarl he picked it up in his mouth.

If Kjell needed any more proof the man was a shifter like he, then he'd found it. The duo hurried out of the tent.

Kjell found Bjorn at the other end of the camp, cornering three men against a stack of white canisters. On the hill stood those damned Night Demons, none of them doing anything to try and even the odds. The other bear turned away, and Kjell wished him good hunting. He hurried to find Bjorn.

"We're circling the perimeter. I think Bjorn has the last of them." Trent's voice echoed in Kjell's ear.

He grunted an acknowledgement, though he wore no microphone. The strange bear stood alongside Bjorn, shoulder-to-shoulder, as if he belonged there. Unbidden, a snarl rose from the depths of Kjell's throat. No one did that unless it was one of them. A determination to find out about this mysterious bear set him on a course for the three men.

He skidded to a stop beside Bjorn. *Kill them already.* His fury rode high, chafing against his impatience to get this mission over with and get back to the compound. Get

back to Cam. His blood hummed with the need to find his mate and assure her safety. He rose up on his hind legs, hoping to intimidate the hell out of these Russians.

Bjorn charged.

Three polar bears. Three men. Their deaths were quick and sweet, the coppery tang of blood filling Kjell's mouth and spraying over his lips and tongue. Finally, something he could do to stop those bastards from dumping PCBs and get back at them for taking Cam.

"We'll call in the clean-up crew." Static filled Trent's voice over the ear bud. "Need to get this shit out of here."

Muffled orders between Trent and Mark, mostly snippets of the conversation about how to get their gear back to where Bjorn and Kjell could change, and what to do about the third polar bear that joined them.

"Fall back. Our work is done," Trent shouted over the rise of the snowmobile engines. "Fall back."

Kjell hesitated. He stared at the carnage, at the broken and bloodied bodies and wondered why. His bear roared, an inner, incessant demand that he get back to his mate. Still, he paused. Images, flashes of things he hadn't really seen, floated through his mind. A man's open mouth, blood pouring from wounds along his neck. The slice of claws through snowsuit and skin. A scream. A yell. The last bubbling breaths and blood flecked foam.

"Kjell. Fall back," Trent's soft voice penetrated the fog of Kjell's mind.

He shook his head, blinking his eyes and seeing just another battlefield, another enemy defeated for now. Slowly, he turned. Bjorn and the stranger, both in bear forms, stood by the snowmobiles. The stranger pointed his nose at the empty vehicles, almost as if he was telling Bjorn and Kjell that they were theirs. A bundle dangled from his maw, and somehow, Trent had grabbed an extra snowsuit.

"We'll come back here and scavenge gear," Trent said, almost as if he saw Kjell's attention focused on the extra snowsuit.

Sure they would. Because EUFOR ran salvage missions along with the military ones. He opened his mind, intending to ask the Night Demons about the stranger, and about what had happened, only to realize that they were gone. With a grunt, he lumbered up to Bjorn and sighed. *Time to go home.*

Except, he didn't see Cam. He vaguely remembered Trent saying she was clear, but he never verified his statement. Kjell stiffened, pain slicing through him at the thought that he had let her drift from his thoughts for even a moment. Whirling, he stared at the carnage they'd left behind, praying she hadn't been among the broken bodies. *Cam.* His ursine lips begged to form her name. He inhaled and her scent eluded him.

One snowmobile. One woman. He swore he'd seen them, had thought maybe Trent had stopped her and kept her safe. He'd thought wrong.

With a snarl, he shouldered past the stranger, smelling the stench of the Russians on the bear's fur. Turncoat. Spy. Whoever he was, he wasn't welcome. Turning, Kjell snarled.

The stranger snarled back.

"Kjell, stop it. Head to the rendezvous point now." Trent barked the order.

Kjell growled again. Hair rose on his neck and back. Claws flexed, testing the snow as easily as they'd test skin and bone. Had he been human, he'd have knocked the stranger on his ass by now. Wearing his bear form, such fistfights grew real deadly real quick. *Cam*. Her name hammered with each beat of his heart.

"Leave him," Mark muttered. "Maybe walking back will cool him off." Snowmobile engines revved and sped away in a spray of snow and ice.

Kjell shook himself against the sting. A second engine, and then a third. Kjell sniffed again.

Cam's floral scent flooded his nostrils, though the scent of gas and oil from the machine nearly hid it. A third snowmobile. *Cam*. He roared his happiness and bounded after the snowmobiles, feeling like a new puppy let out to play. He wriggled all over, his bear's happiness at finding his mate overshadowing everything else. The stranger snorted, a half-cough, and then followed more sedately.

His feet floated over the terrain, heading back to the place where they'd shifted. By the time he reached it, Trent had set out their gear, and Bjorn was already zipping up his snow suit. Kjell halted, the stranger not far away.

Seeing his commanding officer already in human form, Kjell shifted and pulled on his clothing. Muted now, Cam's scent still filled his nostrils, and when he turned, she flung herself into his arms.

"The next time Vik wants to keep someone alive, tell him to go to hell," she said, burying her face against his chest and embracing him so tight he thought he felt ribs crack.

Slowly, aware of the men's looks, he wrapped his arms around her. His fingers itched to smooth over her back, down to her buttocks, and bring her against his body and his already hard cock. His lips tingled with the need to kiss her, or maybe that was impending frost bite since he hadn't put on his ski mask again. After a long moment, she looked up and pressed her gloved fingers to his bare lips.

"Later. Put your gear on," she said, and the promise in her eyes heated his heart and soul.

"Who's the stranger?" He asked, tugging his ski mask down over his face. He tightened his hood, put his goggles on, and then headed to the snowmobile. "You're riding with me," he told Cam, grabbing her hand before she could dart to her own vehicle.

Cam smiled and shook her head. "Think with your head, and not the one that's dying to get inside me, we don't know who that guy is. Leaving a man alive nearly got me killed. Don't put one of those bastards on a snowmobile by himself." Caution laced her words.

"Aleksander Dimitriev," the man said, in thickly accented English. Wearing one of the stolen snow suits, the pack slung over his back, he didn't hold out a gloved hand. "I would not hurt you, but you will need Vik to verify who I am."

"Bjorn Lunde." He gave no sign of their rank or their unit, or the fact that they even know Vik. "You can ride with me." As if his words settled the situation, he headed for his snowmobile.

Cam rose on her tip toes. "See, I do get to drive myself. And if this is another secret Vik didn't tell us, I'm flying to London and kicking his ass. Okay?"

Kjell wrapped his arm around her and pulled her into a tight hug. "I'm going with you." He gave her a quick Eskimo kiss, rubbing his nose against hers through their masks, and then released her.

"Quit playing kissy face and let's go back where it's warm," Trent grumbled.

"You're just sad that you're no longer the one in charge," Kjell chuckled and swung his leg over his snowmobile. He gunned the engine and moments later, the six of them hurried back to the compound.

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Once inside the compound and his mask and goggles tossed aside, Kjell grabbed Cam and pulled her to him. He spun her around, backing her against the wall, and kissed her long and deep. She opened beneath his mouth, her husky sigh was all his cock needed to throb and harden. Her tongue slid along his, inviting him deeper into her mouth, and the hands plucking at his snowsuit promised sensual delights once they reached his skin.

Kjell braced his hands on the wall, half afraid to reach for her, lest he tear her snow suit from her body. He leaned into her, letting her feel the extent of his arousal. Even through layers her breasts flattened against his chest, and the low moan she made when they parted for air left him hard and aching.

"Knock it off you two. We have company," Bjorn's voice, tempered with amusement, cut through his lustful haze.

Kjell pulled away, though didn't move. He drew air into his lungs; his attention still focused on the woman in front of him. "Later?" he rasped.

"Oh yeah." She stood on tiptoe and kissed him again, then wriggled out from beneath his arm. "You heard the man. We got company." She slapped him on the ass. "Get out of your snow suit."

Bjorn laughed.

"You too," Sigrid's voice cut through her mate's mirth. "Hans has set up the conference room."

Bjorn pulled his woman to him and gave her a kiss. "Okay. Trent has escorted the guest we brought to proper quarters?"

