

The Honeymoon Phase : Frank and Marina

By Kate Simon

The Sandcastle Resort on Molikai was everything the pictures promised. The grounds were covered in lush tropical flowers and trimmed palm trees. Frank Nash surveyed the lobby for any possible security threats. When your wife was one of the most popular actresses in the world, you never let your guard down.

"Oh, Frank. It's beautiful," said Marina.

He took her hand and smiled as they approached the desk. Marina was wearing a ball cap with her long brunette hair tucked up underneath. Even though she also wore oversized sunglasses and loose clothing her presence still made her stand apart from everyone else. Frank would only be able to relax once they'd gotten to their cottage.

Frank smiled at the young girl behind the desk. "Hi, Mr. and Mrs. Nash checking in." The girl tapped a few keys and looked at her monitor. "One moment, please," she said with a smile. She picked up a phone and dialed an internal extension. "Mr. Sullivan, it's Bella. Mr. and Mrs. Nash have arrived." The girl hung up and returned to her computer. "Mr. Sullivan wanted to know when you arrived." The girl generated the paperwork for Frank. As he was signing they were joined by a tall, handsome man with sandy blonde hair, wearing a loud Tommy Bahama shirt and khaki shorts.

He extended his hand to Frank, "Mr. Nash, Tom Sullivan." He shook Marina's hand. "Mrs. Nash, congratulations."

"Thank you," she said with a smile.

"Welcome to Sandcastle. I'll be seeing you to your cottage." Tom looked at the two suitcases on the floor. "Is the rest of your luggage in the car?"

"No, this is all we brought," said Marina.

Tom smiled. "Huh, okay. Let's get you to your cottage."

Frank grabbed his own bag while Tom grabbed Marina's. "Why were you surprised?"

"I assumed someone like Mrs. Nash would bring more luggage than one bag for a week."

Marina laughed. "Bathing suits and t-shirts and shorts don't take up that much space."

Tom took them to a small dock and put their luggage in a small skiff. "Your cottage is very private at the far end of the resort. You can walk there but with luggage, this is easier." They all climbed in the small boat and made the short trip across the lagoon to the small, beach front cottage. Tom tied up the boat to a small dock. Frank helped Marina out of the boat as Tom followed with the luggage.

Frank noticed the next closest cottage was several hundred yards from their cottage. They were surrounded by thick foliage and tall palms. Frank would have a perfect view of the only two access routes to their cottage, over the water or directly down the beach.

Tom opened the cottage for them and carried in their luggage. There was a bottle of champagne chilling in a bucket next to large bouquet of tropical flowers. Marina pulled a card from the bouquet and read it.

"Congratulations, Tom Sullivan and the staff of Sandcastle"

"Oh, this is lovely." She handed the card to Frank.

"I assume this means you're not the bellhop," he smiled.

Tom laughed. "No, I'm the owner of Sandcastle. Katherine's an old friend and asked me to take care of you. She knows her special clients can relax here without being disturbed. How long have you known Katherine?"

"She's married to my brother, Vasily."

"Katherine got married?"

"Yes." Marina noticed how stunned Tom looked. "I'm sorry is that a problem? Were you and Katherine..."

"What? Katherine and me? No. She was just a good friend. We never dated. I'm just surprised. She never seemed to want to be in a long term relationship."

"You asked?" she asked.

"Well, she's a great woman," he said with a smile.

"It was a triple wedding. Frank and I, Katherine and Vasily and my other brother Jake and Michaela Turner."

"Marina, what are you doing?" asked Frank in Russian.

"Relax, Frank," she replied in English. "Tom is used to keeping secrets. Otherwise Katherine never would have called him."

"Yes, well I can imagine why you'd be keeping this quiet. Let me assure you that you can count on the discretion of myself and my staff."

"We appreciate that," said Frank.

"Mr. Nash if you're comfortable using the skiff I'll leave it here with you. Then you can come and go as you please."

"That would be great, thanks."

He pulled a map out of his cargo pocket. "This is a map of the lagoon and surrounding islands."

"Thanks, Tom," said Frank.

Tom handed them a business card. "I'm sure you want to get settled after your flight. My direct cell is on the back. Please call me if you need anything at all."

"Thank you," said Marina. She watched as Tom closed the door behind him. "Well, that was interesting."

"What?" asked Frank as he was reviewing the map.

"What do you mean, what? He had a thing for Katherine."

"He said they never dated."

"Doesn't mean he didn't have a thing for her."

He tossed the map on the dresser and slipped his arms around her waist. "Could we not talk about other people's love lives?"

"Do you have something else in mind?" she smiled.

"We are all alone in a tropical paradise. I can think of a few things," he said as he placed a kiss on her neck.

"Oh yes?"

"Umm Hummm," he said as he kissed her shoulder, then nipped at it.

"Interesting. Anything else?" she asked.

Frank pulled back and smiled. He picked her up and tossed her on the bed.

Marina smiled. "You have my attention."

Frank insisted Marina sit with her back to the flow of traffic, reducing the number of people who might recognize her. She had won the debate on having dinner at the restaurant, determined not to hideout during their entire honeymoon. His eyes darted around the room, surveying the guests.

"Frank, relax. We're safe. This is an exclusive resort with an excellent reputation. The staff are used to dealing with celebrities."

He reached his hand across the table. "Sweetheart, protecting you is the most important job I have. It's the most important job I'll ever have. I won't ever stop."

"I know, babe, and I love you for it. It's just this is your honeymoon too. I want you to enjoy it."

Frank smiled. "I found this afternoon very enjoyable."

Tom Sullivan approached their table. Apparently, his evening attire was changing from cargo shorts to cargo pants and a different Tommy Bahama shirt. "Good evening. I hope you are enjoying SandCastle."

"We are. It's lovely," said Marina.

"Our chef is amazing. I recommend the salmon. Please let me or any of the staff know if you need anything."

"Thanks," said Frank.

Tom walked off to greet another table. A young girl in the resort uniform came to their table with her notepad and smiled. "Good evening, I'm Manuela, your server for tonight. Can I get you something to drink?"

"Just a soda for me," said Frank.

"Frank, we're on vacation. Have a beer."

"Fine, give me whatever you have on tap."

"And you ma'am," the girl gasped, finally realizing to whom she was speaking. "We have a delicious house drink, called the Paradise," Manuela said.

Marina noticed the slight shake in the girl's hand. "It's okay, dear," she said.

"I'm just such a big fan of yours," she said in a whisper. "But it's the cardinal rule here, we can't impose on any guests."

"You're doing fine. I'll take one of those drinks."

"You'll enjoy it, but be careful," she smiled. "They can sneak up on you."

"My husband will look out for me."

Manuela gasped again then glanced around to see if anyone noticed.

"Congratulations," she whispered.

"Thank you. What do you recommend for dinner?"

"Well, the salmon is excellent but the ahi is amazing."

"Sounds great," Marina said.

"Make it two," said Frank.

Manuela was correct in her recommendation and they'd thoroughly enjoyed their meal. Frank sipped his beer while he watched Marina polish off a large piece of cheesecake.

"Ummm. Delicious," she smiled.

"Glad you enjoyed it." He signaled to Manuela who brought them the check. He tacked on one hundred dollars for a tip which made the young girl break into a large smile.

"Thank you. I hope you enjoy your stay at Sandcastle."

"How much did you give her for a tip?" Marina asked as they walked back to the skiff.

"Hundred bucks. She seemed like a nice kid."

Marina gave him a kiss on the cheek.

Frank secured the skiff as Marina kicked off her shoes. She jumped off the dock and walked up to the lagoons edge, letting the water cover her ankles.

"Umm, it's warm." She walked further into water.

"You'll get your dress all wet." He could see her mischievous smile.

"Well, we can't have that," she said as she pulled the sundress over her head and tossed it to him. She stood in the moonlight wearing nothing but a small thong. She walked further out and then dove under the water. As she broke the surface the moonlight Frank thought she looked like a water nymph.

"You just gonna stand there?" she smiled as she dove under the water again. As the moonlight reflected off her bare ass his clothes hit the beach. He dove under the water

and came up next to Marina. He pulled her close and she wrapped her legs around him.

"Fancy meeting you here," she smiled.

"Fancy that," he said as he kissed her. "I love you, diva," he whispered in Russian.

"I love you too, goon," she replied in Russian. They splashed around the lagoon like children, laughing and chasing each other. Marina walked out of the water like a goddess, picking up her dress but not bothering to put it on. Frank laughed and shook his head, grabbing his clothes and following her into their cottage. Life with this woman would never be dull.

Tom had arranged a boat and pilot for a private scuba dive. Frank had been scuba certified from his Marine days and Marina had gotten certified for a movie role. Frank looked over at Marina as she double checked her gear.

"I'm impressed," he said.

She looked up at him with a smile. "Mad skills," she said. "You ready for this, Marine?"

"Let's do it."

They sat on the edge of the boat, crossed their arms and fell back into the water. Frank quickly realized he didn't need worry about Marina's ability. He watched the joyful look on her face as they swam through a school bright yellow butterfly fish. She snapped pictures of the fish and coral reef. After she snapped a picture of him he grabbed the camera and snapped a picture of her. He handed her the camera and glanced at his watch. He pointed up, indicating they'd spent all the time they should in the water.

They climbed back in the boat and stripped off their gear. The pilot secured the gear and started them back to their cottage.

"That was great," said Marina.

"Yeah, that was fun."

"Franklin Nash did you actually relax enough to enjoy your own honeymoon?"

He tilted his head down to hide his grin. "Maybe."

"Well it's about time."

He looked up at the pilot. "Mike, I heard something about horseback riding."

"Oh, yeah. They have a few horses stabled. I'm sure Tom would bring them to you. You have enough open beach to run them and there are a few trails near here."

"I'll call him and set it up," said Frank.

"Horses?" asked Marina. "I don't know how to ride. Do you?"

"Yes, I can teach you. You never learned for a movie?"

"Apparently I don't have the look for a western."

"Their loss," he smiled as he helped her out of the boat. Frank extended his hand to the pilot. "Thanks, Mike."

"You're welcome, Mr. Nash, Mrs. Nash. By the way, I'm a big fan."

"Thank you, Mike," she said with her best movie star smile.

Frank shot the man a glare. "Oh, don't worry, sir. Tom pays me a healthy salary to pilot boats and be discreet." He pulled out a card from his pocket. "Here's my cell. Give me a call if you want to go out again."

He nodded. "Thanks, Mike." He took Marina's hand and walked toward the cottage. "How about a shower and then nap before lunch?"

"A nap? What are you? Three?"

"No, I'm an old man with a young wife and I need my rest."

Marina laughed and slipped her hands around his neck. "Old man, my ass. You are my hot lover."

"Hah! Well, this hot lover needs a shower and a nap."

Marina smiled and ran her hands down his arms. "Tell you what, I'm going to make you a deal. We take the shower together and then we take a nap."

"The sacrifices I make for you, diva," he smiled, then gave her ass a slap.

Marina lightly shook Frank on the shoulder. "Hey, sleepyhead. Wake up."

"Hmmm, what?" he murmured.

"Lunch is here."

Frank opened his eyes. "Lunch?"

"Yes, it's nearly one. I have a couple of wraps and fries. Oh, and I ordered a couple of those fruit smoothies you like."

He laughed as he swung his feet over the edge of the bed. "Mango and french fries, very healthy." He sat at the small table and took a sip of the delicious fruit drink. "So what do you want to do next? Rock climbing? Cliff diving?"

Marina smiled as she picked up a fry. "Very funny. I thought after lunch we could take a walk up to the end of the cove. It's private so you could stand down from security watch. Then we could just relax and soak up some sun." She smiled as he stopped in mid bite. "You're right that I need to chill out a bit. I am always running. I'd enjoy my man putting some lotion on me and listening to the ocean."

"Sounds great, babe."

Marina watched as Frank enjoyed his meal. She loved watching him, he was so handsome. His broad shoulders, his strong jaw, his beautiful blue eyes. She really did love her man. She hated to be reminded that Frank was older than she was. The man who'd been in the shower with her a couple of hours ago certainly didn't behave like an old man. Frank's soft kisses and loving touches were more romantic and satisfying than actual sex with any previous lover. After the relaxing shower, they'd curled up together until they'd both dozed off. Maybe slowing down a little would be a good thing.

"What are you smiling about?" he asked.

"I'm looking at my very handsome husband. What's not to smile about?" Frank's smile made her heart skip. My God, she loved her man.

Frank and Marina walked a few minutes up the cove to a secluded section of beach. He took a moment to look around and determined Marina had been right. This was at the far end of the resort, unlikely to have any foot traffic. He'd seen from the map of the lagoon that this section had difficult shallows to navigate for boats. It was a beautiful day, the afternoon sun was tempered by a cool breeze. He took a deep breath and set his beach bag down and smiled. He looked over at Marina as she opened the beach blanket and laid it out. She slipped off her beach jacket and tossed it with her things. She was wearing an olive colored strapless bikini top with a tropical print skirt tied at her hip. She put her hand on top of her large brimmed straw hat and looked up at the sky. The sun cut through the palm trees framing her toned, tanned body. Thousands of pictures of his wife, posed and candid, appeared in hundreds of publications declaring her the most beautiful woman in the world. No one had ever seen her like this. She was perfection. She was his.

"Frank?"

He couldn't answer. All he could do was stare.

"Frank, is everything okay?"

He walked toward her and touched her cheek, almost afraid to break the spell. "My God. So beautiful," he whispered. He gave her a soft kiss and smiled. "My beautiful woman," he whispered in Russian. "My love, my life." He untied the knot at her hip and let the cover fall to the sand. He looked up and down at her long legs, ran his hand over her flat stomach. He ran his hand up over her breast. "My woman," he whispered again.

"Your woman," she replied in Russian. "Only yours."

He reached behind her and released the clasp on her top and let it fall. He caressed her bare skin as he kissed her. He deepened the kiss, pulling her tight against him. She matched his fire with a blaze of her own. His woman was pure passion, for people, for life, for him. He pulled her toward the blanket and laid her down. He pulled the small bikini bottom down her legs and tossed it aside. His hands moved up and down her skin, the warmth of the sun mixing with the heat of her body. He leaned down and tasted her skin, letting his tongue travel up her long torso to her breasts. He explored her as if she were a new discovery. Her sighs became moans. He pushed off his own trunks and raised himself over her.

"Josiah," she whispered. "My Josiah."

He covered her mouth with his, absorbing her groans as he entered her. She wrapped her legs around his waist but let him set the pace, letting him take her to the edge before pulling her back. He savored every aspect of her until he clasped her hands over her head and their cries mixed with the sounds of the ocean.

Anna looked out the kitchen window at Frank's rose garden. Colors burst through trellises and out carefully arranged plots. Her son in law had a real gift. She'd promised she'd take care of the garden while he was gone but she didn't know much about flowers except not to over water. George would help her.

George. She smiled at the thought of her son, Vasily's, father in law. He was a tall, man with a shock of white hair and a white mustache. He seemed very fit for a man their age. She smiled broadly. Very fit, indeed. She shook her head and chastised herself. That part of her life had been over for a very long time.

Anna put the finishing touches on a chicken salad she'd made for lunch. Just as she stuck it in the fridge the doorbell rang. She opened the door and smiled. Very fit, indeed. George wore blue jeans and a work shirt. All he needed was a stetson and he'd look like a cowboy.

"Hello, George."

"Hello, Anna."

"Come in, please." George followed her into the living room and stopped her with a hand to her shoulder. He leaned in and gave her a light kiss to the cheek.

"It's good to see you again, my dear."

"I appreciate you coming to help me with the garden but no one else is here. No one to tease."

George smiled and leaned in close. "What makes you think I'm teasing?" He walked out toward the garden, leaving Anna dumbfounded. Regaining her senses, Anna followed him to the garden. "Frank really knows his way around a rose," George said.

"What do you mean you weren't teasing?"