She nodded. "This shouldn't take long, and then you can call Vik. I know you're dying to wake him up."

Bjorn couldn't quite suppress his grin. "It is rather fun, isn't it?" He turned back to them. "Okay you two, you heard my woman, we have a guest in the conference room. That means no nookie until the business is done. Kjell, I want to talk to you."

Those six words dropped his stomach. "You go on ahead," he told Cam. "I'll be there soon."

She smiled and nodded, heading breezily out the room, while Kjell figured he'd be getting his ass chewed. Probably something about his behavior back there, though he bet Bjorn would have done the same thing if Sigrid had been the one captured.

"Hey," Bjorn said once Cam was out of earshot. "You did a good job holding it together back there. We did what we had to do. Nothing more. Okay?"

Kjell nodded, relief flooding through his veins. "Thanks."

"I think it's time to bring Cam in as a member of the team. I've spoken with Sigrid and she's okay." Bjorn grinned. "You think Cam would go for it?"

Kjell struggled to hide his wide smile. "I think she could be persuaded. The question is, after being kidnapped by Russians and talking to the Night—Spirits, is she going to want to stay?"

"From what I saw, I don't think we could pry her away. But it's her call. Just wanted to let you know. Let's go meet this new biologist. Probably a woman. Vik seems to think we all need to be paired up so we can focus on our missions or something." Bjorn chuckled. "Apparently he has no idea how distracting a woman can be."

Kjell laughed. "Yeah. Let's go. I'll talk with her after the meeting."

By the time he strode into the conference room, Kjell knew he had a solid plan for convincing Cam to go along with Bjorn's proposal. Of course, it hadn't taken much convincing on Sigrid's part, when it had been her turn. What a funny pact to have taken back in basic training, that once they got where they wanted to be and found their mates that they'd share. A bond of brotherhood between the two of them. He hoped Cam really wouldn't mind at all.

She had taken a seat, leaving an empty chair next to her, which he gladly accepted. Sigrid sat on the other side of her, and another woman, her light auburn hair a contrast with the two blondes, sat with notebooks piled in front of her. A pencil sat forgotten behind her ear, and she seemed oblivious to Hans' salivating looks from the other side of the table. Kjell bit back a grin.

Mark remained standing until Bjorn gestured to him to take the chair next to his twin. Trent and Bjorn sat at opposite ends of the table. Kjell gladly relinquished his usual

seat so he could be next to his mate. He found her hand beneath the table and squeezed it, tracing his finger along the top of her thigh. The quick back and forth motions had her batting his hand away, until Bjorn fixed them both with a stern glare.

"I think you have the floor," Bjorn said to the newcomer.

"I am Louhi Virtanen, a biologist. I bring information from Vik about the new compounds being created, and I also have a connection to the Spirits." Her plain words startled Kjell, though he figured none of them would beat around the bush in this company. Louhi turned to Cam. "I understand that you've spoken with the Spirits. I'd like to compare notes with you as soon as possible. I think we can work up a good alliance and use them to our benefit in getting this new compound."

"Thank you. I trust that you've been speaking with Sigrid," Bjorn said.

"Yes. We're already collaborating on our work." Louhi spoke formally. "Hans has given me a tour of the compound. I believe the front clearing, where Cam had spoken with the Spirits, will prove most beneficial. Thank you." She clasped her thin, long-fingered hands over the books, and Kjell couldn't help but compare them to the talons of the Spirits. Between the Russian and Vik's biologist, he suspected their lives just got a lot more complicated.

Chapter Fourteen

Cam listened to Louhi discuss her findings as well as it what it might mean for the Spirits and for the polar bears. The talk about the super sludge being something to feed a faction of the Spirits as well as more thoroughly pollute seemed to be true. Louhi had the numbers. Though Cam had known the woman less than an hour, already she liked her cool, competent air. She was a woman with life experience outside the lab, one who knew the practical application of her work.

And, she'd spoken with the Spirits. Not just spoken with them, she claimed to be some sort of human-Spirit hybrid, a way that the Spirits had connected with shamans of other Arctic Circle peoples to try and repair the damage they'd done in creating the rift between them and the bear shifters. Cam wasn't really sure what to think about that part. Getting used to the Spirits talking in her own head seemed farfetched enough.

"I'd like to go to the lab. I think Sigrid and I should get started. When you do your salvage work on the site, you'll bring in several of the darker canisters? And do be careful with them." Louhi said, her words bordering on an order.

Cam bit back a smile. If this woman thought she would come in here and the men would jump to her bidding, well she'd quickly learn differently. She noticed Bjorn trying not to smirk.

"We'll make sure you have what you need." Bjorn waited until Louhi pushed back her chair and left. "Trent, will you get our guest?"

Rising to his feet, Trent nodded and left the conference room.

Bjorn made a call using the large communications center and moments later Vik's face appeared on the screen. He smiled when he saw them. "Good evening. I'm glad to see you're back and safe, Cam. Welcome to the team."

Those four words stole her breath. "Thank you," she managed to get past the lump in her throat. A team. Sure, she'd had that in the military, a team of necessity rather than anything resembling a family. Beneath the table, Kjell squeezed her hand. Here, she suspected she found something more. "Glad to be a part of it. I'm sure we'll get some good intel from the camp site."

"Always working. That's what I like about you." Vik said, pausing when Trent opened the door. "Aleksander, I'm glad you made it out all right. I trust Bjorn and his men have been treating you well."

The Russian, looking a little better since he had access to a sink to clean up, nodded. "They've been hospitable." He cast a sideways glance at Trent. He saw the empty chair next to Cam and went to it. Pulling it out, he dipped his mouth close to Cam's ear.

Next to her, Kjell stiffened.

"I'm glad you got out safely," he whispered just loud enough for others to hear. "I would have never let Demyan hurt you."

"Thank you," she said, the memory of Demyan hovering over her, his threats coming with puffs of his fetid breath made her stomach churn.

Aleksander sat down next to her. Cam took the opportunity to study him, noting his stubbled jaw, his thick dark brown hair. Green eyes that looked far too old looked at Vik's image on the screen. "You know I can't go back there. With no body, they'll mark me a deserter. There is a price on my head."

"I know. And that's why you will stay here with Bjorn and his team, working with them. You'll need to return to help the salvage mission. You know, probably better than even Louhi or Sigrid, what kind of compounds were stored at the site and what their uses were. If you can send me the files you brought back with you, then we can make a move on our end. I suspect by the time we're ready to bring down the corporation, the scientists will have finished their work."

"And if not?" Bjorn spoke into the silence. "If they're not finished with their work?"

"They will be," Vik said, and it sounded more like an order than any certainty.

"Would you mind telling us what Aleksander was doing there and who he is?" Trent questioned.

"That would be good to know too. I didn't expect to pick up anyone except Cam when I went to the camp. It would have been nice to know that we had people on our side there. Good thing we went in bear form and not with guns blazing, huh?" Bjorn gave a stern look to Kjell, and Cam inwardly smiled. No doubt when faced with news of her kidnapping, he'd gone in all claws and fangs and killed anyone who got in the way. She knew she would have done the same had their positions been reversed.

"I knew what I was getting into when I took the assignment. Being from a former Soviet republic does have its benefits, when I can be useful." Self-deprecating sarcasm dripped from his words. "There is no easy way in my country. Nor, I suspect in yours." He grinned and leaned back until he gave Cam a once over. "And some of our secrets are darker than others." He fixed her with a harsh smile, and then looked back at Vik. "Right?"

"That may be, but here everyone's equal and everyone is on my team." Vik's words sounded like a pronouncement, a summons, rather than a gentle reminder and encouragement.

Cam shivered. Her stomach roiled, wretched with memories. She breathed deeply, drawing strength from Kjell's hand on her knee. He offered support for now. She'd accept it while she could.

Thankfully the meeting turned to other things, leaving Cam to her thoughts. She clung to the man beside her, his hand resting lightly on hers. Drawing strength from him, she replayed his promise over and over in her mind. At last, Vik's image faded away and Bjorn announced the meeting adjourned.