He dazzled her with his smile. He ran his hand down her arm. "Anna, my dear, you are a beautiful, intelligent woman. I enjoy spending time with you and I'd like to spend a lot more time with you."

"George, I don't know what to say."

"Do you enjoy my company?"

"Yes, of course."

He gave her a sly grin. "I know you enjoy looking at me." Anna blushed bright red and swore a few Russian invectives. He took her by the shoulders and smiled. "I may be an old man, Anna, but I know when a woman is attracted to me." He laughed. "At least I remember what it was like."

"Fine. I admit you're a very handsome man but I'm an old woman who's spent the last twenty years alone. There's never been anyone in my life but Maxim."

"My Patricia has been gone for a long time too. I loved her and we had a good life together. But Anna, we're still here. We shouldn't waste what time we have left in this life."

"George, I don't know if I can."

He leaned in and whispered. "Do you want to try?"

Anna looked into his eyes and started a slow smile.

Marina took Frank's hand as they took a walk down the beach toward the resort.
"This really has been a great trip."

He pulled her hand to his lips for a kiss. "It really has."

"I'd like to come back sometime."

"I think that could be arranged."

They walked toward the stable and met up with Lisa, a petite young blonde who was feeding an apple to fawn colored mare. A chestnut colt was pushing at her hand. "You had yours, greedy," said the girl as she rubbed his nose. "Hi. You must be Mr. and Mrs. Nash. I'm Lisa."

"Hi, Thanks for the private lessons," said Marina.

Lisa smiled. "No problem, Mrs. Nash. Tom asked to make sure you enjoyed yourselves." She patted the neck of the mare. "This is Lady Jane. She's a very mellow girl. She'll be good for you since you've never ridden before. She nodded toward the colt who was still looking for apples. "This greedy bugger is Champ, Lady's son. He's still young and a bit spirited. Mr. Nash, you told Tom you've ridden."

"It's been a while. I did a few summers teaching at a summer camp."

"Alright, we're all saddle up. Let's get started."

After thirty minutes of instruction, Lisa decided Marina was a natural on a horse. Frank remembered his own skills quick enough that he took Champ through his paces. "If you feel comfortable, you can take them up the beach to the trails." She handed Frank a card. "If you have any problems, give me a call and I'll ride out to meet you."

"Thanks, Lisa," said Frank as he turned to Marina. "Are you ready, babe?"

She leaned over and patted Lady's neck. "Yes, we are, aren't we girl?"

"Let's go." He clicked his tongue and pushed his heels into Champ's flanks. They started up the beach at a smooth trot. Frank smiled at the sight of Marina's ass moving up and down on her saddle. "How are you doing over there, diva?"

"I'm fine, goon." To prove her point she pushed her heels in Lady's flanks and the horse took off down the beach.

"Marina, wait!" he shouted as he followed her up the beach. They reached the

section of the beach that where the edge of the foliage opened into a wide trail. He caught up to his errant wife and maneuvered Champ in front of her. "Slow it down, woman. You're new to this and I don't want you breaking anything."

"I'm fine," she pouted.

"Yes you are and I intend to keep it that way." He turned his horse toward the trail and maneuvered up the grassy path. Marina followed slowly behind but he wondered for how long. The trail led them through twisted paths of bright flowers and thick foliage. Colorful birds perched in trees adding their calls to the sounds of their horses heavy breath. They rode for about twenty minutes before coming to a large clearing. "Let's take a break before we head back." He pulled up on Champ's reins. "Stay put and I'll help you down." He lifted his right leg and swung it over the horse's back. He was about to step down when Champ reared and Frank fell backwards to the ground.

"Frank! Are you okay?" Marina called as she dismounted her horse.

"I'm fine," he groaned from his spot in the grass. Marina appeared over him and he could tell she was trying desperately not to laugh.

"Did you break anything? Because you are so fine and I want to keep you that way," she said before breaking into peals of laughter.

"Very funny," he said as he rolled to his side and pushed himself to his feet. He pushed aside Marina's hand to help him up. He wouldn't let her see him wince. Nothing was broken but he would have a few bruises. "I don't know why Cabe said this would be a highlight."

Marina snickered. "Oh, I'm finding this pretty memorable."

Frank stood under the hot shower and stretched his muscles. He hadn't been on a horse in thirty years. What in God's name possessed him to ride? Between sore muscles and the bruises from his fall he was going to be popping aspirins for a week.

"Hey, I brought you a beer," said Marina as she walked into the bathroom.

"Thanks, babe."

Marina opened the door to the shower and gasped. "Oh, sweetheart. Now I feel bad I laughed. You have a couple of huge bruises on your ass."

He took a sip of his beer as he rinsed soap off his chest. "I am aware." He stopped

in mid sip as Marina got into the shower with him, still wearing her shorts and a t-shirt.
"What are you doing?"

"Turn around. I'll get your back."

He turned and smiled as he sipped his beer while his wife scrubbed his back.
"You're wearing clothes."

"I am aware," she said.

He smiled to himself. Bruises aside, he could get used to this. Things might have gone a bit further if they hadn't heard a loud knock at the cottage door.

"That's dinner." She got out of the shower and wrapped a towel around her wet clothes. After she was gone a few minutes she came back in the bathroom. "Dry off and come get your dinner. Don't want it getting cold." He got out of the shower and she looked him up and down. "Clothing optional," she said with a smile.

Frank laughed as he threw on a pair of shorts. He walked out to the living area and sat at the small table. He smiled at the sight of the large strip steak and baked potato. In deference to eating like a grownup there was a side of glazed carrots.

"I figured after our little misadventure a big steak and a cold beer would make you feel better." She rubbed her hand over the eagle tattoo on his back. "The clothing optional part makes me feel better."

He slipped his hand around her waist and slid it down to cup her ass. "You're the best, babe."

"Why yes," she said with a smile. "I do believe I am."

Frank watched his wife as she demolished her meal and talked animatedly about their return home the next day. He watched her smile and talk about the souvineers she gotten at the gift shop for the family. Her long brown hair was piled up in a loose ponytail at the top of her head. She hadn't bothered to change her wet clothes which were still damp in places and clung to her. She wore no makeup and her only jewelry was her wedding band. She stopped in mid conversation as she caught him staring.

"What is it?"

"I'm just looking at my beautiful wife and reminding myself what a lucky man I am."
He stood and walked to her, pulling her to her feet.

"There's cheesecake," she said, looking back at the table.

"Later," he said, just before he kissed her. He led her to the bed and slid his hands under her damp top. He pulled it over her head and pushed her shorts to the floor. She smiled and pushed his shorts to the floor.

"What about the bruises?"

"I'll manage," he said as he pulled down to the bed. He kissed her deeply as he covered her with his body, She slid her arms around his neck and pulled him into a deep kiss. He slid down her body, kissing her neck and shoulder. He traveled down to her breasts, teasing and licking. He was vaguely aware of the aching in his muscles, but he pushed the thought out of his mind. He focused on his beautiful woman. When they finally came together, he couldn't think at all.

Frank took the luggage from the driver and walked toward their front door. A five hour flight on his bruised ass took the edge off what had been a great trip. He couldn't wait to slip into their jacuzzi tub.

Marina opened the front door and tossed her bag on a chair. "Mama, we're home," she called. Anna was housesitting while they were away. She and Vasily would go back to New York next week to close up her home and put it on the market. In the meantime, Frank would help her find a local residence.

"Mama?" she called again.

Anna came out of the kitchen dressed in her bathrobe. Her hair, normally pinned back, was loose at her shoulders. "Hello dear. You're home early."

"Early? It's nearly evening."

"Oh, I must have lost track of time."

"Are you not feeling well?" Marina asked.

"I feel fine, dear."

"You're in your bathrobe. I've never seen you in a bathrobe after breakfast."

"Ah, I'm on vacation," she said.

"Anna, what's for dinner? I'm starving..." said George as he came downstairs, wearing Frank's bathrobe.

"George?" gasped Marina. "Mama?"

Frank bit his cheek, trying not to smile.

"What's going on here?"

Anna looked at her daughter then at George. She looked at Frank who surrendered to a smile. Anna shrugged and smiled. "Well, it's fairly obvious what's going on here."

"I can't believe you're..." Marina paused and lowered her voice. "...sleeping with George."

"Oh don't be a prude, dear. How do you think you got here?"

Frank lost his grip and started laughing. "Franklin Nash, don't you dare laugh," yelled Marina. He laughed harder.

"George, why don't you help me with these and you can find some clothes."

"Good idea," said George as he grabbed a suitcase and followed Frank upstairs.

Frank set the luggage down in their bedroom and was silently relieved that their bed seemed undisturbed. As amusing he found the situation, he didn't think he could have slept in his bed again if he'd thought his seventy five year old mother in law had sex in it.

"So, you and Anna,"

"Yes. Is that a problem for you?"

Frank smiled. He liked George being so direct. "I have no problem with it. I can't speak for the rest of the family. What does Katherine think?"

"I haven't told her. We've been keeping things quiet."

"Well George, that ship has sailed."

"Looks like I better make a phone call."

"I'd recommend it. First, I'd put on pants."

George smiled. "That'd be wise."

"Mama, what is going on with you?" asked Marina.

Anna had gone back to the kitchen to check on dinner. "I'm making plov. There's enough for everyone. You set the table."

She stared at her mother as she moved around the kitchen making dinner as if it was a normal evening. Except it was anything but normal. "Mama, will you stop and talk to me."

Anna set down a large spoon and faced her daughter. "What do you want me to say, Marina? Yes, I'm embarrassed you found out like this."

"But Mama, you and George?"

"He's a wonderful man."

"I think so too but this...I just don't know what to say." Marina paced around the kitchen. "It's all so confusing."

"I know, dear. It confuses me too. No one could ever replace your father in my heart. I think I finally realized that I had room in my heart for George too."

Marina thought Anna looked differently, not at all like her mother. Then she realized what it was. She was seeing her as a woman, not as just her mother. "Does he make you happy?"

Anna smiled and looked a bit dreamy. "He does. I thought this part of my life had

died with your father. I never realized how much I missed having someone in my life. A partner."

"Mama, are you in love with George?"

Anna took Marina's hand. "Yes, dear. I am."

A deep voice came from behind them. "Well that's very good to know." They turned and saw a smiling George standing in the kitchen doorway, wearing Frank's clothes. He walked toward Anna and took her hands. "I'm in love with you too." He gave her the softest of kisses.

Marina walked out of the kitchen to give them a moment of privacy. She needed a moment herself. Frank was standing in the dining room. She slipped her hands around his waist and rested her head on his chest. "They're in love."

"That's wonderful."

"Is it?"

"What's wrong with your mother and George being happy together?"

"Nothing, I suppose. I just can't imagine her with anyone except Papa."

"I think it's a miracle they found each other. They don't have to be alone any more."

She looked up and smiled at her husband. "I want her to be happy."

"So do I. Now all they have to do is tell the rest of the family."

She closed her eyes and rested back on his chest. "Dear Lord."

Anna could tell Marina was still uncomfortable, but to her credit she wasn't treating George any differently than she'd always had. She got Marina and Frank to start talking about their honeymoon. Anna snickered at a horse story and the reason Frank was still wincing. She caught Marina's gaze and knew something was wrong. "What is it, Marina?"

"What, Mama? Nothing."

"Marina Valentina do not lie to your mother."

"When are you going to tell the others?" asked Marina. "I assume we are the first to know."

"Yes, you are," she said glancing at George.

"I want to tell Katherine myself," said George. "They don't get back from Paris for

another few days. I'm supposed to have dinner with them Saturday night." He reached for Anna's hand. "Come with me. We'll tell them together."

Anna smiled and nodded. "Of course, dear."

"I think it's time for presents," said Frank.

"Presents?" asked George.

"We brought some souvenirs from Hawaii," said Marina. She got up from the table and retrieved a suitcase. Tossing it on a chair, she opened the bag.

Anna watched as Marina dug through the luggage. Nothing made Marina happier than giving out gifts and Frank knew that. She leaned toward Frank and whispered in Russian, "Well done." He nodded and smiled.

Marina pulled a flat shirt box from the bag. "Here, George. this is for you."

"For me?"

"My wife loves buying presents," said Frank.

George opened the box and found a bright blue Tommy Bahama print shirt. It was cover with large white hibiscus and tropical ferns. "Oh my." he said.

Anna smiled. "Oh George, you'll look very dashing in that."

"You think so?"

"I do."

George smiled. He stood and gave Marina a kiss on the cheek. "Thank you, dear. Thank you, Frank."

"You're very welcome." She handed Anna a small thin box. Anna unwrapped it and opened the box and gasped.

"Oh angel, they're beautiful." Anna showed Frank the box that contain a strand of black Tahitian pearls with matching earrings. She gave Marina a kiss. She long ago gave up telling Marina not to buy her gifts. "Thank you, angel."

"You're welcome, Mama."

Frank closed the bedroom door. "Well done, diva."

"What?" she asked.

He pulled her close. "Asking Frank to stay. I know it pleased your mother."

"Well, there's no point in pretending they aren't a couple. I'm just glad we put Mama in the bedroom at the opposite end of the hall."

He gave her a kiss and smiled. "We put her there so she wouldn't hear us. Who would have thought we'd have to worry about hearing her?"

Marina shook her head. "Good Lord."

Marina looked at her watch and realized she'd been working on Welcome Home paperwork for four hours. No wonder she was tired. She usually worked from her home office. Most of the paperwork and phone calls she made could be done from home. Biggest perk was working in sweats. Her cellphone rang a number she didn't recognize so she let it go to voice mail. The caller left a message and she hit the icon to play.

"Marina, Hi. It's Kate Gallo. I hope you don't mind but Cabe got your number for me from Frank. Our fundraiser is coming up next weekend and I thought I'd go over some of the details with you. Give me a call when you're free."

Kate Gallo was the wife of a Marine buddy of Frank's. Cabe and Kate were both Homeland Security agents and had helped them with security at their wedding. They'd also made an incredibly generous donation to Welcome Home. The least she could do was attend Kate's fundraiser. She checked her calendar and saw the notation of the event she'd promised to attend. One of the many advantages to being married to Frank was his obsession for organization had a positive influence on her. She hit the missed call icon and the phone rang.

"Hello Marina," said Kate.

"Hey, Kate. How are you?"

"I'm good. How are the newlyweds?"

Marina couldn't help but smile. "We're good."

"I was wondering if you had any free time to get together. I'd like to show you a bit about what we do at the center."

"Actually, I'm free now. I've been doing paperwork all morning. I just need to get some lunch first."

"Do you know where Oceanside drive is?"

"It's not that far from my house."

"Why don't you come to my place. I'll feed you. It's the least I can do."

"Oh, I don't want to put you to any trouble."

"No trouble and I promise Frank wouldn't have any problem with your security here."

"Okay, I'll see you soon."

Marina shouldn't have been surprised at the Gallo home, considering its location but she was. It was magnificent, located on a cliff in a private section of beach. She knew Kate's father founded Rimark Computing so that explained how two Homeland agents could afford this home, let alone a six figure donation to Welcome Home.

"Hi Marina, welcome."

Marina gave her a hug. "You're home is beautiful."

"Thanks, we love it."

She took a look at the art work on the wall and was overwhelmed. "Is that a McClaren?"

Kate smiled. "Yes, my mother was a collector."

Marina noticed a sketch of Kate and Cabe sitting on a deck chair. "Oh, this is beautiful." She noticed Kate's beam of pride.

"That was done by our son, Jonathan."

"He's very talented,

"Yes he is, just like his father." Kate directed Marina's attention to a joyful portrait of a young, blonde girl, clapping her hands. "That's Amanda."

Marina sat in the surprisingly comfortable kitchen and enjoyed a large dish of ziti and fresh bread. "This is delicious. I can't believe you made this so fast."

"It's a quick recipe. I'll give it to you."

"Fabulous. I love to eat." She took a sip of ice tea and set down her napkin. "Can you tell me about Amanda?"

"She was his daughter from his first marriage. She had an acute form of leukemia and died only a few months after the diagnosis."

"How awful for him."

"I don't know how he survived it. His marriage didn't." Kate stood and grabbed a binder from the kitchen counter. "My parents were patrons of Mercy General and I continued. I was asked to name the new pediatric center. I'd been seeing Cabe for a few months and I knew about Amanda."

Marina reviewed the binder and the administrative reports. Working with Welcome

Home made her familiar with what she was reading. Everything looked in order. Children were being successfully treated for critical illnesses. The fundraising paid for new developments in treatments and for the care of patients who couldn't afford it. Like Stuart's daughter. Marina turned the page and recognize Stuart and the little girl on his lap who must have been his daughter. They both had broad smiles.

Stuart had been an employee at the resort where they got married. He'd attempted to sell a picture of Marina in her wedding gown to the tabloids. Cabe, Kate and their team intercepted him. It was then they found out the reason he'd done it was he needed the money for his critically ill daughter.

"I thought you might like to know how that turned out. His daughter is in remission and doing very well."

"That's wonderful. Thank you for showing me this."

Marina and Kate took their ice teas into the living room. Marina looked out the slider to the ocean below. "You really have a lovely home."

"Thank you."

"We have a place at the beach in Carmel but I miss having pool at home."

"Come over anytime. I'd love to have you."

Marina smiled at her new friend. "Thanks. I might just do that. You're right Frank would approve of the security here. We met when he was protecting me from a stalker. He can still be overprotective."

"I know what you mean. Cabe's the same way."

"It's scary how much they're alike." Marina glanced at some family pictures on the sideboard. "I still think they must be distant cousins." She pointed to a family picture. "Wow. He's got to be a relative."

"That's Jonathan, our son. Cabe and his mother were college sweethearts. He didn't know Jonathan existed until a few months ago."

"That must have been a shock."

"That's putting it mildly."

"You look pretty close now."

Kate smiled. "We are. He's a terrific man. We're very proud of him."

"Not to mention he's the spitting image of his father," laughed Marina.

"Jonathan is a carbon copy of his father." She pointed to a picture of the two of them posed next to a muscle car.

"Oh man, is that a 68 Camaro?"

"Yeah it is. You like cars?"

"I dated a bad boy for a while. Turned out I liked his car better than him."

"Cabe didn't take it with him to work. It's in the garage."

Marina's eyes lit up as she followed Kate into the large garage. Next to a sedan was the bright blue muscle car. She walked around it and smiled. "It's a beauty."

Kate got a wicked gleam in her eyes. "The keys are in the house. What do you say to a quick trip up the PCH?"

"Have you ever been to Montie's Chicken Shack?"

"Atomic wings?" asked Kate with a broad smile.

"Oh, I knew I liked you for a reason."

"I'll get the keys," Kate smiled as they raced back for their handbags.

They jumped in the car and looked at each other and smiled. "Road Trip!"

Marina and Kate drove up the PCH with the windows open and the music blaring. After about an hour and a dreadful rendition of "Sweet Caroline" Kate turned off the radio and pulled into Montie's Chicken Shack.

"Kate, I really shouldn't go inside," said Marina.

"No worries," she smiled as she pulled into the drive thru lane. She order a large bucket of atomic wings, some large sodas and a bunch of wet wipes. "Let's do our best not to mess up Cabe's baby. I'm kind of fond of being married."

"Will do," Marina laughed as she reached for her soda. They parked in the back of the lot. Marina scanned the lot for any prying eyes. Frank's organizational habits weren't the only thing that affected her. Kate noticed what she was doing and smiled.

"Don't worry. I have my badge and my gun. You're safe."

"You brought you gun for a chicken wing run?"

"Marina, I know what happened to you with Peter Kane. And I know what it's like to be married to a security specialist. They worry, sometimes needlessly, but it doesn't

hurt to err on the side of caution."

"Thanks, Kate," she said quietly. "I haven't been working for the last few months and I've been living a pretty normal life. I forget sometimes my life is not normal."

"Do you miss acting?"

"Acting, yes, but not as much as I thought I would. I loved what I did and I'm proud of it. I definitely don't miss the nonsense that surrounds the business."

"And now?"

"Now I'm working a lot more for Welcome Home. When I secure financing for a big project or give a vet the keys to his new home, well, I've never felt better."

"It's hard to shift gears, I know. Before I met Cabe I was an undercover operative, working alone."

Marina nearly choked on her chicken wing. "Excuse me?"

"I'm a computer geek. I'd go in to locations and dig out the computer information on suspects."

"Right under their noses?"

Kate hid a smile behind her napkin. "Yeah."

"How long did you do that?"

"Twenty years with the FBI, ten with Homeland."

"Holy crap!"

Kate laughed. "That's Jonathan's line. Anyway I met Cabe and he convinced me I didn't belong in the shadows any more."

"So you don't do stuff like that anymore?"

"I keep my hand in." Kate noticed Marina had stopped eating and was just staring.

"Wow."

"Oh, I'm definitely slowing down in my old age."

Marina looked at her and smiled. "You're not that old and that's not why you're slowing down, is it?"

"No. There's been a few incidents in the last year. Cabe doesn't want me in the field anymore and frankly I don't mind flying a desk." She put her hand on Marina's shoulder and smiled. "So believe me I understand what it's like to have an overprotective spouse."

Marina smiled and took a sip of her drink. "Tell me about Jonathan."

"He an attorney. He gave up working in a downtown practice to open one devoted to helping veterans. He's a former Marine too."

"Really? You'll have to give me his info. My brother, Vasily, is going to be inhouse counsel for Welcome Home, but he's new to LA. Maybe Jonathan could give him some pointers."

"I'm sure he'd be happy to help."

Marina polished off the last of the wings and wiped her fingers. "What's it like to be a stepmom?"

Kate's face lit up. "I couldn't love him more. It was kind of amazing. He came into our lives and it was like some switch flipped on in me. He's my kid and I die to protect him."

"What about his other mother?"

"She's a real piece of work," Kate all but growled. "Jonathan's cut ties with her." Kate looked at Marina and smiled. "He's says I'm his real Mom."

"I'd love to meet him one day."

"I'd like that too."

Marina smiled. "This has been great but we better head back. I told Frank I would be with you but not where."

Kate laughed. "Me too." She wiped her hands and they got strapped in for the ride back. She turned the key but all she got was a clicking. "Uh oh."

"Is it the battery?"

"No, we have lights."

"Now what?"

"Now you get to meet Jonathan." Kate pulled out her phone and hit the Facetime app. "He's going to need to see you to believe this."

"Hey Mom. What's up?"

"Honey, I've had some car problems and I need you to come get me."

"Sure, but why don't you call the auto club?"

"Two reasons. First, I have your father's Camaro."

"Uh, oh," he said. "Dad's gonna be pissed."

"Noted. Second reason, I'm not alone and having my friend out in public could be an issue."

"Mom? Are you...you're not are you?"

Kate laughed. "Don't be ridiculous. Say hello to my friend, Marina." She turned her phone so Jonathan could see his mother's friend was a world famous actress, not a boyfriend.

"Holy crap!" said Jonathan.

Kate looked at Marina and laughed. "Told you it was his line."

"Hi, Jonathan. It's nice to meet you. Your Mom has told me all about you."

"She's told me nothing about you."

Kate took the phone back. "We can talk on the way home. I'll text you the address. You better arrange for a tow. This thing isn't moving on it's own tonight. In the meantime we're fine and I have my service weapon. I just would rather do this quietly."

"Okay. I'm on my way."

"Thanks, sweetheart."

"You're welcome, Mom."

"Jonathan,"

"Yeah?"

"Don't tell your father."

Marina sat in the front seat of the car after a quick trip to the ladies room inside Montie's. Kate got her in and out of the restaurant without being seen. She could tell Frank that Kate's skills at security were equal to his own, that was if she ever planned to tell him about this. Which she didn't.

"Jonathan just text me. He said he'd be here in about an hour with the tow."

"I better call Frank," Marina said as she pulled out her phone. "Hey babe."

"Hi, sweetheart," said Frank. "Are you still with Kate?"

"Yeah, We're talking about the gala next weekend."

"That's nice."

"Where are you?" she asked.

"I'm in traffic."

"Oh, okay. Well, I'll see you later." Marina hung up and looked at Kate. "Are you calling Cabe?"

"No, he's out on a job with the team. He'll let me know when he's done."

Marina watched as Kate scanned the lot again. "If you ever get tired of computers I'm sure Frank would give you a job in security."

"Hah, thanks," she laughed. "You told him we were talking about the gala, which maybe we should. I advertised your appearance and ticket sales went through the roof."

"That's great," she said with a smile. "So other than just show up, what do you want me to do?"

"I was hoping you'd say a few words."

"Sure. Anything else?"

"I don't think so. Any thoughts?"

"What about a photo shoot? I've done it a few times at fund raisers for Welcome Home. We set up a screen and people make a donation to have a picture taken with me."

"You'd do that?"

"Of course."

"That'd be great."

Marina and Kate were laughing about their husband's mutual love of John Wayne and all things cowboy when they saw a flat bed tow truck pulled in to the parking lot. A familiar SUV pulled up next to it.

"Oh crap," said Kate.

"What?"

"My son has some explaining to do."

The doors to the opened. Cabe got out of the driver's side, Frank got out of the passenger side and Jonathan got out of the back seat.

"Oy dermo," Marina said and looked at Kate. "That's 'Oh crap' in Russian."

Cabe walked slowly toward his wife and stood still for a moment. "You took my Camaro on a joy ride."

"Yes I did, Gallo." She looked past her husband at her sheepish son. "Jonathan..."

she said in a very mom tone.

"I'm sorry, Mom. I had to call him." He extended his hands toward the car. "It's the Camaro."

Frank stood in front of his wife and looked her in the eyes. "A joy ride Marina? Really?"

Marina looked at Frank with his hands on his hips in all his male fury. She glanced at Cabe who was standing exactly the same way. She nodded at Kate who looked back and forth at the men. Then they broke into peals of laughter.

"What's so funny?" demanded Cabe.

"Marina, this is serious," said Frank.

They laughed harder.

"Get in the SUV," said Cabe.

"I'll ride with the tow truck, Dad."

Kate pointed towards her son, still smiling. "We'll talk later, young man."

"Yes, Mom."

Marina and Kate didn't stop laughing for twenty miles.

Marina looked over at Frank. His hands were gripped tight on the wheel and he hadn't taken his eyes off the road. He'd insisted on driving her car back from Kate's and she knew better than to argue.

"Is there a time frame on this cold shoulder?"

"This still isn't funny, Marina."

"I know you're upset, and I'm sorry about that. But I didn't take chances today. I'm sure you were too pissed at me to notice but all those paintings in the Gallo home are real."

His he snapped from the road to her. "What?"

"Her mother was a collector. Van Gogh, Monet, McClaren. That collection has got to be worth tens of millions. Did you see keypads? Considering they're Homeland agents you can bet that's top of the line security."

"Yeah, well, that's not where you were. You were in a dark parking lot."

"With an armed Homeland agent."

"She was armed?"

"Yes, and I didn't even ask her. She assumed the role of protector. You should have seen her get me in and out of Montie's restroom without being noticed. I told her if she ever got tired of Homeland you'd want to hire her."

Frank pulled into their own driveway and shut off the car. "Fine, but I didn't know that. Do you know how worried I was?"

"I'm sorry, sweetheart. I know Peter Kane affected you as much as he affected me. I promise you I don't take foolish chances, but I can't keep myself in permanent lockdown. Do you know how long it's been since I've had a girlfriend to hang out with?"

"Awhile," he said quietly.

"Try a decade. Yes, now I have Mike and Katherine and they're great but they're family. It's not the same." She reached for her husband's hand. "Frank, I promise I will always let you know where I'm going," she tried a smile. "Even on a road trip for wings." Frank glared. "There are going to be times when things do go as expected and we'll have to roll with it. I'll promise to always be careful, you'll have to promise to trust my judgment."

Frank sighed. "I'll try to relax if you swear you'll let me know where you are."

Marina took his hand and slipped it under her blouse. She moved in up and then across her breast. "Cross my heart."

"What are you doing?"

"What I'm doing is the beginning my penance for worrying my husband." She began unbuttoning her blouse.

"We're in the car, woman. People with see you."

She slipped off her blouse and smiled. Her breasts looked about to spill over her small bra. As she reached behind her back to unclasp it her grabbed her hand.

"You're crazy," he said. Then he smiled and hit the button for the garage door "Get in the house. You have so serious apologizing to do."

Marina tossed her blouse at Frank as she ran into the garage and through to the kitchen. Frank pulled into the garage and secured the door. He walked into the kitchen and looked around. No wife, only a pair of jeans on the floor. He walked into the dining room and found the tiny bra on the floor. He walked into the livingroom and found the matching panty on the rug. "Where are you, crazy woman?" he called. He looked at the

top of the stairs and there she was, stark naked and smiling. He climbed the stairs, "What are you..."

His questions were cut short when she pulled him against her. Her kiss went from passionate to blazing inferno in a split second.

"I need you, Josiah. I need you now." She grabbed his hand and pulled him into the bedroom. Frank realized any questions would have to wait as she ripped his t-shirt over his head. She ran her hands over his chest and smiled. "Mmmmm. I love your tattoos." She placed light kisses on chest, then followed them with her tongue. She looked at him with a passion that left him speechless. "So strong, so deliciously male." Marina backed up to their bed. "Pants. Off. Now." He was happy to follow her order.

She pulled him over her and drew him into another fiery kiss. "Josiah," she whispered. She nipped at his ear and neck. "Take what you want, baby. Anything you want."

He pulled back and looked into her eyes. His passion for her overwhelmed him and he lost what control he had. He pulled her hands over her head and had her grasp the rails of the headboard. Then he turned his wife into his own personal feast, tasting, licking, nipping. He turned her over and feasted again. He caressed her ass, loving the feeling of it's perfect curve in his hand. He tasted and nipped, loving her moans. He smiled to him self as he left his mark on her beautiful skin. She would feel it for the next few days.

He pushed her to her back and wrapped her legs tight around him. He took her hard, until she cried out in Russian, shuddering under him. He called out for her as he gave him self over to her.

It took a few moments before his heart calmed and he could regain his voice. "My God, woman, you make me crazy."

Marina gave him a soft kiss. "Am I forgiven?"

"Hell yes," he said, his head buried in her shoulder, still not able to move.

"Darn. I was hoping to apologize to you again."

Frank double checked his weapon and tucked it into his shoulder holster. Tonight they'd be among hundreds of people many of whom would be paying money to take a photo with Marina. Carrying under this circumstances was mandatory.

"Hey, diva, you ready?" he called. "We have to pick George and your mother up."

"You're very impatient, goon."

He glanced up as Marina started down the stairs. "My God," he gasped.

"What's wrong?"

He smiled and shook his head. "You look spectacular." She was wearing a tightly fitted blue gown that hung low over her shoulders and crossed her breasts. It hugged her body to her feet with the exception of a small train in the back. Getting married meant he now knew what a train was. The delicate diamond necklace and drop earrings did not shine brighter than his wife.

Marina smiled and ran her hand over Frank's shoulder. "Thank you. You look very dapper, Josiah. Almost as good in a tux as your dress blues."

"Almost?"

"A girl's gotta have her standards."

He smiled and grabbed his car keys. "You do know this is a hospital fundraiser, not the Oscars."

"These people are going to pay big money to have their picture taken with me. Gotta give them what they pay for." She had a look on her face he didn't like and stopped her.

"Marina, don't have to do anything you don't want. Just tell me and I'll call Cabe and cancel."

"Oh no, I have to be there. Kate would be so disappointed."

"Is it the photo booth?"