Kjell turned her hand over. He slid his fingers up and down her palm, eliciting tiny sparks of desire. Her pussy ached, growing wet as her clit swelled. "I think it's time to make good on the promise." He finished his words with a sensuous stroke of his tongue across the tip of her ear lobe. He drew it into his mouth and sucked. A slight graze of teeth, and then he was gone, leaving her breathless.

She ducked her head, turning her face to his chest. The flame of embarrassment burned her cheeks. She drew a deep breath, filling her nostrils with his outdoors scent. Around her, the sounds of people leaving reminded her of their close quarters. No doubt everyone knew about her and Kjell's relationship and she had nothing to be ashamed of. Lifting her face, she rose onto her tip toes and pressed a quick kiss against Kjell's lips. "I'm looking forward to it."

"Good. Why don't you meet me in the lounge in an hour?"

Cam arched an eyebrow. The lounge had a door; she wasn't worried about anyone walking in on them. But it seemed awfully public. Whatever turned him on, turned her on. "Okay."

Kjell squeezed her hand. "You won't regret it." He released her, then turned and left the conference room, followed closely by Bjorn and Sigrid.

Cam joined them in leaving the conference room. She watched Bjorn and Sigrid, the scientist resting her head on Bjorn's shoulders. With their hands entwined, they appeared like a pair of lovebirds. Cam smiled until she slipped into her room.

An hour later, Cam paused in front of the door to the lounge. Inside, Bjorn and Kjell discussed Norwegian hockey. Typical men. Cam grinned to herself as she reached for the doorknob. She touched it, her stomach fluttering with anticipation. Her mouth went dry. She drew a steadying breath. *This is silly. You've had sex with him before.* Though her mental words were meant to soothe, they didn't. Instead, something in the back of her mind told her this would be different.

It was different. She loved him. Turning the handle, she opened the door and stepped inside, closing it behind her. She turned.

Kjell and Bjorn sat on the couch, both wearing a pair of lounging pants that hung low on their hips. Though her attention went to Kjell first, noticing the broad, flat chest and the ripple of his abdominal muscles, she couldn't help but admire Bjorn. Side by side they made quite the pair. Kjell's white-blond hair looked freshly washed, standing up in damp spikes. Suddenly, Cam felt very dowdy in a pair of black yoga pants and a military-issue gray T-shirt.

"Come here." Kjell patted the space on the couch between him and Bjorn.

Her steps faltered. She sensed Bjorn's predatory gaze on her, sizing her up. "Did you bring me here for some sort of kinky sex thing?" She tossed the question out in an attempt to diffuse the sudden sexual tension in the room.

"In a manner of speaking, we did," Bjorn said. "I won't bite unless you want me to. I promise." He flashed a smile that probably had Sigrid's knees weak every time she saw it.

His words conjured an image of her standing between Bjorn's knees while he sat on the couch, his lips and tongue on her nipple. Just the barest hint of his teeth would graze her, and she'd lean back into Kjell's strength as he took her from behind.

Somehow, Cam managed to make it across the lounge without tumbling into a boneless heap of want somewhere between the door and the couch, though she did notice the blankets on the floor. She debated about asking, though it seemed Bjorn's words about a kinky sex thing were true. She paused in front of the couch, painfully aware that sitting between the men would be more than the simple act of reclining on a couch. It implied consent. A want and a desire for something she wasn't quite sure about yet. Not that she dismissed the idea of having her every carnal need fulfilled by these two hot men, not at all. More than she feared treading in places from where she wouldn't return.

Aleksander knows about my past. His words had confirmed it, though he said nothing to the other men, or she guessed he hadn't. Sleeping with Kjell right now, making love to him, and finding sexual release with their Commanding Officer, all without telling him...she drew her lower lip into her mouth and nibbled on it. Some things, she feared Kjell would never forgive.

And yet, how could she tell him these things now. He had made a promise, now they fulfilled it. Nothing more and nothing less. Or so she hoped.

“Relax. We won’t do anything that you don’t want us to do,” Bjorn said. He rested his hand against her shoulder closest to him and started a soft massage. His thumb found the tense muscle near her collar bone, and she moaned as he applied pressure to the very spot that needed it. “Kjell and I promised each other that once we found our mates, we’d share. Just once as a show of friendship and brotherhood. I allowed him to share Sigrid, with her permission of course. And now, with your permission, he’s willing to share you with me.” Bjorn spoke softly, matter-of-factly, and somehow, keeping that same military discipline calmed her.

“I see.” She glanced at Kjell and saw him watching her reaction. His arm rested along the back of the couch, his fingers just barely brushing the side of her neck next to Bjorn’s hand. “So what do you want me to do? Stand up and whip off my clothes?”

Kjell chuckled. “If that’s what you want, honey, I’m all for it. This is your night. Whatever you want.”

Again the same image of her standing between Bjorn’s knees filled her mind. Standing, she turned went to Kjell. She insinuated herself between his legs, then pulled her t-shirt over her head.

Kjell’s attention went to her breasts. His nostrils flared. He reached for her, cupping the twin globes with his hands. He palmed her for a bit, and then brushed his fingers across her nipples. “What are you thinking about?” He leaned forward to nuzzle her.

Cam splayed her fingers across his shoulders. Aware she had an audience in Bjorn, she kept her shoulders back so he could see as much of her as possible. Her fingers trailed down across Kjell’s collar bone, then back up again. “I’m thinking of having you take me from—” Her words ended on a moan when Kjell sucked her nipple. He drew the tight bead into his mouth, laving it with his tongue. Sliding his hands to her ribs, he pulled her close to him, so close that she rested first one knee, then a second one on the couch.

“That’s it,” he murmured between licks and nibbles of her skin. One hand slid down over her ass to tug on the pants. They slid, revealing her bare hip. “Shit! You’re not wearing any underwear.” He tugged again, bunching them up around her knees.

His urgency forced her to wiggle closer to him. Though her pants blocked the way, she longed to feel the thick ridge of his cock pressing against her damp pussy. One thumb maddeningly brushed along the top of her neatly trimmed curls, a back and forth movement that grew ever closer to her clit and labia.

Kjell tugged at her pants. “Need you naked.” Somehow, together, they managed to slide them down her legs, and she crawled back into his lap. Nestling her pussy against his hips, she moaned at the delicious feel of his cock sliding between her labia as she rocked against him.

Bjorn moved closer. He reached for her, stroking his fingers along the outside of her breast.

Cam shivered.

Kjell’s hands stroked up and down her back, sliding over her buttocks, then moving upward to thread through her hair. “I think we need the floor. Much more room,” he whispered against her skin.

“Yeah,” she agreed, her pussy aching to be touched, licked, kissed, anything. Her channel tightened, anticipating the thrust of fingers or cock.

“Hang on,” Kjell cupped her ass and stood, carrying her five steps to the floor. He lowered to his knees, and then leaned forward to rest her against the pillows.

“No, you.” Cam pushed against his chest.

He leaned back, and she shimmied down his body, tugging at his pants. When she had him as naked, Cam crawled back up his body. She stopped at his cock, the thick shaft making her mouth water. If going down on Kjell felt good to her, she knew it’d look fucking awesome to Bjorn. Meeting his gaze, she lowered her lips to Kjell’s cock.

Bjorn groaned. “You should see this.”

Cam stopped the downward halt of her lips. Reaching between Kjell’s legs, she fondled his balls. He groaned, and she used her tongue to tease the slit in his cock head into releasing a droplet of fluid.

Her wet labia demanded to be touched. She wished she could mentally order Bjorn to move behind her. She sent the thoughts at him as she nestled her lips against the root of his cock.

Bjorn did move, striding around to stand behind her. He gave a low whistle. She sensed, rather than heard him move closer, until he stood between hers and Kjell’s feet. Reaching out, he slid two fingers along her wet pussy.

She jumped, her mouth pulling away from Kjell’s cock. A low whimper tumbled from the back of her throat, and when she bent her head again, she moaned around the girth of Kjell’s cock.