"Honestly, they're not my favorite thing, but it's for such a good cause." She slipped her hand in his. "I'm just a little tired. I've been burning the candle at both ends since we got back from Hawaii. Besides, you'll be there, standing guard. Are you carrying?"

"Of course."

Marina gave him a smile that made him a little more comfortable.

"Mama, you look beautiful," said Marina as she kissed her mother's cheek. Anna was wearing a long sleeved black gown with a heavily jeweled, v shaped neckline. Her long white hair was twisted loosely in the back.

"I think so too," said George as he came down the stairs. Marina forced a quick smile. She was still getting used to the idea that her mother was all but living with her lover just down the block from her. "George, you look so handsome."

George walked toward her and kissed her cheek. "Thank you, dear. Thanks for helping me get the tux, Frank. You were right about having the jacket altered. Anna thinks I look very dashing." Anna patted George's chest.

"You're very fit."

Frank smiled. "You just want the other women at the party to envy you your handsome escort."

Anna smiled and winked. "That too," she said. She glanced at Marina as she and George walked by her toward the front door. "Close your mouth dear. You look like a fish in the market."

Frank fought a snicker as he took Marina's arm.

"Who is that woman and where is my mother?"

Marina and Frank entered the ballroom. They were followed by Anna and George and the familiar hum of people noticing her arrival. Kate was standing close to the entrance and moved quickly toward them.

"Marina, Frank, thank you for being here," she said giving Marina a quick hug. "You look amazing."

"Thanks, so do you." Kate was wearing a deep emerald dress that highlighted her Irish heritage.

Kate gave Frank a quick hug and whispered, "I assume you're carrying."

Frank smiled. "Of course."

"So are Cabe and I. We've stepped up the normal security with the Scorpion team."

"Thanks Kate."

"Kate, this is my mother Anna and this is George Davenport." Marina had filled her

in on how she was trying to deal with her mother having a boyfriend.

"It's great to meet you both. The rest of your party is already seated." Kate led them to the long head table where Vasily and Katherine were already seated with Jake and Mike.

"Hi, everyone. Thanks, for coming," said Marina. After kisses all around Marina accepted a glass of champagne from a waiter. They all stopped mid sentence as a last couple joined them at the table. She was a beautiful blonde wearing a stunning, flowing red gown. He was a handsome man in his early thirties with sandy brown hair and a strong, dimpled chin. The young man leaned down and kissed Kate on the cheek.

"Hi, Mom."

"Everyone I'd like you to meet my son, Jonathan."

"Hi, everyone. Nice to see you again, Mrs. Nash."

"Hi Jonathan. Has your mother forgiven you for dimeing us out?"

He glanced at his mother who glared. "Ah...I'm still doing penance." He held the chair for his date. "This is Jesse Brennan."

"Hello everyone."

Val leaned over to Marina and asked in Russian, "Is just me or did Frank step into a time machine?"

"That's Cabe's son."

"Are you sure?" Val laughed.

"Oh, he's definitely a Gallo," said Jesse...in Russian.

Jonathan laughed. "I don't know what you all were saying but maybe I should have told you before Jesse was an NCIS agent, she was an Army intelligence specialist. She speaks four languages."

Frank and Cabe returned to the table taking their seats next to their wives. "Frank, this is my son, Jonathan," said Cabe.

Frank held out his hand and tried to keep his mouth shut. "Don't worry," said Marina. "We've already covered the carbon copy issue."

"Good, just so I'm not the only one to notice."

Frank noticed Cabe beamed as he put his arm around his son's shoulder. "We get that all the time." Cabe pointed to Jonathan's date. "And this is Jesse.."

"Captain Brennan?"

"Colonel Nash. It's good to see you again, sir."

"You know each other?" asked Marina.

"Our work intersected a few times over the last couple of years."

"What kind of work?"

"Sorry, sweetheart. Classified." Frank ignored Marina's glare. "What are you up to, Captain?"

"It's Agent now. I'm with NCIS."

"I retired. I do private security so it's just Frank now."

Jesse smiled as she glanced at his wife and back again. "Yeah, I don't think so, sir."

After dinner, the guests quieted as Kate rose from the table and made her way to the podium. "Good evening, everyone. Thank you for being here for this benefit for the Amanda Gallo Pediatric Center. I am very pleased to announce that tonight's silent auction has raised more than one million dollars." Kate waited for the polite applause to die down. She glanced toward their table and smiled. "I'd like to give a special thank you to Michaela Turner. The magnificent necklace and earrings she donated won the largest bid of the night, bringing in one hundred thousand dollars for the center."

Marina looked at her sister in law in stunned amazement. Mike smiled and shrugged her shoulders as if giving away such a valuable design was something she did every day.

"Now I'd like to introduce our special guest for tonight. She's an actress, a generous philanthropist," she looked at Marina and smiled. "and a dear friend. Ladies and gentlemen, Marina Sokolov."

Frank watched Marina at the podium as he walked the floor. He kept his eye on the floor, observing guests and making sure there were no security risks.

"Nash, is that you?"

Frank saw a local congressman walking toward him. Walter Fleming was a pompous little twerp he'd worked for briefly. Fleming had hired Frank to provide security for his fundraising events during his last campaign.

"Congressman," he said, merely acknowledge his presence.

"Still working security?"

"I'm here with my wife," he said, watching as Marina announced the photo shoot.

"A picture with Marina Sokolov, mmmm. I'd love to get my hands on that."

"Watch it, Fleming."

"Come on, Nash. Tell me you wouldn't want a piece of that."

"That's my wife you're talking about."

"Hah! Yeah, right." Before Frank could deck the guy he saw Marina was headed in their direction. Fleming adjusted his jacket. "She's headed this way. She probably recognizes me."

Frank couldn't believe the arrogance of the man. He was torn between pitying him and decking him. Decking him was out ahead.

"Hey babe, who's the putz? You look ready to punch him," said Marina in Russian.

"Worked for him briefly. He's a congressman. He thinks I'm your security guard."

"Hello Marina. I'm Congressman Walter Fleming."

Marina looked at the man and forced a smile. She switched to English and extended her hand. "Hello. I'm Marina Nash."

"Nash?" he gasped.

She slipped her hands around Frank's arm. "I'm Frank's wife," she said with a big smile. She gave Frank a quick kiss. "If you'll excuse us, I want to steal a dance with my husband for a dance before the photo shoot. Will I see you at the there, congressman? The average donation for a picture is a thousand but I'm sure someone like you will be very generous."

"Ahh, yes, of course," he stammered.

"Sweetheart, how about that dance?"

"Of course." They walked away from Fleming without further acknowledgement. He took her in his arms and began moving with the music. "What was that about the photo shoot? I thought you said most people would pay fifty or one hundred dollars."

"Yup," she said with a smile.

"It's a good thing you use that brain of yours for good or we'd all be in trouble."

"Hey sleepyhead, get up," called Frank from the office. He was getting paperwork together for his trip to Sedona tomorrow. He walked into the bedroom and found Marina still under the covers.

"It's after eight, diva."

"I'm tired. Leave me alone." She grabbed another pillow and put it over her head.

This was starting to worry him. She'd been sleeping a lot the last few weeks. She worked hard at Welcome Home but not enough to explain her pale color. He lifted the pillow off her head. "If you get up now I have time to make you pancakes before I go."

"I'm not hungry. I'm sleepy," she said before grabbing the pillow and pulling it back over her head.

He grabbed it back. "That's it. Something's wrong. Either you call the doctor today or I will."

"Ugh, you're being a pain, goon."

"No, I'm being your husband. Are you going to make the call or do I have to?"

"Fine. I'll call. Now give me back my pillow."

Marina stared at the ceiling only half awake. She'd kissed Frank goodbye an hour ago when he left for his office but she still hadn't gotten out of bed. She couldn't remember ever being this tired without being sick. Maybe Frank was right. She threw off the covers and forced herself to her feet. A wave of nausea engulfed her and she ran to the bathroom. After tossing what little she had in her stomach she looked in the mirror. She really did look like crap. She reached for the toothpaste. Finding it empty she tossed it in the trash and dug under the vanity for a new tube. She pushed aside nail polish, makeup and boxes of tampons until she found the toothpaste. She brushed her teeth and felt better. Well, maybe not better but at least not nasty. It was then she looked in the mirror and froze. "Oh my God," she whispered.

Marina grabbed her phone from the nightstand and hit a contact icon.

"Hello Marina. What's up?"

"Kate, I need your help."

Marina sat in Kate's car, pale and nervous. "Are you sure this guy is okay. I can't have this getting out."

Kate took her hand. "Sweetie, I promise. He's saved my life and Cabe's life," she smiled. "Twice."

Marina nodded and put on her sunglasses. "Let's do this." They walked into the Pediatric Center at Mercy Hospital and straight to an exam room. A man she'd seen before was standing in the room. He had a scruffy beard and a pork pie hat. He didn't look like a doctor. He looked like a bookie.

"Marina, this is Toby Curtis."

"Kate, I don't know about this."

"It's okay Ms. Sokolov. I went to ..."

"Harvard Medical School...yeah, yeah," said Kate. "Marina, I promise, he may look and sound like a dork.."

"Excuse me?" he asked

Kate ignored him. "I promise there isn't a better doctor in this entire hospital."

"Thank you," he said.

"Yeah, well don't let it go to your head, Harvard. Loose the hat and get to it," said Kate. She took Marina's hand. "I'll be outside."

"No, don't go. I need you here."

Toby nodded. "I can do my thing with an audience." He handed Marina a specimen cup. "You know what to do with this. There's a gown in the bathroom. Everything off, gown on."

Marina came back in the room a few minutes later wearing the gown. Toby took the specimen and patted the exam table.

"Hop up and I'll be right there."

She got up on table and watched as Toby performed a test on the specimen. He turned to her and smiled. "Okay, Ms. Sokolov, lay back on the table."

"Nash."

"Excuse me?"

"I'm married. The name's Nash."

Toby gave her a warm smile. "Apologies. Mrs. Nash, if you'll lay back this will only take a few minutes." He pulled stirrups in the exam table into position."

"Oy derma," she whispered as she laid back on the table. Kate held her hand and smiled at her. She held her breath as he examined her.

He pulled off his gloves and smiled. "Well, Mrs. Nash, I have a feeling you're not going to be surprised when I tell you. You're pregnant."

"Oh God," she whispered.

"There is something I want to check. Kate, can you please have them bring me an ultrasound."

Kate smiled. "Sure thing."

"Is something wrong?" asked Marina, suddenly panicked.

"Just dotting the eyes and crossing the t's," he said as Kate returned pushing the ultrasound machine.

"That was quick."

"We keep one here in the center."

Toby set up the machine and put cold gel on Marina's stomach. He turned the screen toward them and smiled. "It's what I thought."

"Get to it, Doc," said Kate.

Toby gave her a broad smile. "Twins."

Marina sat in the passenger side of Kate's car and rested her head back against the seat.

"Are you okay?" asked Kate.

"I'm not sure."

"Are you happy about the babies?"

"I think I'm just numb right now."

"What do you think Frank is going to say?"

"I have no idea. This was never even on the table. I was on the pill. I still don't know how this could have happened."

"Toby said the pill is only ninety one percent effective. You were the exception that proved the rule."

"He did?"

"Yeah, he did. Are you sure you're okay?"

"I must have gone blanked out after he said twins. My God, twins. What the hell am I going to do? I'll be nearly forty when they're born. What if the pills hurt them? Oh God, I've been drinking."

"Marina, calm down. Toby already said the babies should not be affected by the pill. You don't drink to excess, so everything should be fine. You'll make an appointment with your regular doctor and he can answer all your questions." Kate started the car and smiled. "Everything is going to work out."

Marina had tears in her eyes. "Thank you for being there for me."

Kate patted her hand before she pulled out of the parking spot. "Always, sweetie. Marine wives stick together."

She managed a small smile before she looked out the window and wondered how the hell she was going to tell Frank.

Marina made herself a cup of green tea and some toast. She sat down at the kitchen table and looked out at Frank's roses. He took such good care of them, of her. "He'll be a good father," she said out loud. She patted her belly. "Okay you two, listen up. Mama is about to have some tea and toast. I would appreciate it if you would let me keep it in my stomach. If not there will be consequences. I'm thinking no ponies for Christmas." She took a sip of tea and was grateful when it stayed put. "Okay. You get the ponies."

She'd just put her cup in the dishwasher as she heard the front door open. "Okay kids, this is it."

"Diva, where are you?"

"Kitchen."

He walked into the kitchen and tossed the mail on the table. He gave her a quick kiss on the cheek as he grabbed a soda from the fridge. "You're up but you still look pale. Did you call the doctor?"

She sat back down, feeling a bit unsteady. "I went to see the doctor."

"Good, what did he say?" he asked.

"I'm not sick."

"Then why are you so pale and tired?"

She reached for Frank's hand. "I'm not sick. I'm pregnant."

"What?" he whispered.

"I'm pregnant."

"How? You're on the pill."

"Well, nothing is one hundred percent. Apparently, our honeymoon was even more eventful than we thought."

Frank shot to his feet. "A baby? I'll be what, Pushing eighty by the time this kid graduates from college."

"I'm not exactly going to be the youngest mother at the playground."

"How am I supposed to raise a baby at my age?" he asked.

Marina thrust a finger in his chest. "Apparently God decided that despite all our efforts to the prevent it, nothing was going to stop him from making us parents."

Frank began pacing. "We never talked about this."

"And if we had?" Marina shook her head. "Aren't you supposed to be on your way to Sedona?"

"Not for a few hours."

"Get a head start."

Frank stopped and looked at her "What?"

"Get out."

"Are you throwing me out of the house?"

"I am suggesting you get your ass out of my presence before this becomes something we can't come back from."

"Fine." He grabbed his keys and stormed out the front door.

Marina rubbed her hand over her belly and whispered, "Now what?"

Frank realized he'd been driving for thirty minutes without paying attention to the road. He pulled off into a parking lot and stopped his car. His head was spinning. A baby. He was going to be a father. It was something he'd given almost no thought to his entire life. Sure, he saw his fellow Marines with their kids. He liked hanging out with his buddies and their families. He even spent a couple of seasons coaching the base's little league team. Being a father himself? It had never seemed to be in the cards. He leaned his head back against his seat. He'd seen Marina pissed before but never like that and never at him. What the hell was he supposed to do now? He pulled out his phone and tapped the contact information.

"Hey brother."

"Hey, Cabe."

"I've been expecting your call."

"You have?"

"It's been a pretty big day for you?"

"How do you know?"

"Kate was the one who took her to the doctor."

"So you know."

"I know. Congratulations, Dad."

"Geez."

"What's going on?"

"Are you tied up?"

"No, I'm free. Where are you?"

"I parked at that strip mall on Peco."

"That's not far from the garage. There's a coffee shop there. Get yourself a coffee and I'll see you in twenty."

Frank sipped his coffee and looked out the window. For the first time he was noticing mothers and fathers pushing strollers. That would be him in what, six months? She said it happened on their honeymoon so that would mean January or February. He heard the door open and was relieved when he saw Cabe walk in. He stood and shook

Cabe's hand.

"Thanks for coming."

"No problem." Cabe nodded to the waitress who recognized him. She brought him a large cup of coffee.

"Bear claw?" asked the waitress.

"Not today. Thanks, Jessica." Cabe turned to Frank and drilled him with a look. "So tell me why are you here with me instead of picking out colors for a nursery with your wife."

"She threw me out. I'm on my way to Sedona to meet a client but I didn't need to leave for a few hours. She told me to get a head start and leave early. "

"What? Why?"

" I was pretty shocked by the news and I guess I didn't behave too well. We never talked about this as a possibility."

"Well it's a bit more than a possibility now."

"That's for sure."

Cabe smiled and sat back. "So let's review. Your wife, a passionate, hot tempered Russian, who's system is currently flooding with hormones, got pissed and told you to leave." Frank looked startled at his assessment. "We've been getting together for months. I've gotten to know Marina. Remember the Trivial Pursuit game?"

Frank rolled his eyes. He'd made a mistake that cost them the game and she swore at him in Russian.

"You don't speak Russian. You don't know what she said."

"I didn't need to."

Frank smiled. "I guess not. Cabe, I have no idea how to be a father."

Cabe smiled. "Nobody does."

"What?"

"Not until you do it." He took a sip of his coffee. "Amanda was the light of my life. Even though I only had her for a few years I wouldn't trade one minute of it. Being her father was the greatest joy of my life."

"Even after losing her?"

"Even then."

"Now you have Jonathan."

Frank saw Cabe's beaming smile. "He's a great kid. I missed out on so much but we're making up for it." Cabe got quiet and then looked at Frank. "I did something recently I haven't done in years. I didn't even tell Kate. I went to church. I went to say thank you for bringing Jonathan into my life. I can't give words to what he means to me."

Frank saw Cabe was fighting tears in his eyes.

"My point is, you will find your way with this. So take it for the miracle it is. Cancel your meeting and go make this right with Marina."

Frank smiled. "I already did. I called my associate and got him to take the meeting for me."

He stood and pulled Cabe into a hug. "Thank you, brother."

Marina propped herself up on their bed with pillows. Staying upright seemed to help a bit with the nausea. She blew her nose and tossed the tissue on her nightstand. It joined the stack of tissues she'd cried through since Frank left. She didn't know how things had gotten this crazy. There was only one person she turned to where her life was this screwed up. She picked up her phone and hit the contact button.

"Jake?"

"Marina, what's up?"

"Can you talk?"

"Yeah, it's fine. I'm working on a lesson plan. What's wrong?"

"Can't I just call...yeah, even I'm not a good enough actress to pull this off. Frank and I had a big fight."

"About what?"

"It's something we never expected."

"Oh God, there isn't someone else is there?"

Marina managed a small laugh. "Don't be ridiculous." She paused and took a deep breath. "Jake, I'm pregnant."

"What? Oh my God. That's amazing. Congratulations."

"Thanks," she said quietly.

"It's not good news?"

"Frank freaked out. He started talking about how old he is and how hard it's going to be like he's the one who's carrying them."

"Them?" Jake choked.

"I'm having twins."

"No wonder he freaked out."

"I didn't get that far."

"What do you mean you didn't get that far?"

"He was so busy ranting about one baby, why would I tell him there are two? We were fighting and I didn't want us to say things we couldn't take back. He was supposed to leave for a flight so I told him to leave early. He left about an hour ago."

"Marina Valentina, what is wrong with you? You dropped that bomb and then kicked him out?"

"I'm scared!" she cried.

"Of course you're scared. So is he." Jake took a breath. "Marina, listen to me. I know you. You weren't afraid of what he would say. You were afraid of what you would say. You get wound up for an argument and it's like a fire whistle going off. There's no stopping you. You wouldn't have even been able to hide what you said by yelling at him in Russian."

Jake heard a quiet, "You're right."

"Of course, I'm right. Now. Think of Frank and how he must be feeling. He's thinking he's coming up on retirement and suddenly it's baby bottles and college funds. Marina, give the guy a break. He loves you, baby girl, more than anything. He will be a great father. You just need to give him a chance."

"You're right," she said, this time a bit louder.

"Okay, now that we have that covered, how are you feeling?"

"Like crap. I'm exhausted and I haven't been able to keep anything down. So far, I'm not a fan of pregnancy."

"But sweetheart, when it's over you're going to have two precious babies to show for it."

Marina managed a smile. "True."

"Oh Mama is going to go nuts," Jake said.

She managed a laugh. "She'll say it's proof of the power of all her prayers to God." She sighed. "Jake, thanks for listening to me. I feel better."

"Any time, baby girl. Now call Frank and talk to him."

"I promise, just as soon as I hang up. I love you, big brother."

"I love you too, baby girl."

Marina smiled as she looked at the contact picture of Jake. She was blessed to have such brothers in her life. Men she could depend on. But her brothers weren't the only men she could depend on. She sat up and looked at Frank's contact photo. She smiled because he hated it. It was the first picture she took of him after that first swim. All tattooed and muscled and so hot. She would call him...right after she threw up.

She ran to the bathroom and heaved what little she'd managed to keep down. When her belly stopped rebelling she stood and looked in the mirror. God she looked like

crap. But it was a matched set, because she felt like crap too. Her stomach hurt from wrenching and her head was swimming. The room started spinning and then faded to black.

"Marina, where are you?" asked Frank as he tossed his keys on the sideboard. "I had Jerry take my meeting." He walked into the kitchen but no Marina. He switched to Russian. "Talk to me, diva. I'm not going anywhere. Ever." He went upstairs and walked into their bedroom. He saw all the pillows had been pushed up against the headboard and piles of used tissues on the dresser. He glanced toward the master bath and his heart stopped.

"Marina!" he knelt down next to her on the bathroom floor. She was pale as chalk except for a slight cut on her forehead surrounded by an angry bruise. "Marina, sweetheart, talk to me." His heart raced. This can't be happening.

"Ow, damn my head hurts," she said as she opened her eyes. When she saw him she broke into a broad smile. "Frank, you're here."

"I had Jerry take the meeting. What the hell happened?"

"I was brushing my teeth and I got dizzy. I must have hit my head on the sink when I passed out. Now help me up," she said as tried to push herself to her feet.

Frank pushed down on her shoulder. "Stay put. You're hurt. I'm calling an ambulance."

"I don't need an ambulance."

"Don't argue with me, diva. It's not just your stubborn head I'm worried about." He pulled his phone out of his jacket and punched the buttons for 911 despite his trembling fingers. "My wife has fallen and hit her head. She needs an ambulance." He gave them his name and address and hung up. "Sweetheart, I'm so sorry about what happened when you told me."

Marina smiled. "So am I babe but there's something else I need to tell you."

"What?" Frank asked.

"Toby did an ultrasound."

"Who's Toby?"

"The guy from Scorpion. Cabe and Kate's team. Scruffy beard, ugly hat."

"Why would he be doing an ultrasound on you."

"When I realized why I might be sick I called Kate. I figured she could get me into Mercy for testing without anyone finding out."

"Makes sense, but I still don't see where the guy with the hat comes in."

"He's a genius doctor, graduated from Harvard Medical when he was still a kid."

"The guy with the hat?"

"Yeah, I know. Surprised me too. Anyway, he was the one who confirmed my pregnancy. Then he did an ultrasound."

Frank's heart skipped again. This being a father thing was going to kill him. "Is there a problem with the baby?" He held onto Marina's hand. Instead of bad news she gave him a sweet smile.

"No problems, with either of them."

"Either?"

"We're having twins," she said quietly.

He stared at his wife for what felt like a very long minute then broke into a wide smile. "Really? Twins?" Then he saw Marina release the breath she must have been holding. She'd been afraid of his reaction.

"Really," she said. "Apparently your little Marines are very effective."

Frank laughed as he felt his face blush. "This is amazing, isn't it?"

"I'm beginning to think so," she said smiling.

"Cabe called it a miracle."

"You talked to Cabe?"

"He met me for coffee and gave me a reality check. He told me Kate was the one who took you to the doctor. I really am sorry about earlier, sweetheart."

"I know, babe. So am I. Jake told me I was really afraid of what I would say that couldn't be forgiven."

"Jake?"

"I called him. He gave me my reality check."

Frank heard the sirens coming up the street. "I'm going to let them in. Do not move." He pointed at her and gave her a stern glare.

She smiled and put her hand over her belly. "I promise we'll stay put."
Frank smiled at her before he ran to the front door and let in the EMT's.

Frank paced back and forth in front of the closed door while he waited for the doctor to finish Marina's exam. He'd called Kate as soon as he'd gotten in the ambulance with Marina. He never took advantage of Marina's fame or his friend's resources but this was a different story. Kate arranged for a private exam room. She had the head of the hospital find Marina's regular ob/gyn and meet the ambulance. He didn't care he was asking for special treatment. He was protecting Marina's health and the health of his children. His children. My God. Eight hours ago he was only thinking about his security meeting with a resort in Sedona. Now he just wished the freaking doctor would finish.

"Mr. Nash, you can come in now," said the doctor. Dr. Jennifer Weston appeared to be younger than Marina and he wondered how experienced she was.

"How is she?" he asked as he took Marina's hand.

"She's going to be fine. When she passed out she hit her head. I see no signs of concussion. I'm keeping the tests to a minimum, of course."

"And the babies?" they both asked.

"The babies are fine." They both whispered quick Russian blessings as Frank kissed Marina's forehead. "Marina, I'm surprised you didn't come to me first."

"I needed to find out right away and we have ..." she looked to Frank for backup.

"We have a doctor in the family and Kate Gallo arranged for the tests. Marina wanted to keep it quiet until we knew for sure. I'm sure you understand how important security is for us." He smiled when he saw her startled look at the mention of the hospital's biggest benefactor. He knew their sidestepping the doctor would not be brought up again

"So can I get out of here?"

"No. I'm admitting you."

"Why? You said I'm fine."

"No, I said you will be fine. The reason you passed out is because your so dehydrated from the morning sickness. I'm going to keep you on fluids until I'm sure you aren't going to pass out again. I want you here for at least twenty four hours."

"Ugh."

"Marina, it's necessary. You're a high risk pregnancy automatically because of the twins. Your age is also a risk factor. I'm going to give you a strict routine to follow." She

glanced at Frank and smiled. "I have a feeling this guy can keep you on the straight and narrow."

Frank smiled at the doctor and nodded. "You can count on it."

They moved Marina into a private room in the maternity ward. Frank watched as the nurse hooked her up to IV's and monitors. She was an older woman who looked like she knew what she was doing.

"Okay, Ms. Sokolov, you're all set. If you need anything at all just hit the call button."

"Thank you, I will," Marina laid on her best movie star smile. "And it's Mrs. Nash."

"Excuse me?" asked the nurse.

"I'm married. I'm Mrs. Nash and that guy there is my husband, Colonel Nash."

"Oh, of course, Mrs. Nash."

Frank looked at the woman and smiled. "I'm sorry, I didn't get your name."

"Grace," she took his offered hand and smiled.

"Grace, I'm sure you can understand how security and privacy are of great importance to us." He looked at Marina. "I need to keep my family safe."

Grace all but melted into a puddle at Frank's feet. She put her hand on his shoulder. "Colonel, I'm the head nurse on this floor. You can count on me and my team."

"I can't tell you how much I appreciate that." He closed the door behind the nurse.

Marina laughed. "Damn, Marine. You had her so charmed she'd volunteer to carry these babies herself."

Frank grabbed a chair and put it next to her bed. He gave her a quick kiss before he sat down. "Sweetheart, there isn't anything I wouldn't do to protect you and our kids, even if it means charming the ladies." He was stunned when he saw her eyes tear. "I was kidding, baby."

"No, it's not that. You said our kids," she started weeping and Frank grabbed a box of tissues and handed them to her. She began pulling tissue after tissue out of the box and wiping her eyes. "Damn hormones."

He leaned over and gave her a kiss. "It's okay, baby. Everything is going to be okay. You're going to do what you need to and I'm going to take care of you." He smoothed his

hand over her belly. He noticed a curve he hadn't noticed before. He leaned over and spoke to the curve. "I'll take care of you too." Marina wept harder. "Oh sweetheart, what can I do?"

She choked out, "A hug would be good."

He wrapped his arms around her and held her tight. "We're in this together and we're going to be just fine."

Marina flipped channels to the Western Channel and tried to get comfortable. She'd be able to doze off and on for the last few hours. She pushed her pillows up and moved the bed up further.

"Do you want to lay down?" asked Frank. "You don't have to stay awake for me."

"No, I feel better sitting up. Do you want to go get something to eat? You must be hungry."

"I'll get something later."

"Frank, If you want to go home, it's okay."

He stood up and got within kissing distance. "Not going to happen, diva. I'm not going home until you do."

Marina sighed and smiled. "Oh thank God," she said as she pulled him into a kiss.

Grace came into Marina's room with a can of soda and a cup. "I see you're feeling better."

"Actually, I am. Not as dizzy."

"Good. How about sipping some ginger ale?" she poured the soda into a cup with ice.

Marina took a tentative sip. "That's good, thank you."

"You're welcome." she picked up the tv remote. "Colonel Nash, Mrs. Nash I want you to know this was not my doing."

"What?" asked Frank. Grace turned the channel to a tabloid show. There was a headshot of Marina from her last movie. He grabbed the remote from the nurse and turned it up.

"This breaking story. Actress Marina Sokolov has been rushed to Mercy General Hospital in Los Angeles. Her condition is unknown at this time. A source has told us about a possible drug overdose."

Frank heard Marina gasp.

"This coming just as this photo emerged of Marina locked in a passionate kiss with an unidentified man in a secluded corner of the recent Mercy General gala. Ms. Sokolov was recently married in a secret ceremony to a soldier."

Frank turned to see Grace had slipped out of the room. He was furious but he didn't think the nurse or her staff was responsible. He saw Marina had gone from pale to bright red.

"Those bastards!" she yelled in Russian. "I want someone's head on a spike, you hear me Josiah? You find them and bring them to me!"

"Calm down. It's not good for you, or the babies." He pointed to the spiking numbers on the monitor.

"How am I supposed to calm down? Oh God, Mama. She'll hear that."

"Marina, I already called your family. Your mother should be here shortly."

"What did you tell her?"

"I told her you were fine but you were here. She's was waiting for George to pick her up. Val and Katherine should be here soon too. Jake and Mike are coming in later tonight."

"All the way from Carmel?"

"He said as soon as he hung up from your call he told Mike and they got a flight."

Marina pointed to the television that was now repeat their story on her Peter Kane nightmare. Nothing like a good stalker story to juice their ratings. "What are we going to do about that?"

"I have an idea," he said with a smile.

Frank thanked the candystriper for the bag from the gift store. "I had her get you

a few things, hairbrush and some toiletries. I wasn't exactly sure what to get. She had the same coloring as you so I told her to get what she would want.

Marina looked at the brush, some blusher a little lip gloss, nothing too bright. "Oh, this is perfect." She swung her legs over the bed.

"Hey, where do you think you're going?"

"They've been pumping me full of fluids. I need the bathroom. Then I'm going to wash up and try to fix my face."

"At least open the door when you're washing up."

Marina sighed. "Is this is how it's going to be for the next six months?"

"Absolutely."

She shook her head and smiled. "Fine. You win, Josiah."

A few minutes later Marina looked more like herself. "How's this?"

"Most beautiful woman in the world," he said.

Marina laughed. "You're full of it, Marine. I'm pale as chalk."

Frank smiled and gave her a quick kiss. "And yet, still the most beautiful woman in the world." He helped her back into bed and arranged the covers just as Anna and George came into the room. Anna gave Marina a kiss and began speaking in rapid fire Russian.

"Angel, what's happened?" Anna said as she touched Marina's forehead.

Marina smiled at George and replied in English. "I fainted and hit my head. The door opened again and Val came into the room with Katherine. "Hi guys."

"Hi, what's going on? We saw the reports," said Katherine.

"Those reports are pure BS," said Frank

Anna waved her hand dismissively. "Of course they were. She fainted."

Marina patted the bed. "Mama, sit."

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing." She took a breath and smiled at Frank. "Mama, I'm pregnant."

"What?" Anna and the rest of the family said in unison. Anna pulled her daughter into a tight hug and resumed the rapid fire Russian. "Oh, my angel. This is wonderful."

"Mama, mama, wait."

"What?"

Marina smiled. "We're having twins."

Anna Sokolov, stoic matriarch, lost it. She squealed and kissed her daughter and then grabbed Frank and kissed him. "Grandchildren! God has answered my prayers!"

Marina smiled at Frank. "See, I told you so." The others crowded in to give Marina a kiss and hug. Then it was Frank's turn.