“Damn, she’s so wet.” The sound of clothes rustling punctuated Bjorn’s words.

Cam longed to turn around and see Bjorn. No, she’d let her imagination fill in the gaps in her knowledge, and turned her attention to the man beneath her.

“I want to watch you take her.” Kjell’s voice turned gravelly. Reaching up, he caressed Cam’s hair. “Do you want Bjorn’s cock inside you?”

The question sent a fresh flood of moisture to her sex and torrid thoughts to her mind. “Yes,” she whispered, sliding her tongue across his cock head. She tongued the bundle of nerves beneath the flare of the crown and smiled at the way he groaned.

Something rustled, and then Bjorn’s condom-clad cock nudged her opening. Reaching around to her hips, he fingered her clit. “She’s hot, buddy.” He eased the head of his cock into her. Another long thrust buried him fully inside her. Bjorn paused.

Cam closed her eyes, her breath caressing the tip of Kjell’s cock. Some part of her mind told her that she should keep sucking him, continuing until he came. At the moment, she savored the thick penetration and Bjorn’s fingers sliding across her clit. The man knew how to touch her. Slowly, he pulled out again, and she turned her attention back to Kjell, taking his cock deep.

Closing her eyes, Cam concentrated on her own arousal. The need humming through her body forced her to thrust back against Bjorn. Not wanting to ignore Kjell, she licked him up and down like she savored the perfect treat. Hollowing her cheeks, she sucked him harder into her mouth. He bumped against the back of her throat. She retreated for a moment, then relaxed and breathing through her nose, took him deeper.

His salty essence dripped onto her tongue, and she licked it. His groans, and Bjorn's, surrounded her, reminding her that she had the power here. Cam tightened her inner muscles around Bjorn, and when he shuddered and pumped harder into her, she fondled Kjell's balls.

Her nipples tightened, demanding in their neglect. Though her thighs quivered and she braced her weight on one arm, still she took them. Spreading her legs wider brought Bjorn closer to her, and when he gripped her hips to propel himself into her, she inched her finger along Kjell's perineum.

She'd been in other threesomes. Not many, but enough to know that this differed. Though Kjell's fingers tangled in her hair, he was gentle.

"Wait." Kjell used his fingers to still her mouth. "I want to save it for when I'm inside you."

She pulled her lips away. "You are inside me. My mouth." Swiping her tongue across the tip, she smiled before ducking her head and giving herself over to the pleasure of Bjorn's cock.

Bjorn flicked his fingers over her clit.

Cam whimpered. She thrust against him, the meaty slap of his balls against her only adding to her pleasure. Her body tightened. Having Kjell watch her made her arch her back and offering him a view of her breasts. They swung with every thrust.

Her gaze caught and held Kjell's, and it was the desire in his eyes that drew her pleasure even higher. She imagined his fingers, his cock, his body making love to her, and it was in slow motion that he moved from beneath her. Rolling onto all fours, he crawled to her, pausing with his face just parted from hers. Then he leaned forward and kissed her.

Cam's heart tightened. She squeezed her eyes closed, the emotion flooding her body driving tears to her eyes. A soft, mewling noise escaped a moment before Kjell pressed his lips to hers. She kissed him like it might be her last, pouring her love and her heart into it. Though Bjorn still fucked her, and she tightened with every thrust of his cock into her, it was Kjell she made love to in her heart. He had to understand. He needed to understand.

Bjorn's grunts deepened. He drove harder, his fingers strumming her faster and faster toward release.

Kjell cupped her cheeks. "Come for me. I want to see how beautiful you are."

His words propelled Cam closer to orgasm. She hovered on the precipice, the pleasure building so much she feared she might die from it. Kjell plunged his tongue into her mouth, taking, demanding his pleasure, and she gave herself over to the two men. He reached for her breasts, his touch on her nipples a delightful counterpoint.

With the deep-throated roar of a male bear, Bjorn leaned over her and thrust deep into her once more. Stiffening, he came, the first tremors racing through his body enough to send her over the edge. She leaned on Kjell, letting him support her as she shuddered and panted. Sparks of pleasure, darted through her womb and down her channel until she tightened around Bjorn. He held onto her, balancing her between him and Kjell, until she somehow came back down to earth.

Then, Bjorn pulled away.

Cam whimpered his loss, as Kjell helped her to lie down. Someone, maybe Bjorn, slid a pillow under her head, and then Kjell moved over her.

"You okay?" He kissed her forehead as he moved between her thighs, his hard cock nudging her.

"Yes," she panted. "Never better."

Sweat cooled on her skin. She drew a deep breath and feathered her fingers across his cheek and jaw. She strove to remember every detail, from his sensuous mouth to the hollow of his collar bone. Twining her fingers behind his neck, she toyed with the short, soft strands.

Leaning down, Kjell kissed her. "You ready?"

"Yeah," she breathed.

In a long, sure stroke, Kjell buried himself inside her. Automatically, she lifted her heels, crossing them behind his lower back to draw him even deeper inside. The slide of his flesh against her already had her cresting again. Each brush of her hard nipples against his chest drove her higher, and when he claimed her mouth, fucking her with his tongue and his cock, she shuddered as another orgasm overtook her.

The world faded down to her and Kjell. The feel of his muscles, so strong and sure above her. Even in the depths of that godforsaken tent, she knew he'd come for her, just as she would have done the same for him. Strong enough to let her do her job, yet tender enough to love her like this, she couldn't have conjured a more loving, beautiful man.

Her eyes stung and she relished the tear that leaked from the corner. He understood her. He touched her. And though he hadn't yet said the word, she prayed he loved her. She prayed it would be enough.

And then the tug of his teeth on her lower lip pulled her mind back into her body. She distantly registered the closing of the door, the sense that it really was just her and Kjell. She cried out as the tip of him brushed against the mouth of her womb. They moved together until she shattered beneath him, coming hard and fast. Her channel milked him, muscles rippling along his shaft until he groaned and spilled himself within her.

Sparks shot through her body, her nipples sensitive where they brushed against his chest. She shuddered, trying to draw air into her lungs. Holding him, she clung, not wanting to let him go, lest reality intruded and this dream faded.

"Welcome to the team." Kjell rolled to the side and flung his arm over his head. He panted, and she rolled to the side to trace her fingers across his sweat-slicked skin.

"That's a hell of a welcome, not that I minded. I wonder what you'll do for an encore." She kissed the center of his chest and spun a blissful, sated web around herself. Because once that door opened, they had a corporation to bring down and Spirits to help. And, she had a truth to tell.

Chapter Fifteen

Even with Kjell keeping pace beside her, Cam scanned the horizon for anything that shouldn't be there. She listened for the sound of snowmobiles, the memories of her capture still too fresh for her comfort. Both she and Kjell wore .45 pistols on their hips, and she'd taken extra precautions to secure a couple of knives as well. One rested comfortably in the small of her back, held in a zippered compartment she'd checked to be sure she could reach if her hands were bound. The other had been tucked into her boots. She'd gotten cocky once, certain that no one would attack her on her morning runs. Not again, not even with Kjell beside her.

He ran at an easy pace, no doubt slower than he'd go on his own. The plumes of their breathing led the way. Surprisingly, Kjell hadn't grouched this morning when she suggested they go for a run outside. He'd mentioned the treadmill, and she'd let him know that she preferred to condition in the environment in which she worked. He'd conceded her point with little fuss.

Frankly, after last night and the lovemaking that happened once Kjell took her back to his room, she was shocked either one of them had the energy to run.

"I think I'm going to shift when we reach the halfway point. Hope you don't mind the brief break." Kjell checked his pedometer. "Probably less than a quarter mile to go."

"Sounds good." She double checked his calculations and found them correct. Thankfully, with his help, she'd chosen a different run, one that wouldn't bring them back to the place of her capture.

They jogged in silence for a couple of minutes and then Kjell announced that they'd reached the place. He slipped a pack from his back and dropped it on the ground, quickly shedding his clothes. "If you wouldn't mind carrying them back for me," he said.