Val touched his forehead. "So what happened here?"

"I got dehydrated from morning sickness. I passed out and hit my head on the sink. Frank found me and called an ambulance."

"What about that report?" asked Katherine. "Anyone who knows you two knows you were kissing Frank."

"People believe what they want to believe," said Val.

"Do you want me to look into it?" asked Katherine. "I'd be happy to take them on for you. Those bastards have been torturing people with their lies long enough."

"Marina, that's a good idea," said Frank. "Entertainment law is her specialty."

"Sounds good. We do have a response in mind." There was a knock on the door.

"Mrs. Nash?" The door opened slowly and a young man with curly red hair stuck his head in. "Is this a bad time?"

"No Jimmy, come on in," said Marina.

He walked in carrying a notepad and a bouquet of flowers, his camera hanging around his neck. "I came as soon as Colonel Nash called." He handed Marina the flowers. "For you," he said quietly.

"Thank you, Jimmy. You're so sweet. Everyone, this is Jimmy Collins. He's a reporter who's earned an excellent reputation for honesty. She smiled at Jimmy's blush. She introduced everyone in the room as Jimmy shook their hands.

"Katherine Davenport?" asked Jimmy. "The entertainment lawyer?"

"Yes, I am."

Jimmy smiled. "You're the lawyer that dumped Michael Peterson. No one could believe anyone would stand up to the jerk."

"Thanks, I think."

"Oh, it was a compliment."

"Jimmy, I'm sure you saw what they're saying about Marina and why she's here,"

said Frank.

Jimmy rolled his eyes. "Anyone who's ever met the two of you knows none of that could be true."

Marina smiled and pointed to a chair. "Please take a seat and we'll tell you what happened."

"We're going to get coffee," said George.

"I'm going to stay," said Katherine.

Marina smiled at her sister in law. "Okay let's get started. I'm in the hospital because I fainted. When I did, I hit my head."

"Ouch," he said as he made notes.

"I fainted because," she reached for Frank's hand. "I fainted because I'm pregnant. My husband and I are expecting twins in January."

Jimmy's head snapped up from his notes and smiled. "Wow, Congratulations."

"Thank you, Jimmy. Normally, we are very private people but the report on the Inquistor has forced us to go public. We can't let those lies go unanswered."

"The picture of you at the Mercy General gala?" he asked.

"I was definitely making out with a guy in a quiet corner, but that guy was my husband." She looked at Frank and touched his cheek. "My very hot husband."

"Hush," Frank whispered.

"He's so cute when he blushes," she said. "Frank and I were married in April and it was not secret, it was private. My husband is a retired Marine Colonel. They didn't even get that right."

"Will you be taking legal action?"

Frank nodded toward Katherine. "We are consulting with our attorney."

Jimmy smiled. "This is gonna be good. Off the record, I'd love to see someone take those vultures down. I'd love to see you be the one to do it." He closed his notepad and held up his camera. "May I?"

"Of course," said Marina. She patted the bed for Frank to join her. He sat down and put his arm around her. They smiled for a few pictures until Jimmy stopped shooting.

He stood and extended his hand to Marina. "Thank you for letting me be the one to set the record straight." He shook Frank's hand. "Congratulations."

"Thank you, Jimmy," said Frank as he closed the door and looked at Katherine.
"What do you think?"

"I think I couldn't have scripted it better myself. Who is that kid?"

"He's a freelance. He's always polite and more importantly, accurate."

"Good to know," she said. "Text me his contact info. I may need to know someone like him for my other clients. We can talk later about what legal steps to take against the Inquisitor. Now, I'm going to go find the others. What can I bring back for you?"

"Nothing for me, " said Marina. "But Frank could use a burger and a soda."

He was about to protest when his stomach growled. "That'd be great Katherine."

When they were finally alone Frank sat back down on the bed and pulled Marina close. He kissed her forehead and snickered. "There's never a dull moment with you, diva."

Marina walked into the office to go through the paperwork Val sent her. Waddled was more like it. Being seven and a half months pregnant with twins made locomotion a supreme effort. She had to get this finished before Frank got home. He'd taken hovering to a new level. He expected her to spend all her time off her feet. Despite the awesome adjustable base with the massager he'd bought for their bed, she couldn't spend all day there. She'd go insane.

She glanced up and smiled at the framed front page retraction by The Inquisitor. Katherine had negotiated the settlement that covered the retraction plus large donations to Welcome Home and Mercy General.

She picked up her cell and dialed her brother. "Hey, Val. I faxed the paperwork. So everything is taken care of?"

"Yes. Everything is set for tomorrow."

Marina sighed with relief. She'd made the arrangements completely over the phone and with the help of her family. "This is going to be great."

"How are you feeling?"

"Like a beached whale."

"You're coming down to the wire, baby girl."

"Can't come soon enough. Look, I need to get off the phone before Frank get's back."

"Okay, we'll see you tomorrow."

Marina hung up the phone as she heard Frank's car pull into the driveway. She managed to get to the hallway by the time he came looking for her. "Diva, are you ready?"

"I ready to go."

Frank helped her downstairs and out to the car. "Are you okay?" he asked as he helped secure her seatbelt.

She smiled and gave him a kiss. "Let's do this."

Dr. Weston covered Marina's stomach with gel and turned on the monitor. "Okay, let's see how you're doing." She ran the metal tipped wand over Marina's stomach.

"Well?" asked Frank. The suspense was killing him.

"Patience, Dad," the doctor smiled.

"Your children are doing great. Both a healthy weight, strong heart beats. Everything looks good."

Frank smiled and gave Marina a quick kiss. "See, I told you everything was going to be fine."

Marina laughed. "You say that at every sonogram."

"And I'm always right."

The doctor looked at them both and smiled. "Okay, are you positive you want to know? You don't want to be surprised?"

"Doctor, I'm fifty five years old and about to be a father for the first time. That's enough surprise for one lifetime."

Marina smiled at her doctor. "What he said."

"Okay," she turned the monitor and pointed to the first baby. "This is your daughter." She pointed to the other baby tucked in close to its sibling. "And this shy one is your son." She clicked a button to print out a picture. She handed it to her smiling patient. "Congratulations. One of each."

Frank stared at the picture in amazement. He'd known for the last five months he was going to be a father but somehow this made it real. He had a son and a daughter. He looked at his wife and she'd never looked more beautiful to him. His life had become nothing he could have imagined, not in his wildest dreams. She smiled and wiped his cheek. It was then he realized he was crying.

Marina stared at the ceiling and tried not to focus on the soccer match going on inside her. She felt Frank move next to her.

"Are you awake?" she whispered.

"Yeah." He turned on his side to face her. "It's so real now. I'm mean, now we know we have a son and a daughter."

Marina reached for his hand. "I know. It's like now they're real people."

"You know we never settled on their names," he said.

"Are you sure you don't want Frank Jr.?"

"God, no. Big Frank and little Frank? I wouldn't saddle my kid with that."

"What do you think of Jonas?" she asked.

"For my dad?"

"Jonas Franklin."

"That's a wonderful name," he said as he gave her a kiss. "I have an idea for her name. She was always out in front on the songrams. I think she's going to be a big personality. How about Anna?"

Marina gasped. "For my mother?"

"She's such a strong woman. I think she's a good role model for our girl."

"Oh sweetheart, it will make her so happy."

"I'd like her to carry the names of the strongest women I know, Anna Marina."

"Frank," she whispered. She leaned over to kiss him but fell back. "Ow!"

"What's wrong?"

"Your children are kicking each other and I'm the battleground."

Frank leaned over and spoke to Marina's stomach. "Anna Marina, this is your father. You need to take it easy on your brother. You should be taking care of each other in there."

"What makes you think it's her fault."

"If she's anything like her mother she want's more elbow room. You have a way of taking up the whole bed."

Marina chuckled, knowing it was true.

"Jonas Franklin, you've been living with a pushy Russian diva for nearly eight months. You should be used to this by now. I want both of you to settle down and let your

mother get some sleep." He got very close to her large belly. "Sweet dreams," he whispered and placed a kiss.

"Oh my God, you did it," she whispered. "They settled down."

Frank gave Marina a soft kiss. "Try and get some sleep. We have a big day tomorrow."

Marina tried in vain to reach her shoes. "Josiah!" she shouted.

Frank dashed into the bedroom. "What? Are you okay.?"

"No, I'm not okay. You're fat cow wife can't reach her own shoes." She pointed to under the bed.

"Shoes? That's why you're scaring the crap out of me?"

"I can't bend over," she flopped down on the bed and her eyes began to tear.

"Oh, sweetheart, I'm sorry." He reached under the bed and dug out a pair of black flats.

"I used to be pretty," she whispered.

Frank sat next to her and turned her face toward him. "Hey, you listen to me. I married the most beautiful woman in the world and I won't have you talking about her like that." He placed his hand on her stomach and rubbed softly. "We may have made these children together but you're the one stuck doing the heavy lifting. You've been a champ through this whole thing. You only have a few weeks left."

Marina took a deep breath. "I'm sorry, babe. It just gets so frustrating."

"I can imagine," he said. She shot him a deadly glare. "Allow me to rephrase. I can't begin to imagine what your body is putting you through."

She managed a small smile. "Better."

"Sweetheart, this party may be too much of a strain. I can call and cancel everyone. They'll understand.

"Don't, Frank, Please. I need to see some people. I've been stuck in this house on bed rest for weeks. I'm having it catered. There's a waitstaff. I don't have to do anything except give direction."

"Fine, but the second it gets too much you let me know."

"I promise. The only thing I need you to do is go to Arcaro's and pick up the cake."

"Marina, to get all the way there and back will take an hour."

"Frank Nash, do not whine. It's unbecoming a Marine. Dominic is adding their names to the cake so we can do the big reveal."

"I still don't get the idea of a reveal party."

"You're whining again. Now, put my shoes on my swollen feet and go." He bent

down and put on her shoes. When he looked up at her and smiled her heart skipped. "Prince Charming," she whispered. She pulled him close for a deep kiss. "I love you, Josiah. So much."

"I love you too," he whispered and deepened the kiss.

She pushed on his chest and he pulled back. She pointed toward the door. "One Death by Chocolate cake, go. Now."

She waited until she heard his car pull out before she picked up her phone. "Mama, it's all clear. Come on over."

Marina made it downstairs by the time her mother got to her front door. "Hi, Mama," she said as she got kisses and hugs.

"Hello, angel. You look wonderful."

"No I don't but thanks anyway."

"Your Mama, doesn't lie," said George as he gave her a kiss.

"Thanks, George." She took a deep breath as she saw her in laws for the first time since their wedding. "Jonas, Florence. It's so good to see you both." Florence took a long look at Marina and began to weep. "Oh, Florence, I don't look that bad."

"No," she gasped out "I didn't think I'd ever see grandchildren and now..." she began to weep harder as she tried to hug her.

Jonas put his arm around his wife's shoulder. "Needless to say, Marina, we are all thrilled."

Marina hugged her sister in law and brother in law. "Carolyn, John, I'm so glad you could make it."

Carolyn gave her a tight hug and whispered. "I owe you big for getting me off the no grandchildren guilt train."

George and Anna led everyone toward the kitchen where the caterer had set up the luncheon. George held up a large container. "Where can I put this?"

"What did you...did you make me ribs?" asked Marina.

"I sure did," he said with a wide grin.

Marina squealed and pulled her father in law into an awkward hug. "Jonas Nash, you are officially my favorite human." She looked at the confused caterer. "Please put

some of these on a plate for me and put the rest in a secure location."

"Do you want me to serve them with lunch?" the young woman asked.

"Hell no. These babies are all mine."

Marina sat at the kitchen table devouring ribs while the caterer passed out hor d'oeuvres and drinks. A couple of the waiters hung a sign over the dining room table. Val and Katherine had arrived shortly after Jake and Mike.

"You're sure he doesn't know?" asked Florence.

"Not a clue," said Marina as she wiped the sauce from her fingers. "Val, did you take care of it?"

"We're all set."

She blew her brother a kiss. "You're the best."

A knock on the door was followed by a deep gravel voice. "Marina, is he here?"

"Not yet. Come on in Cabe." she looked at her brothers. "If someone would be kind enough to help me waddle toward the front door." Jake extended his arm and she used it to balance herself as she got to her feet. She walked towards her friends. "Cabe, Kate, so glad you're both here." She turned to the rest of gathering. "Everyone, you remember Cabe and Kate Gallo. You all met at the wedding."

Marina noticed there was a stack of pastel wrapped gifts next to gifts in more traditional paper. "What's all this?"

"You never had a shower. You didn't think we'd show up without gifts, did you?" said Carolyn.

Marina tried to fight tears. A whispered, "Thank you," was all she could manage. "He'll be back soon. I sent him to get the cake, so George, if you could take it from it when he comes in. I don't want it winding up on the hall floor."

Cabe looked out the window. "He's here." Everyone took quietly as Marina opened the door.

Frank walked in holding a large cake box "Sweetheart, sorry it took..."

Everyone shouted, "Surprise!"

"What the?"

As George grabbed the cake from his hands Marina gave him a quick kiss. "Happy

birthday, Josiah."

"Mom? Dad?" His parents walked toward him and gave him a kiss and a hug.

"Happy birthday, sweetheart," said Florence. "Marina arranged it all for us."

"Oh she did, did she?" he said with a noticeable tone.

"All arrangements done by cell phone and laptop from my bed, promise."

Frank greeted all the guests and then pulled Marina aside. "What is all this? Why did you do all this now, in your condition?"

"Sweetheart, I know you said you didn't want a fuss, but it's your birthday. You deserve a fuss and I promise you I didn't do anything strenuous." She saw his shoulders drop.

"Okay," he smiled and gave her a quick kiss. "Thank you."

"You're welcome."

"We're still doing this reveal thing, right?"

"Definitely." She pointed to the stack of presents. "Look, they brought baby gifts."

Frank smiled. "You want to do the reveal right away so you can dive into those gifts."

She smiled. "You know me so well."

Frank grabbed a glass of champagne offered by a waiter and took a large sip.

Marina stood in the middle of the gathering and held Frank's hand. "Everyone, thank you for coming. The original purpose of today was a reveal party. Yesterday we finally found out what we are having." She rubbed her hand over her stomach and looked up at Frank. She nodded at him and he realized she wanted him to do the reveal.

Frank smiled. They stepped to the dining room table and opened the edge of the cake box. He opened the box to gasps. On the cake was written "Jonas Franklin Nash" in blue icing and "Anna Marina Nash" in pink icing. Another round of hugs and kisses brought out some tears and tissues, especially from the grandparents.

Frank's father looked a little pale. "Dad? Are you okay?"

He looked at his son with watery eyes. "You're naming your son after me?" he asked quietly.

Frank didn't know what to do so he pulled his father into a hug. "You're a very good

man, Dad. I'm proud my son will have your name. Besides, I think Marina hopes it will make him as good a cook as his grandpa."

Jonas looked at Florence and whispered, "Grandpa." Florence gave her husband a tight hug. She then hugged her son.

"You've made your father and me very happy."

Anna was still staring at the cake, transfixed. "Mama?" called Marina. She turned toward her daughter with tears in her eyes.

"I don't know what to say." she whispered.

"It was Frank's idea."

"It was?"

Marina looked at her husband and smiled. "He said he wanted his daughter named for the two strongest women he knew." Marina saw something she'd never seen before, Anna Sokolov speechless. She pulled her mother into her arms. "We love you, Mama."

"I love you too, angel." She looked over at Frank and smiled. "Both of you."

"Mama, I'm going to need your help. I'll need you to show me what to do. I've know idea how to be a mother."

Anna touched her daughter's cheek and switched to Russian. "You are a kind, loving woman. You are going to be a wonderful mother."

Jonas walked toward Marina with his arms open. "Thank you," he whispered as he pulled her into a hug.

"Jonas, Frank has told me what a great childhood he had. How you were always there for him, even when he went into the Marines instead of the family business."

Jonas blushed. "Cooking was never his passion. He loved the Marines."

"He loves you. He's told me he hopes he's half as good a father as you are."

Jonas glanced at his son who was trapped in a death grip hug from his mother in law and smiled. "He's going to do just fine."

"Yes he is," Marina said with pride.

Marina made herself comfortable on the couch next to Frank. "Okay, I don't do shy, people."

"No? Really?" said Frank.

She pushed on his shoulder. "Smart ass. I see baby presents." She put out her hands. "Gimme." Kate handed her a large box with green paper and a bright yellow bow. "From Caroline and John." She smiled as she tore into the paper. There were several packages of onesies and bath supplies.

"My secretary has little ones and she said you can never have too many of those."

"Those are great, thanks," said Frank despite the fact he had no idea what a lot of the supplies were.

"There should be another box inside there. It was my idea," said John.

Marina opened the extra box and squealed. "Oh my God, look at these." She held up two sets of baby size hospital scrubs with white doctor coats and tiny stethoscopes. Each jacket was monogrammed Dr. Nash. "I love them."

"Thanks John, they're great," Frank smiled as his usually quiet brother in law blushed with pride.

Kate handed the next box. "This is from Cabe and me, mostly Cabe," she said shooting her husband a look. Inside the box Marina found baby size Marine t-shirts. Under the t-shirts were two baby size leather jackets with Harley logos.

"Hah, very cool, Cabe," said Frank.

"Are you planning on turning my children into gearheads?" asked Marina.

"Absolutely," said Cabe and Frank together.

The next box was from Florence and Jonas. Marina gasped and her eyes welled when she opened the box. She pulled two hand made baby blankets from the box, made in soft greens and yellows. "Oh Florence, they're beautiful. Frank, tissues."

Frank grabbed some tissues from the coffee table. "Thank you, Mom,"

"You're welcome, dear," Florence smiled.

Jonas pulled an envelope out of his jacket and handed it to Marina. "This for you." She opened a letter and began to read:

Dear Marina,

Thank you for coming into my son's life and making him so happy. I also want to thank you for giving us the miracle of grandchildren."

Marina paused as her voice choked.

"You are a wonderful woman and I know you will appreciate and keep this gift safe for future generations."

Love,

Jonas

Marina looked at the second page and squealed and jumped to her feet and pulled Jonas into a tight hug.

"Marina, what is it?" asked Frank.

"It's the recipe for his ribs!"

"What?! He's never let anyone see that recipe," said Frank.

"Son, in the fifty years I've been making and serving those ribs I've never seen anyone enjoy them as much as she does. I know she's the perfect person to keep this for future generations."

"Jonas Nash, I love you madly!"

Marina sat back down as Kate handed her another gift. Val and Katherine gave them an assortment of baby outfits in several sizes so they'd work for several months. They also gave them a night out on the town including babysitting services provided by them. Jake and Marina gave them a large collection of baby books in both English and Russian.

Marina unwrapped a present wrapped in rose printed paper. "This one is from George. She opened it to reveal two little set of overalls and sun hat. Under the clothes was a children's book about plants.

"It's never too soon to get them interested in the garden," said George.

"Thanks, George," said Frank. "These are great."

Marina picked up the last baby gift and rubbed her hands over it. She looked at

Frank and smiled. "This is from Mama." She carefully opened the box and froze. "Oh, Mama," she whispered. She pulled out two antique lace christening gowns.

"One was mine, one was your father's. I don't know what your plans are but I thought if you decided, you could use these."

Marina tried to speak but could find no words. She looked at Frank. He smiled and took her hand.

"Of course, we will use them, Mama. We are honored," said Frank.

Marina stood and gave her mother a tight hug. "Thank you, Mama," she whispered. "Excuse me." She moved out of the living room as best as she could toward the kitchen.

Frank came up from behind her. "Sweetheart, are you okay?"

"I'm fine, it's just. I didn't expect this. This was supposed to be your day." Frank pulled her close and gave her a kiss.

"Do you want to lay down?"

"No. no, I'm fine, really. What they all did, baby blankets, Russian baby books, it's all so wonderful of them."

"We're very lucky. We have a great family and friends."

"We didn't even talk about a christening. You told Mama we would."

"You'd been going to church with your mother until you got put on bed rest. I assumed you'd want to christen them in your church."

"You were raised Methodist. Won't your parents mind?"

Frank smiled. "Angel, we are giving them the grandchildren they thought they'd never have. I could raise them Buddhist and they'd be fine with it."

Frank wasn't sure Marina really was fine. He wanted her to put her feet up and rest but he knew that was a non-starter. He decided for the next best option. He had a few words with the caterer and her staff and then they returned to their guests.

Anna rose and spoke quickly in Russian "Are you okay, angel?"

"I'm fine, Mama. I promise."

"Everyone, it's such a beautiful day we're going to move out to the garden."

Frank led the party outside and set Marina down on a chaise lounge. He took up a seat next to her as everyone moved around the garden. The caterer began to serve

lunch to the guests. It was a sunny day and everyone relaxed into pleasant conversation. Frank kept an eye on Marina who seemed to be better, especially since he'd had the caterer bring her another plate of ribs.

"Mom, it's so great of all of you to come out for this."

"Marina took care of everything for us." She gave his wife a conspiratorial look. "Should I tell him?"

He glanced at Marina. "Tell me what?"

Marina winked and smiled. "Go ahead."

Oh, this didn't sound good. "Mom?"

She patted her son's leg and smiled. "Marina got us a condo in Malibu. We're staying until the babies arrive."

"You are?" he said trying to hide the tremor in his voice.

"Isn't that wonderful? We'll be here for Christmas too. There's room for Carolyn and John to stay.

He glanced over at his sister who smiled who said, "We fly back tomorrow." He smiled in return. "But we'll be back for Christmas," she said with a sly grin.

"Oh, it's wonderful. You'll have to come for dinner. Anna and George came last night. Did you know they play bridge? Anna could go for Masters points, she's that good."

"You and Jonas are excellent," said Anna. "We look forward to playing again."

Florence turned her attention to Anna. "Jonas loves having more than just me to cook for. What night is good for you two?" she asked as they walked over to Jonas and George who appeared to be talking football versus soccer.

He sat opened mouthed for a moment and then turned to Marina. "Darling, you probably want some help going upstairs, don't you?"

Marina smiled. "No, I'm good."

He leaned in and whispered, "Up, diva." He walked Marina upstairs toward their bedroom. She looked at the master bathroom and shrugged.

"So long as I'm here," she said.

"Hold it right there, diva."

"Yes?" she said with an extra sweet smile.

"You've invited my parents to stay here for the next what? Eight weeks?"

"I didn't invite them to stay here," she said holding out her hands. "I invited them to stay in a lovely condo in Malibu. I made sure they have a car and a driver if they so choose. I've already discussed a few day trips for them. I set them up with Mama and George because I knew they would get on well. Apparently, I was right."

Frank stood in amazement at his wife. He wanted to be annoyed that she'd made such broad ranging decisions without consulting him but he couldn't.

Her smile slipped away. "How mad are you?"

He shook his head and smiled. "I'm not, not really. Surprised. But it would be kind of nice if they were here for the holidays." He pulled her into a hug. "You really are something else, diva."

"So, were good?" she asked.

He gave her a kiss. "Yeah, we're good."

"Good, because now I really do have to pee."

Luncheon was finished and Marina directed everyone back to the living room for another round of gifts, this time for Frank's birthday. He opened a large box and smiled. "Wow." He couldn't believe what he was seeing.

Both George and Anna and his family had gotten together and gave him rare roses for his garden. "These are wonderful. "Thank you," he said with a huge smile. "Marina, this is a Blue Girl tea rose and this is a Sky Blue Snow rose." He picked up one of the wrapped plants. "Holy cow, this is a purple dragon." He smiled and nodded. "Very cool." In his mind he was already plotting where they would go in his garden.

"George helped us pick them out," said Jonas.

"I love them, everyone. Thank you so much."

Marina smiled and indicated to another large box. "Kate and Cabe went together with the rest of my family for your other gift." Cabe pushed the other large box toward Frank. "Happy birthday, brother."

"Holy crap!" he looked over at his mother who was scowling. "Sorry, Mom." He pulled out a leather bike jacket with a large Harley Davidson emblem on the back. He turned it to the front and saw a namepatch had been sewn on over the pocket that read 'Papa Bear'.

Marina leaned over and said, "That was my idea."

There were gloves and a new pair of boots. "I'm not sure I understand." He'd been riding with Cabe a few times, but not for awhile. Not since Marina had been put on bed rest.

"You've been riding with me on the weekend. When we asked what you'd like for your birthday, Marina suggested your own bike gear."

"These are great, guys. Thank you."

Marina smiled. "One more thing. You've been borrowing Jonathan's bike when you and Cabe ride. I thought that should change." She held up a set of keys with a Harley logo keychain.

His heart pounded. "What the..."

"Check the garage," she smiled and tried to push herself up. "But first, help your wife to her feet."

Frank took Marina's arm. "What did you do?"

"Patience, Marine."

He walked with Marina out to the garage and she hit the button and the door opened. Inside was a Harley Davidson Road Glide Ultra with a big red bow. He became aware of Marina pulling on his arm.

"Do you like it? Cabe said it was the one you liked."

He'd seen on at the Boozefighters club house and all but salivated over it. He never thought he'd own one.

"Frank?"

"It's amazing but do you want me on that, you know, with the babies coming?"

Marina smiled. "Sweetheart, you wear a gun for a living. Your job is a lot more dangerous than that bike. I know you. I know you're careful. Cabe told me what a great rider you are."

Cabe walked up and gave him a pat on the back. "She's a beauty. Since you have your own now you can come with us on the charity ride next weekend."

"Oh, no. It's two days. I can't, not now," he said as he looked at Marina.

She smiled and shook her head. "Josiah, do you have any doubts that I love you madly?"

He looked at his new bike and smiled. "No."

"Good. I want you to go on that ride. We've already signed you up for it. Cabe pulled paperwork out of a storage box on the bike and handed it to him. It was a pledge sheet. Marina had pledged fifty thousand dollars to the charity. "I'll sponsor you but you have to ride to get the money."

"Why are you doing this?"

"It's an excellent cause."

"You could have sponsored Cabe."

"She did," Cabe smiled.

"Josiah, I love you. You have been the best expectant father in the history of fathers. But my love, you have taken hovering to a fine art. You need some downtime with your friends."

"I can't leave you now."

"Mama has already agreed to spend the night with me. The rest of the girls are coming over for junk food and gossip and manicures. A real hen party. Sweetheart, I won't be alone for a minute. I just want us to have a few hours to ourselves when we can have fun and relax."

"So the bottom line is you want me out of the house for a while."

She pulled him close and gave him a big kiss. "God yes."

Frank followed Cabe into the bar parking lot. After the charity ride he'd done last month he and Cabe had managed to take a couple of rides together with the rest of the Boozefighters. Frank found despite their rough exteriors, they were a bunch of good guys who loved bikes. As much as he hated to admit it, Marina had been right. It did them both good to get out of each other's hair for at least a few hours. He did as much work as possible from his home office but it when he had to go out Anna would stay with her. He had a fully charged phone so Marina could reach him at anywhere.

The Road Warrior was a the type of place that could be found on any highway anywhere. A plain wood building with small windows displayed neon signs for the favored beers. It was a favorite haunt of bikers and biker wannabes. It was the Boozefighters midway pitstop when they went for rides.

Frank scanned the bar as was his habit in any new environment. It was late Saturday afternoon so there was a minimum of customers. One section had half a dozen men who looked like they'd been there for awhile, judging by their loud voices and near empty beer pitcher. Cabe waved to the bartender as he grabbed a table next to the four other Boozefighters on the ride. They placed orders for burgers, fries and a beer. The waitress smiled at the tall Sven and signed what Frank thought was a greeting. She was a pretty girl in her mid twenties with long black hair and big brown eyes.

Sven smiled and signed. "I didn't know you could sign, Jenny,"

"I started taking a class."

"Do you know someone who's deaf?" he asked as he signed.

Jenny gave him a bone melting smile and signed, "Just you." She left with their orders as the guys smiled and gave Sven a few hoots and pats on the back. Sven glanced back at Jenny and smiled.

"I didn't know Sven was deaf," said Frank

"Yeah, most people don't, he reads lips so well. He teaches sign language to deaf kids," said Cabe.

"Wow, I never would have guessed. He's a man mountain. I'd have said a bouncer or maybe a football coach."

"Most people underestimate bikers. You would never guess Bobby teaches

English or that Tommy's an accountant." Cabe pointed to the club president, Mike, sitting at the opposite end of the table. "Mike's a lawyer."

Jenny served their burgers and beers and conversation turned from bikes. "How's Marina feeling?"

"She's being a trooper but she's really uncomfortable. The last sonogram said Jonas was six pounds and Anna was six and a half pounds."

"Damn, that's a lot of baby to be carrying around."

"Yeah. And she's still got another three weeks to go. She's been trying to focus on Christmas instead. She's been ordering a ton of stuff from bed."

"Kate loves Christmas but she makes herself crazy trying to pick out the perfect gift."

Frank took a sip of his beer. "Tell me about it. I had a hell of a time thinking what to get Marina."

"What did you get?"

"Ah, it's a little weird."

"Do I not what to know?"

Frank laughed. "No, nothing like that. She's always complaining how I hate to have pictures taken. She has this one of me on her phone that's taken when I'd been swimming that I hate. So I had a couple of pictures taken."

"Yeah?"

Frank pulled out his phone and hit the icon for his photo gallery. "The photographer sent me a couple of proofs." He showed Cabe a picture of him in a dark blue suit sitting backward on his chair. The next shot was of him posing on his bike, the last was a stoic headshot.

"Well, I'm not authority but they look like good pictures."

"It's a photographer that Marina spoke well of. I think she'll like them."

Cabe gave Frank back his phone and smiled. "But you got her something else just in case."

He smiled. "Hell yes. I had her sister in law Michaela design her a necklace with the kids names on it."

"How are you doing with the impending big event?"

"I'm fine."

"Try again."

Frank looked at his friend and laughed. "I'm one step away from complete dumpster fire. I'm having trouble sleeping. I'm worried about what's going to happen when we bring the babies home. I've never taken care of a baby."

"You went to the classes with Marina."

"Yeah but it's different practicing with dolls." He took a sip of his beer. "I guess I can't believe I'm going to be a father."

"Frank, you're going to be fine. You've got a big family backing you up."

Frank smiled. "And good friends."

Cabe raised his glass to his friend. "You're going to be a great dad."

"You're going to be a Dad?" asked Bobby.

He smiled. "Yeah."

"Congrats, dude," said Bobby as he slapped him on the back. "Hey guys, Frank's having a baby!" The men hooted and hollered. Frank smiled and raised his glass to the crowd.

"He's having two!" said Cabe.

"What?" shouted the group. That rated everyone standing to shake his hand and pat his back. "When's the big day?"

"In the next couple of weeks."

"Wow, and she let you out of the house?"

"Insisted on it. Marina says he hovers," Cabe laughed.

"Marina?" asked Tommy. "My wife reads those fan magazines..."

"Your wife does?" asked Mike with a smile.

"Shut up, Tommy. My wife said some ex Marine married Marina Sokolov. Is that you?"

"Yeah," said Frank not sure where this was going.

The group sat frozen until Bobby laughed. "Ah come on. No way a woman like that married an old fart like you." Frank tapped his gallery icon again and pulled up a wedding picture and showed it to Bobby. "Holy shit," said Bobby. He grabbed the phone from Frank and showed the others. "It's true. He's married to Marina Sokolov."

The men looked at the picture and smiled. "And you're having twins with her?" asked Mike. "Damn. I feel old. I've got six grandkids."

"Yeah, well I'm feeling pretty damn old myself."

"You're a good guy, Frank. You'll do fine," said Sven."