"Not at all." Even in the frigid Arctic air, she admired his lean, male physique. His form shimmered, and in a moment, a male polar bear watched her as she tucked his clothing into the bag. She slipped the pack over her shoulders, thankful that it didn't hinder her access to the zippered pocket at the small of her back. With a nod, she turned, and saw three Spirits standing in the middle of their path.

Kjell stopped. The fur on the back of his neck bristled, and then smoothed down as if he forced himself not to give into the instinctual reaction.

"Hello," Cam said.

We are glad to see that you are well. The bears take care of their own quite well.

Cam startled. Their own implied that she might be a bear too, though as far as she knew she was just a plain old human.

You have mated with this one. It is plain to see for those who know the signs. We have come to tell you thank you. We do not know what is in the dark canisters, but your scientists will find out. I'm sure the new one will prove most helpful.

Cam concentrated on the Spirits, frustrated by her ability not to tell which one was speaking, or if indeed, only one communicated with her. In the meeting, Louhi had mentioned a connection with them.

"We'll do our best," she replied, not quite sure really what to say. Railing against the Spirits for not coming to her aid appeared first in her mind. Out here, away from the compound, she

guessed angering the Spirits might not be the smartest move to make. "But what do you want me to do?" The scientists, Louhi and Sigrid, had their job. She guessed the men would have to work to bring down the Russian corporation, though Vik said he had plenty of work to do. Although she fit in with Vik's and the men's work, she guessed there might be something deeper for her.

The Spirits focused on the bear. *Be a good mate to this one. Work with him and the others to stop the poisoning of this place and our people.*

"No 'learn the ways of the force and come into your destiny'?" Cam arched an eyebrow. "After you guys talking to me, telling us about how there used to be a bond between the bears and you, and now Louhi is some sort of human-Spirit conduit, taught by Finnish Shamans..." Her words trailed off in a bubble of nervous laughter. "And I'm left to just spin my wheels?"

Next to her, Kjell nudged her hand with his muzzle, a gentle warning. She stroked his head, though it came easily to her waist. For a moment she thought about asking if she could side astride him and let him carry her home. Not here, and definitely not where the Spirits were watching.

You will have plenty to do, we're sure. And if you do want to learn, you can simply call. We will come and we will teach. But it has to be your choice.

The solemn words spoken by the Spirit touched Cam. She nodded. "Thank you." Having them offer her the choice, perhaps even a way to atone for her past, meant a lot. "Thank you." With her words, the Spirits shimmered and faded away.

Cam breathed a sigh. Aware she still stroked Kjell, she pulled her hand back. "Ready to go?" she asked.

Kjell gave a noise, some kind of cross between a rumble and a growl, and then loped away. Cam followed, pushing herself a bit to keep up with the large bear. Together, they ran toward the compound and home.

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Kjell bounded forward, careful to keep his strides in line with Cam's running. His heart soared. Even the run-in with the Spirits, where they spouted mumbo-jumbo about Cam learning from them and the scientists working on the compound, couldn't dim his spirits. His bear rejoiced. Finally, after all this time, he had a mate, someone who understood his bear and his man. Kjell marveled at Vik's ability to find people to send to them, perfectly able to compliment their bear nature, and he wondered, if perhaps, Vik wasn't more than he seemed.

Maybe so, or maybe it was just an easy match to find women with spirits as wild as his own. Somehow, Kjell thought it took a bit more than luck.

Cam ran beside him, her lean body moving like a machine. The pack sat easily on her back, and he let his mouth gape open in an ursine grin when he thought of all the hardware on her. She'd even taken his gun and slid it onto her own belt at her left hip. Take away the snow suit and high-tech fabrics, she might be an old west gun slinger, ready to kill with deadly accuracy.

His mate. Last night the bear, and the man, had relished in taking her over and over again. Even now, out here in the cold, he wished Cam, too, was a bear so they could shift, run, play, and even mate together in their true forms. That she was human required more warmth and finesse than his bear could supply, so he contented himself with the knowledge that they'd soon be back at the compound and he could claim her once more.

They ran in silence, not that he could really carry on a conversation with her anyway. Reaching the compound, Cam opened the gate, holding it to let him in. He waited while she closed it behind her, then he headed to the supply shed.

Cam followed, though he sensed her questioning his moves. After all, surely he could go into the compound in his bear form. It wasn't like the doors or hallway would be too small for him. Still, he had other things in mind, and as soon as she opened the door to the heated shed and they stepped inside, he started to shift.

His form wavered. In a moment, he stood there, naked, already reaching for the pack Cam slid from her shoulders. He dropped it to the floor, and then tugged the zipper of her snowsuit down.

"What are you doing?" Cam yanked her ski mask and goggles free.

"Trying to get you naked." He stepped away long enough to grab a couple of blankets from their supply storage, and spread it out on the floor. "Better?"

Cam stepped out of her ski suit and before she could disrobe any farther, Kjell was there. He yanked her sweater and her undershirt over her head. Reaching behind her, he unfastened her bra. The straps slid down her shoulders, and he pulled them down.

Her supple body entranced him. Kneeling, he shoved her panties down her long legs, undoing her boots and pulling them off along with her socks. When at last she was as naked as he, he pulled her down to the blankets. Their legs tangled, and he relished the press of her breasts against his chest. He kissed her, drinking from her lips. He plunged his tongue into her mouth, the insistent pulse in his cock demanding he do the same.

Not yet. Beneath him she mewled, her fingers curling into his shoulders. Pressing her hips along his, she looked one lean leg around his calf. His bear clamored at him to mark her to take her, no matter how many times they'd had sex last night. Pulling his lips away, he drew a shuddering breath and kissed a path along her neck.

He found a sensitive spot on her shoulder. *There*. His bear growled the demand. Kjell took her skin beneath his lips, sucking hard. He grazed her with his teeth, her startled cry echoed in the shed.

Yes. Mine. He shifted, his turgid cock brushing her folds. He didn't need to touch her to test her readiness, for she lifted her hips and he easily slid along her labia. The tip of his cock bumped against her clit. Shuddering, she cried out, lifted her face to capture his lips once more.

His fearless warrior. Her hands slid down his back to cup his ass. "Please. I need you inside me." Her breathy plea tightened his balls.

A subtle movement of his hips and one long thrust buried him inside her. They both groaned, and he didn't care if anyone heard. Kissing her, he took advantage of her open mouth by stroking his tongue along hers. He devoured her, needing to be inside her, heart and soul, as she was with him. His bear reveled in the claiming of his mate, and he struggled to hold onto some edge of control.

Cam squeezed his ass.

"Cam," he groaned her name, his balls tightening to the point of pain. "Shit!" The muscles in his biceps bulged as he stiffened above her. His body trembled, every muscle taut with the attempt to hold back his release.

"Kjell," Cam shouted. She shattered. Her pussy tightened around him, milking him into orgasm. Her body undulated with pleasure. Pressing against him, she clung, her face buried against his chest, her heels pressing hard into his buttocks. Inside, the tiny shocks of her orgasm wrung even more from him until he felt as if he'd given her everything he had.

Their harsh breathing echoed in the storage shed. He remained buried inside her, his weight mostly on hers, his biceps bulging with the effort not to sag against her. He rained kisses on her forehead, the top of her head, until she sighed and wriggled against him. Only then, did he roll to the side, taking her with him.

"The meeting," Cam murmured. She licked at his sweaty chest, her inner muscles already tightening around him. "We should probably go."

"Yeah, we should." He pulled away, not liking being the one to leave first and knowing he had no choice. Quickly, he dressed. A covered tunnel connected the main building to the shed, and they jogged along it, carrying their snowsuits. Hanging them up in the entry way, he watched Cam finger combing her hair. A red flush sat high on her cheeks. His kisses gave her mouth a bee-stung look. No matter how serene they appeared walking into the meeting, the mere fact that they were late would testify to what they'd done. He didn't mind.

Cam put distance between them. His stomach dropped. Picking up his pace, he reached for her hand. He tangled their fingers, thankful when she slowed to match his pace. "They'll wait for us," he said.

She nodded. "We shouldn't be late."

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Cam glanced down at their joined fingers, the turmoil churning in her stomach. After running with Kjell this morning, she knew, deep in her gut that she had to come clean with him. Her past haunted her just like the Spirits did. Though she knew they wouldn't force her to do anything, it was obvious that they wanted her to do *something*. She frowned as they reached the conference room.

She allowed Kjell to open the door, and then hurried inside. Everyone else was already there, and two chairs had been left along the side of the table closest to the door. Cam took one seat and Kjell the other. She avoided Bjorn's amused smile.

"Okay, now that we're all here, I'll make the call to Vik." Bjorn turned to the panel and punched a few buttons on the keyboard. The call made, and moments later, Vik's voice appeared on the screen.

At least they didn't walk into the meeting with Vik able to watch them. He smiled and gave greetings. "I'll get right to the point. The basic information that you've sent back about the black canisters concur that it's the new compounds developed by the corporation. Continue to work on it. We've been able to secure the Russian government's cooperation in tracking down its production source. We also will be sending some new compounds."

Louhi nodded. "We'll figure out what they are." She glanced at Sigrid. "Won't we?"

"Definitely," the other woman answered. "And anything your scientists come up with will be helpful too."

"Good." Vik turned his attention to Aleksander. The man sat between Trent and Bjorn, not looking happy. "Your cover wasn't blown. Information has been seeded back that you were killed

in the raid. Stay there and continue to work with the team. You're going to come in very handy soon."

Aleksander smiled with a painful looking twist of his lips. "I'm sure I will." The conversation continued. The more Cam listened, the more she realized this investigation had come to a turning point. No more did they really need boots on the ground. Until they determined the makeup of the new compound, and where it was being manufactured, then all the evidence in the world wouldn't be enough to bring down this corporation. And the problem was, there was more than just this one company.

Cam's stomach twisted. Kjell squeezed her hand beneath the table, and she allowed him to offer the small comfort. "What about me?" she asked in a conversational lull. "If you don't need manpower then you don't need a sniper." Her heart leapt into her throat.

"You're a part of the team, Cam. You have no reason to doubt that." Vik's words held a finality that wouldn't allow any argument.

"Thank you." She shifted in her chair, feeling odd. Both Vik and Aleksander spoke as if they knew about her past. The General, sure. She'd worked for him before, and with his military contact he knew everything. Aleksander worried her. She'd never met him before in her life, so he had no reason to know, unless someone told him. Surely Vik wouldn't reveal her darkest secret and greatest shame.

"Don't worry. I'm sure you'll be putting your marksmanship skills to good use soon. Once Louhi and Sigrid determine this compound, then they we'll go in and mop up. That'll be where you, and the men, come into play." Vik's words reassured her.

"Okay." Cam acted cool. Until she was alone with Kjell there was no way she was spilling her guts here. Later though, she had to tell him. If she wanted to allow herself to dream, she had to come clean, and she was tired of being all wishy-washy about the prospect.

Bjorn and Vik discussed what they would need and the communications that would occur. Cam tuned it out. Instead, she focused on Aleksander. The Russian held secrets, deep ones. Then the meeting ended.

"Cam, Kjell, I want you to stay." Vik's voice interrupted her thoughts.

Cam stiffened in her chair. "Yes, sir," she said and swallowed hard. Pulling her fingers away from Kjell's, she resisted the urge to salute. She drew deep breaths, noticing Kjell's increasing tension beside her.

Vik waited until everyone, including Bjorn, left the room. Watching her commanding officer leave, a thousand scenarios, none of them good, flashed through her mind. After all they'd said about her being a member of the team, surely Vik wouldn't dismiss her. Her throat tightened. If Vik dismissed her, she had nowhere else to go. She pressed her lips together and drew a deep breath through her nose.

The door closed with a soft click behind Bjorn. No reassuring glance, no words, nothing from him indicated that she would do anything other than get her ass chewed. "You wanted to speak to us, sir?" Cam asked, unable to handle the silence any longer.

"I did. I'm aware the two of you showed up late to the meeting." Vik's attention focused on Kjell now. "I'm sure after your long time in the Arctic, having Cam is a great relief in many ways.

However, what you do on your own time should not interfere with or delay our critical work. Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir," Kjell all but shouted back.

"Yes, sir," Cam replied. She smoothed her lips into a studied neutral expression. In the US Army she would have been court marshaled. Things sure ran differently across the Atlantic.

"Good. There's still more work to do, though you may get somewhat of a vacation right now while the scientists figure out more about this compound. I suggest you take advantage of whatever free time you have, and remember, no matter what happens, that you're both soldiers and you're both under my command. I trust you both implicitly. Is that understood?" With each word Vik spoke, dread settled more firmly around Cam's heart.

"Yes, sir," she said, seeing the truth in the General's eyes. *Tell him.* "I understand."

"Thank you. Now, dismissed." Vik reached for a control on his end and the screen went back.

Cam swiveled her chair. She reached for Kjell, the need to hold him overwhelming. Licking her lips, she stared at him. "There's something you have to know." She drew a shuddering breath.

"What is it? Whatever it is, it'll be all right. You're a part of our team and you've worked for Vik. Surely it can't be that bad." Kjell's reassurance warmed her.

"It's about what I did before I went to work with Vik." She closed her eyes, seeing that horrible day like a movie playing before her. "I was in Canada working with a group of hunters. We came along some polar bears near Hudson Bay. There was one, a male, sunning himself on the beach. He seemed to not even sense our approach. One of my clients fired and his gun jammed." Her voice broke. She yanked her hands away as first one sob, and then a second caught in her throat. She pressed her fists to her lips in a futile attempt to stifle the cries.

No, she refused to cry. Not here, not now. Grief welled up from deep inside. Tears streamed down her cheeks. All she saw was the horrible puddle of blood and the man, the dead man that she'd killed for doing absolutely nothing.

"It's okay. Take your time." Kjell cupped her shoulders and pulled her toward them. The armrests of their chairs got in the way. Turning her, he pulled her into his lap, where she nuzzled her face next to his neck. He smoothed his hand down her back, the motion comforting.

Cam shuddered. "There were three bears on the beach that day. I killed one," she blurted out, unable to be gentle with her words any longer. "I killed him. My contract stipulated that if my client missed his shot, I was to take a second one for him. We do that a lot with beginners. Of course the guy's gun jammed. He knew he hadn't shot it, but that wouldn't matter to those at home. I watched the polar bear heave to the snow. It shuddered, and the guys, realizing they were watching death, turned and hurried back to camp. I didn't mind. I told them I'd come get the bear, we had a travois and a snowmobile, and this is what I was hired to do. When I got back, it wasn't a bear. It was a man. Apparently he'd been a shifter just like you."

She squeezed dry eyes together, no more tears left to fall. She reached for him, smoothing her palm over his cheek. Her fingers grazed his lips, lips that she had once kissed. "I'm so sorry. I went back—" Her voice shuddered, and she paused before continuing. "I went back and told them that apparently we had missed. I saw the body, the man, lying there dead. I closed his eyes. And when I looked up, there were two bears watching me from the bush. I don't think they were just bears either."

"They weren't," Kjell said. He tightened his hold on her. "That's what Aleksander was trying to tell you, I think. We weren't there, but we heard. And when I saw you with those poachers, I guessed that the rumors were probably true. But it was a mistake. It's a risk we take when our bears come out around humans. That's why Vik sends us up here and to places where it's less likely accidents will happen." He stroked her hair. "I love you, Cam. I don't think there's anything you could do that would stop me from loving you. The past is the past. We have a future together and a Russian corporation to bring down."

"So you knew Aleksander? You both knew and you didn't say anything?" Relief that she'd finally told the truth mingled with anger.

"We thought until you were ready, we wouldn't say anything. Until this moment, it had been a rumor, and an old one at that. In fact, it'd been so long since I'd seen Aleksander that I didn't recognize him until he told us his name." Kjell tilted her chin. Dipping his head, he kissed her, and Cam relished the touch of his mouth on hers. She opened, inviting him deeper. In response, his tongue swept her lower lip. More tears, this time happy ones, leaked from the corner of her eyes. For a kick-ass woman, she never cried, and now she had. It was all Kjell's fault, not that she'd tell him that. Instead, she curled her fingers into his short blond hair to pull his mouth closer to hers. She took the lead, stroking her tongue along his.

Closing her eyes, Cam poured herself into the kiss. The tingling in her nipples and her aching pussy only provided a delicious counterpoint to the thrust and retreat of his tongue in her mouth. Here, in the conference room, she wanted him. And yet, there was one more thing to say. Cam ended the kiss.

She wiggled on Kjell's lap, the office chairs not meant for such intimate cuddling. "I love you, Kjell. I can't imagine not running without you by my side, or working as a member of Vik's team. I've been without a home for so long. Now, I have a home, and a family. Vik told me that you guys needed a sharp shooter. I figured this was going to be some short-term assignment. Boy, I was so wrong." She laughed and smiled for the first time since rushing late to the meeting.

"And here we were wondering why the hell Vik was sending us a sharp shooter. It isn't like the five of us are helpless when it comes to guns. Though there's no way we could have posed to lead the poachers out. No way in hell." Kjell rumbled.

"See, you needed me."

"I still do, honey. Let's go back to my room and see if we can start some of that vacation Vik promised us. Then tomorrow, we'll see if we can't requisition a bigger bed." Easily, Kjell scooped her into his arms and stood.

Cam helped him to open the conference room door and their laughter rang down the hall.

"Make way for the sharp shooter and the polar bear," Cam joked as Kjell carried her to his room.

"Yeah, only this time, I get to shoot something into the marksman." Arousal roughened Kjell's voice.

Cam groaned at the pun and quickly wrapped her arms around his neck, silently admitting she couldn't wait to get shot.

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Mary commutes between her dream home near the Mark Twain national forest in Missouri and her current residence in Iowa. She lives with a menagerie of animals including an opinionated horse and a cat that was a dog in past life. When not writing spicy tales of erotic romance, she enjoys writing science fiction and fantasy, spending time with her horse, and enjoying the outdoors. Lucky for her, her partner (hero) shares these same passions, and usually both of them can be found in their respective dens writing.

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Ghost Redeemed

By Mary Winter

Available Now from Pink Petal Books

Shay's stomach flip-flopped. Looking at Kyle standing just outside her bathroom door, a boyish grin on his face, made her wonder what would happen if she invited him to join her. She'd planned on taking a shower, figuring that would be the easiest way to wash the wound on her back. But with Kyle there, she wouldn't need to go to such lengths. Then again, maybe she would anyway.

She stepped back and opened the door, suddenly nervous about her plan. "I guess you're right," she said, trying not to sound too eager. "I will need some help." Turning from him, she pulled her shirt over her head. She swore she heard Kyle's swiftly indrawn breath. She glanced into the mirror and saw the angry red gash start just below her shoulder blade to disappear beneath her bra clasp. She reached around her and unfastened the hooks. Her peach lace bra hung loosely on her shoulders, and she noticed Kyle trying hard not to look at her breasts in the mirror.

She slipped the lingerie from her shoulders. "The peroxide and some antibiotic ointment are in the medicine cabinet."

Kyle opened the mirrored panel. She watched, noticing the light glow surrounding his skin. If it weren't for that, he'd look completely normal standing in her bathroom, reaching for the brown plastic bottle of peroxide. He grabbed several cotton balls and turned his attention to her back. His movements seemed slow, as if he had to think about each action.

"This is going to sting a little. There's not much I can do about that." He unscrewed the lid of the peroxide bottle and doused a cotton ball. "Are you ready?"

"I'll be fine," she said. His fingers brushed her skin, and tiny shivers darted from the touch. Her nipples pebbled, and she resisted the urge to cover her breasts with her hands. A soft fizzing sound filled the bathroom, and then the wound stung. Shay sucked in a quick breath and gritted her teeth.

"I'm sorry," Kyle continued to dab the cotton ball on the wound.

"It's okay," Shay ground out. She reached in front of her and wrapped her fingers around the towel rod on her shower door. Clenching her fingers around it, she focused on breathing in and out to distance herself from the sting of disinfectant on her wound.

His motions slowed, and she heard the soft clunk of the bottle on the counter. The trash bag rustled as he tossed the cotton ball into it. The room closed in. She became aware of Kyle standing behind her, his body just inches from her. The thudding of her heart sounded loud in her ears. She longed to turn around and see him, but didn't, afraid of the desire she would see in his gaze. Keeping her eyes down, she waited.

He touched her. His fingers slid across her shoulder, a feather light touch against her skin. Tiny sparks danced at the contact. Telling herself he was a ghost did little good, as heavy warmth filled her limbs. His hand skimmed her side, barely touching the side of her breast. She wanted more. Him. His cock. Her lips parted.

"Kyle," she breathed.

“Shay.” His other hand reached around to palm her breast, a light touch that soon had him standing against her. The ridge of his cock pressed against her buttocks.

Her knees went weak. She leaned against his strength, not wanting to get used to his warmth surrounding her. The fact he was a ghost mattered little. Some part of her mind rebelled, but she refused to listen. Right now, still aching from the fight and heart-sore from her best friend’s death, she wanted his warmth, his strength surrounding her.

She shifted her weight. Her ankle protested, and she quickly moved her weight to her good foot.

“Let me help you.” His hand slid down her back, to her hip. “Turn around and wrap your legs around me.”

Shay started to turn. “But you’re a gh—” Words died when she saw the naked hunger in his eyes. He wanted her, his gaze sweeping over her bared breasts.

“Perfect,” he whispered, covering one with his hand. He brushed a thumb across a distended nipple, and Shay closed her eyes. His free hand slid over her back, down to her ass. Pulling her against him, he urged her to wrap her leg around his waist.

She complied. The first touch of his hard cock against her coaxed a low moan from her throat. She wrapped her arms around him and brought her other leg around his waist. He easily lifted her, carrying her out of the bathroom.

“Where’s your bedroom?” He glanced down the hall, before looking back into the living room.

The Purrfect Man

By Mary Winter

Available Now from Pink Petal Books

"I'm sorry."

The masculine words sounded truly remorseful, and it took Althea a moment to realize she was dreaming. "It's okay," she automatically replied, though she knew not who this man was or why he apologized to her. In fact, she couldn't really see him. Instead, it seemed as if she still lay in bed, though the edges of the room seemed fuzzy. An effect of the sinus medication, she wondered, but she'd never had dreams like this before.

Gradually, her surroundings became visible. A man sat on the foot of her bed. Though he didn't move, she sensed an inherent lithe grace in his form.

"Wha--?" she asked, coming out of a medicine-induced fog. "Who are you?"

Tawny hair crowned his head and feathered over his shoulders. His brilliant blue eyes held warmth. A straight nose divided his face, leading to the fullest, most sensuous pair of lips she'd ever seen on a man. He wore no shirt, and the view of his chest nearly took Althea's breath away. Matching tawny hair dusted his pectorals, and then arched over a work-hardened set of abs and disappeared beneath the waistband of a gray pair of sweat pants. His feet were bare.

She blinked at the sweat pants. Until that modern piece of clothing, she expected him to be dressed in historical clothing. She didn't know why. She saw only his body; he hadn't even spoken yet. Still, something about his manner, the way he sat with his hands resting on his muscled thighs brought back images from a bygone era. She chalked it up to the timelessness of the dream state.

He moved closer, the efficiency in the way he inched toward her pillow reaffirming her belief that this was a man unlike any she'd met. After settling himself next to her hip, he trailed his fingers over her arm. The caress, so light, reminded her of the way she'd petted the cat on her porch.

"I'm Dante," he said. Reaching out, he brushed his thumb against her lips. "So beautiful. So warm." He bent over, replacing his thumb with his lips. Gently he kissed her, drawing her deeper into the dream, into him. His lips coaxed, nibbled, ate as daintily as a cat enjoying a tasty morsel. With his tongue, he traced her lower lip.

Althea parted her lips to allow him entrance. Dante's answering moan sent warm shivers darting through her body. She wrapped her arm around him, tangling her fingers in his silky soft hair. His hard body pressed against hers, and arousal drew her nipples into tight beads. She wanted to be devoured by him, to feel his lips on every inch of her flesh. Allergies forgotten, she clung to him and slid her other hand down over his muscled back to his buttocks. This was a dream, after all.

And thank goodness it *was* a dream. Her body hungered for the touch of flesh against flesh. Reaching for him, curling her fingers around his biceps, something awakened deep inside. She'd ignored the months of celibacy, hadn't really thought about them, but now, the need to make up for lost time drove her. She moaned as he deepened the kiss. Passion flared in her blood. She wanted him—her dream man. *Now*.

A quick tug pulled her shirt free of her jeans. His hand splayed across her abdomen. His touch branded her. He laid her back on the bed, tugging at her T-shirt. She released him long enough for him to pull it over her head. He unfastened her bra and slid it off her shoulders.

Althea reached for him once more. She wrapped her fingers around his hard biceps and pulled him to her.

Dante lowered his head and nibbled along her collarbone. He laved each kiss, each love bite, with a long sweep of his tongue that had her shuddering to her toes. The crisp whorls of his chest hair tickled her nipples and stomach.

She arched beneath him, her breasts begging for his touch. "Please," she whispered, unaware she voiced her plea.

Keeper

By Shaunta Grimes

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<http://www.pinkpetalbooks.com/index.php/Bookstore/Shunta-Grimes/Paranormal-Romance/Keeper.html>

Jude Felini carefully removed all the thorns from a single, perfect yellow rose before biting the long stem. He surveyed the tree-lined street, the rows of neat four-plex apartments, making sure he was alone before his body shimmered and contracted into that of a large orange tomcat.

Clutching the rose between his teeth, he hopped from the ground onto an iron balcony railing, walked across it, jumped to a tree limb, and then up to a second story balcony. Potted plants and flowers turned the small space into a tiny rain forest. Jude loved being here and he often snuck up without the balcony's avian owner knowing.

The sexy little bird in question had once again jumped headlong into a boatload of trouble. From his position under her window, Jude watched Avery Dove wrap her arms around her slender waist and gaze at the sky. Her up-tilted heart-shaped face was unguarded, and breathtaking in its beauty. She opened the window and Jude leapt onto the sill.

Avery stumbled backward several steps away from the window, upsetting framed pictures off the table behind her, and then let loose with a string of swear words all the more colorful for coming from such a delicate woman.

Laughter rang in his head. He drew altogether too much enjoyment from yanking her chain. If he could get that personality quirk under control, maybe he'd be in Avery's bed instead of standing outside her window. He took on his human form again as he jumped from the sill to the floor. As he transformed, the rose was tossed in the air. It spun in a slow arc before it landed in his hand. He presented it to her with a formal bow.

She stood with her hands fisted on her hips, her cheeks flushed. Though she struggled to keep her gaze resolutely on his face, he caught the sweep she made of his nude body. "I swear to God, one of these days I'm going to put a collar around your neck and take you in to be neutered, Jude Felini."

Jude laughed out loud. "You don't want me neutered, Sweetheart. Trust me."

"Maybe neutered you wouldn't be such a pain in my ass." She took the flower. "Where the hell are your clothes?"

Jude raised an eyebrow and tilted his head toward the window with the tree outside, under which rested his jeans and t-shirt. "Being a pain in your ass sounds fun. Maybe we should give it a try."

"I hope you aren't here just to gloat, because I'm really not in the mood." Avery stuck her nose in the flower, but Jude saw the blush rising up from her elegant neck. No woman had ever done angry as beautifully as she did. "Go get dressed."

He leaned against her clean, white wall. Everything in her apartment was airy and light, perfectly suited for a bird. "Don't you think it'll cause a sensation if I walk down the front stairs nude?"

"So go back down the balcony. You need clothes."

“Or you could take some of yours off.” He let his eyes slide down her body. Her hands were fisted on her hips and she was teetering on the edge of more angry than sexy. “And I’m not here to gloat. I’m here to lend support.”

Avery looked down her nose at him over the rose. “Sure you are. Stay there.”

She put the flower in water and then stalked off. Maybe needing some air, because it wasn’t like her to give into this particular argument so easily. She’d spent an entire evening pretending that he wasn’t naked before, just to keep from going down and collecting the clothing that he shed during his transformation.

Once he was dressed, Jude sat on Avery’s couch and closed his mouth before sexy-angry turned to really-angry. Avery sat next to him. He couldn’t take his eyes off of her. She was beautiful, fine boned and delicate in a way that made him want to take her in his arms to hold and protect her. But also fiery, she was a small package of dynamite with no fear, no hesitation when she went after something she wanted.

That rebellious streak was how she got into trouble this time.

King of Cats

By Jessica Quinn

Available Now

<http://www.pinkpetalbooks.com/index.php/Bookstore/Jessica-Quinn/Paranormal-Romance/King-of-Cats.html>

Rita was still on the phone when she marched out to the front desk and deposited the vase onto her desk with a thud. "Get rid of these ASAP, will you?" Mel asked. "I don't care if you take them to the nearest cemetery or throw them in the dumpster, but I don't want to see them when I come back out here." Rita nodded and Mel turned and marched back into her office to retrieve their latest guest for his bath.

The bronze-furred cat was nowhere to be seen when she stepped back into her office, and she frowned. *Hiding under the couch, maybe? Most folks would be surprised at how many cats learn to recognize the word 'bath'.* She took a few steps forward, shutting the office door behind her without a glance back so he couldn't get out that way, and knelt down on the floor to peer under the sofa.

"You don't really want to let the old man neuter me, do you, sweetheart?" came the purring voice from behind her. A tan, lithely-muscled arm wrapped itself around her waist even as she half-turned, ready to scream.

The eyes she found herself staring up into were copper-gold, brighter than any she'd seen outside of contact lenses. Long, straight, golden-bronze hair spilled over impossibly wide shoulders, gone the color of butterscotch from the summer sun. The broad, hairless chest was equally muscular and tapered downward to a trim, narrow waist, lean hips and a very nice— *Oh. My. God. He's completely naked.*

Before she could force a scream past her parted lips, he grinned roguishly, eyes twinkling, and swooped in, mouth closing over hers. His tongue speared straight into her mouth to tangle with hers, his lips roaming possessively over her own. A flush of heat shot from her lips all the way down to her groin, igniting an ember of liquid flame there that slicked her panties. Eyes wide, she watched the stranger's nostrils twitch, almost as if he could smell her arousal, and even as she turned the rest of the way to face him, he lowered her to the floor.

Her nipples had gone hard enough to cut diamonds, pressing achingly against the white lace bra she wore. He undid the buttons on her blouse with eye-watering speed, fanning the lapels of the shirt open.

"Wait, no!" she gasped, pulling free for a second. Her knees went weak, and she swallowed hard at the rush of heat through her body, consumed by a white-hot lust she hadn't felt since...well, ever. *Jason never made me feel like this!* Something hot and hard nudged her thigh and she glanced down, stifling a gasp at the sight. His erection was huge, large enough to nudge the soft flesh of her belly.

He leaned in close before she could get a better look, arrowing in to nip her shoulder and the side of her throat. She could feel his hands slip below her waist, working to undo the button and zipper of the slacks she wore, and she grabbed his hands, temporarily stilling them.

"Who...who the hell are you?" she gasped, desperately trying to maintain even a thin façade of sanity against the sensations that swirled turbulently through her hungry flesh.

He grinned again, wide, licking his lips, those emerald eyes hot with desire. “Don’t you know, sweetheart?” he teased, sliding one finger under the waistband of her panties and drawing a fiery line from her left hip to the right. “After all, *you* were the one who saved me when that car hit me.”

It made no sense whatsoever. She spent half a second trying to puzzle out the mystery behind his words; then his mouth sought hers again. With waning determination, she grabbed his hands—again— pulling them away from her pants. She could hear the stranger making a deep rumbling sound in his throat and chest. It took her a second to realize what it meant.

Purring. He’s purring.