"Thanks, Sven. I appreciate that."

Jenny came back to their table with a check and Frank spotted her slipping Sven her phone number.

"What the hell are you doing, Jenny?" A paunchy middle age man grabbed the waitress by the arm. "You're giving this lowlife your number and you won't give me the time of day!"

Sven jumped to his feet and pulled Jenny out of the man's grasp. "Back off."

Despite the fact that the man barely came up to Sven's shoulders, he moved close to the big Swede. Too close. "Make me."

Sven pushed the guy back. "Go home. You're drunk." The guy then made a monument to bad moves. He swung at Sven. Sven blocked the man's slow move and connected easily with the drunk's chin. The drunk's friends pushed their chairs back and came charging Sven and the bikers. Frank looked at Cabe who shrugged and smiled. Frank tapped one of the drunks on the shoulder who was throwing punches at Tommy. The man turned and Frank clocked him. After that it was pretty much a blur. The drunk and his friends were surprisingly tenacious. The bikers were just finished putting the last of the drunks down when the police came in.

"Alright, that's enough," said the cop.

Jenny ran out from her hiding place behind the bar and pointed to the Boozefighters. "Pete, leave these guys alone." She gave the drunk on the floor who'd grabbed her a kick. "Marty started it. He grabbed me. Sven tried to protect me and the rest of these fools attacked him."

The cop looked at the bartender. "Is that what happened, Charlie?"

"Yeah, Marty and his buddies started it."

The cop looked at Sven and Jenny. "Do you want to press charges?"

Sven shook his head. "No, I'm good."

Jenny looked at Marty then up at Sven and smiled. "No," Then she looked over at

her boss. "Charlie if I see these guys in here again I'm gone."

"You got it," said Charlie. The cop led the drunks out of the bar as the men picked up knocked over tables and chairs. Frank looked at Cabe and laughed, pointed to the bruise on his cheek.

"Oh man, you look like crap."

Cabe laughed. "You don't look a damn sight better."

Frank caught a glimpse of himself in a mirror. "Oh man, Marina's going to be upset." He looked at Cabe, who's bruise was starting to swell. "Is Kate gonna be mad?"

Cabe laughed. "Oh, hell yeah."

Frank looked over and saw Sven being enthusiastically thanked by a very grateful Jenny. He smiled. "Totally worth it."

Cabe threw his arm around Frank. "Absolutely."

Marina's eyes opened and saw it was still dark. She rubbed her hands over her swollen belly and whispered, "Merry Christmas, my angels." She felt Frank roll towards her.

"Merry Christmas," he whispered.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to wake you."

He gave her a soft kiss. "Waking up to you is never a problem."

Marina chuckled. "Why Josiah, a compliment? I'm going to start to think you like me." She could see his smile reflected by the moonlight.

"Smart ass diva."

"You love my smart ass."

He kissed her neck and nipped at her ear. "And all your other delicious parts."

"Oooww," she said as she rubbed her belly. "I think they're feeling left out."

Frank lean in toward her belly and pull up her nightgown. He placed his lips on her skin, giving their children a soft kiss. Then he spoke softly, "Merry Christmas kids. Mama and Papa need a few minutes to themselves so go back to sleep."

Marina smiled. "I don't know how you do that but they settled. Remember that skill when they're on the outside."

"Will do. I have a present for you I wanted to give you in private."

She smiled and threaded her arms around his neck. "Oh this sounds promising."

"Not that," he smiled. "Well not just that." He slipped out of bed and went into his office. He came back with a large gift wrapped box. Marina sat up in bed and turned on the light. Frank sat on the bed and handed her the box. "I hope you like it."

She looked at her husband and smiled. He looked like a nervous kid. She tore open the box and lifted off the lid. She unfolded the tissue and gasped. It was a portrait of Frank in her favorite blue suit, the one he'd worn that first night they'd gone public. He was sitting reversed on a wooden chair. His smile was just a bit wicked. "Oh Frank, this is wonderful. Did Eve take this?"

"Yeah, you said you liked working with her."

"She does beautiful work. Frank, I can't believe you did this."

"Well you're not exactly easy to get a present for. You complained you don't have enough pictures."

"Damn, babe, you look so good. What were you smiling about?"

"Eve could see I was uncomfortable in the suit and she said to think about a time I was wearing it and felt good." He glanced toward the door and blushed slightly.

Marina smiled. He'd been thinking about that first night too. The first night she'd seen him in a suit. And what they did up against that door.

"There's more."

She pulled the framed portrait out and removed another layer of tissue. There was a portrait of him wearing his favorite jeans and black t shirt. He had his arms crossed and was leaning up against his bike. She couldn't take her eyes off him. "Wow."

"Wow good, wow bad?" he asked.

She brushed his face with her hand feeling his morning stubble rough against her palm. "You know what my first thought was when I saw this?"

"What?"

She looked at the picture and smiled. "I thought, that is MY man. I love it, especially since I know how uncomfortable you must have been doing it." She gave him a soft kiss.

"One more." She kissed him again. He smiled. "I meant there's one more picture. I wasn't sure about this one but Eve said to trust her."

Marina removed the last layer of tissue and stopped cold. It was a headshot, Frank from the shoulders up, looking powerful. Pure male power. "Eve was right," she whispered. She carefully set the pictures back in their box and set them on the night stand. She looked at this glorious man, this man who loved her, who gave her everything she'd ever wanted. She slid her hand around his neck and pulled him into a deep kiss. "I love you, Josiah."

"I love you too."

"Come here," she whispered as she ran her hands over his arms.

"Ah babe...you're really pregnant."

She looked down at her belly and gasped. "How did that happen?" She laughed and pulled him into bed.

Marina sat with her feet up hoping the kids would settle down. Frank had quieted them down this morning. She smiled thinking about how that gave them some quality alone time.

Her father in law was in the kitchen putting together a Christmas dinner with her mother working on some side dishes. Staying put was the only way she could get Frank to agree to Christmas at their house. Even the fact that his sister and brother in law were both surgeons hadn't convinced him.

"They're not obstetricians," he'd said.

Mama and George had become great friends with Florence and Jonas. They had spent time with Frank's parents since they'd come out for his birthday. It had been nice to get to know her in laws better. Florence was a quiet woman who loved her family. Marina was surprised out how easily such a traditional woman of the 1950's accepted that her husband did all the cooking.

"Florence, I feel bad Jonas is working so hard. You're suppose to be enjoying yourselves while you're here."

"It makes him happy to cook. The more people to feed the better he likes it." She patted Marina's leg. "And we are having a wonderful time, dear. Your Mama and George are great fun." Florence glanced at George and Anna talking in the dining room. She leaned in and whispered, "You know, I wouldn't be surprised if those two made it official." She stood and joined George and Anna.

"Wait. What?" she asked to Florence's back.

Jonas called them into dinner. Frank helped Marina to the table while George and Anna took seats to her left. Florence and Jonas sat next to Frank at the opposite end of the table. Frank had put in the table extension to accommodate Jake and Mike, Val and Katherine, and Caroline and John.

Marina and Frank looked at each other in a silent communication over the dinner conversation. This was a Christmas to remember.

"Who wants dessert?" asked Jonas. He was met with a unified groan.

"Dad, the food was fantastic as usual but I think we could all use a breather."

"Well, when you're ready there is pumpkin pie and I made mince meat pie too."

Marina's eye's lit up. "Mince meat? I love mince meat pie."

"Good lord, woman, where to you put it all?" asked Carolyn.

Anna touched Marina's hand. "She has a healthy appetite."

Marina's smile faded a bit. "My appetite is catching up with me."

"Asking as a clinician, how big were the babies at the last visit?"

"Seven pounds three ounces and six pounds five ounces."

"Holy crap! That is some healthy baby weight. So you are carrying around thirteen and a half pounds of baby." She nodded and smiled. "Trust me, as a physician I can tell you, you look great."

Marina beamed. "Really?"

Caroline nodded. "Absolutely."

John smiled. "I concur with my colleague". You look great, Marina. You've obviously been taking good care of yourself."

"Thanks, guys," she smiled. She looked up at Frank who winked at her. Damn, how that man made her heart flutter.

"Hey, how about presents?" said Frank.

Everyone smiled and stood. Val and Jake began clearing the dishes. Anna looked at her sons and smiled. She leaned over to Marina and said, "It's a Christmas miracle."

They gathered around the large Christmas tree in the livingroom and Frank started handing out gifts. "Val and Katherine, Jake and Mike, we want you to all open your gifts at the same time." They all had the same size boxes and lifted the lids together. In each box was a T shirt. Val and Katherine's said Anna's Godfather and Godmother. Jake and Mike's said Jonas's Godfather and Godmother. Their reactions ranged from quiet smiles to tears. Marina smiled as Val reached for his handkerchief and wiped his eyes. She was glad Frank had called Carolyn and John before the holiday. He'd wanted to explain to his sister that they were asking Marina's brother's and their wives to be godparents because they were raised in the same church the babies where would be baptised. She was grateful that they were fine with it. Because of their professions, getting away for visits is very difficult.

"So you'll do it?" Marina asked. They answered her with hugs.

"Frank, give Carolyn and John their gifts." They smiled and opened their gifts and found open ended plane reservations to Los Angeles. "This is so you can come visit whenever you can get away," said Frank.

"Mom, Dad, you're next," said Frank. He handed them two small boxes. "Open them together."

Florence and Jonas smiled and tore the paper off the boxes. They opened each box and pulled out decorate keyrings with several keys on each. "They're very nice, dear," Florence said. He laughed.

"No, Mom. We bought the condo you're staying in. We figured you'd want to spend more time out here when the babies come and you said how much you enjoyed Malibu."

Florence and Jonas stood and gave their son a tight hug then kissed Marina. "This is wonderful, dear. Thank you so, much."

"You're very welcome," said Marina.

"George and Mama, you're next," Marina handed them a flat box they opened together. This gift was the hardest for her to decide on. For nearly six months her mother and George had been inseparable. It had been hard for her to think of her mother being with anyone but her father. But there was no denying how happy they were together. This

was her attempt to demonstrate that she saw them as a committed couple. Inside the box were brochures and tickets for The Sandcastle Resort. "It's an open reservation. We thought the two of you would enjoy it and George the flowers there are spectacular."

"Dear, this is wonderful, thank you," said Anna. She gave her daughter a warm smile and nodded. Mama understood.

"Thank you so much," said George as he shook Frank's hand and gave Marina a kiss.

Frank handed Marina a small stack of gifts with her name on it. He sat next to her on the chaise with a small stack of gifts of his own. "I told you guys you didn't need to bring us anything," she said.

"Yes you did and we ignored you. Now open your gifts," said Mike.

Marina smiled and opened a gift from Jake and Marina. "Oh wow," she said.

"I told you I'd make you another pair."

Marina showed Frank they were a duplicate pair of silver earrings she'd given her when they first met. She had given the earrings away to an adorable little fan. They were elongated rectangles with open sections of blue and green stained glass. Now there was a matching necklace. "These are beautiful. Thank you."

"You're welcome."

Frank smiled at his gift, several Marine T shirts. "Nice. Thank you, brother." Jake smiled and nodded.

"You're welcome brother. Semper Fi."

"Semper Fi," Frank replied.

Marina smiled at her brother. She loved the bond he had with Frank. There was just something about being a Marine that held them together even long after they left active duty. She opened her box from Val and Katherine and squealed at a collection of her favorite treats from back East, including salt water taffy and Tastycakes.

"Good choice," laughed Frank. "Nothing makes her happier than food." He opened his gift and smiled. It was a pair of leather bike gloves with a Harley Davison emblem. "Thank you. These are great."

Anna pointed to two similar boxes on the floor. "George and I and your parents put our heads together for these."

Marina smiled and she and Frank opened the gifts together. They were embossed, old style photo albums. Her album had pictures and notes from the Sokolov family. Frank's album had pictures and notes from the Nash family.

"We thought you and the children might like this. We made notes about who people were and and what stories we could remember," said Anna.

Marina looked at Frank and was glad to see she wasn't the only one fighting tears. "These are wonderful. Thank you," she said quietly. Frank gave her a soft kiss, knowing what emotions were overwhelming them both. She smiled and pointed to a large box. "That one's for you, babe."

Frank slid the large box and unwrapped it. He pulled out a large black leather bag. It had a square shape, almost like a portable cooler. On the side was a large Harley emblem. He unzipped the bag and inside found a supply of diapers, wipes and pacifiers. "A Harley diaper bag?" he smiled.

"I had it made. You'll be taking the babies places and I figured you wouldn't want to carry a diaper bag with rainbows and unicorns."

Frank leaned in and give her a kiss. "I love it, babe. Thank you."

He reached down and got the last box from under the tree. "You already gave me my present," she said.

"This is just a little something extra,"

She looked at her husband and smiled. She never thought she could love someone as much as she loved her husband. She glanced down and rubbed her belly. Now she had these little ones she was already so in love with she thought her heart would burst. She closed her eyes for a moment and offered a quick prayer of thanks to God for giving her this life.

She unwrapped the gift and opened the box. She gasped and ran her fingers over the gift. It was a gold necklace with two interwoven hearts. They were engraved Jonas and Anna. "It's beautiful," she whispered. She glanced at Mike. "Your handiwork?" Her sister in law smiled and nodded. "It's perfect. Sweetheart, will you put it on me?" Frank put it around her neck and she touched the little hearts. "I want to see it on." She tried to stand and Frank stood and helped her to her feet.

"Are you okay, babe?"

"I'm fine. I'm just going to use the powder room." She turned to her father in law.
"Hey, Jonas. I think it's time for your mince pie."

Jonas smiled. "I'll get it warmed for you, sweet girl."

Frank walked with her toward the powder room. "Are sure you okay?"

"I'm okay. You help your dad get the dessert set up." She walked into powder room and looked at her reflection. She could see why Frank was concerned. She looked a little tired. She ran her fingers over the hearts. "I love you, my angels." A sharp kick had her bending in half. "Thanks kids, but for future reference, try 'We love you too, Mama'." Another sharp pull had her thinking maybe Frank had been right. Maybe this was too much for her. Of course, she would never tell him that.

A few minutes later Marina walked into the dining room and smiled at her family.
"I'm afraid I'm going to have to skip dessert for now."

Frank came to her side. "I thought this would be too much for you. I'll help you upstairs."

"No, you need to help me to the car. My water just broke."

Frank sat next to Marina's bedside and held her hand while the nurse connected her to various machines.

"Dr. Weston will be here shortly," said the nurse. "Press your call button if you need anything, Mrs. Nash."

"Here we go," said Frank with a smile.

"Uh huh," she said.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing. I'm fine."

"Bull, what's wrong?" He was startled to see tears running down her cheek.

"I'm scared," she whispered.

"Of what?"

"Everything. Having them, raising them. What if I'm no good at it?"

He gave her a kiss. "Sweetheart, I'm scared too. I'm an old man whose never been around kids. What if I can't do it?"

"You're going to be a great father."

Frank smiled. "Thanks, sweetheart. I think you're going to be a great mother. The point is as scared as we are, we have each other to lean on. Not to mention a supportive family who I suspect will be very hands on."

Marina nodded and smiled. "You're right. I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry. You never have to worry about what you tell me." He gave her a lingering kiss. "I'm never going anywhere."

"Hello you two," said Dr. Weston as she walked in the door. "So, are we ready to do this?"

"No, but I think they are," said Marina as she rubbed her hands over her belly. "I'm sorry we ruined your Christmas."

The doctor smiled. "No worries. You aren't my first patient to go into labor today." She gloved up and pulled down the sheet. When she finished her exam she made some notes. "Well, we're definitely off to the races. Everything is progressing well. It's probably going to be a couple of hours yet.

"I'll back for show time. Meanwhile the nurses will be keeping an eye on things"

"Thank you, doctor," said Frank as he closed the door behind her.

"Why don't you get yourself some coffee?" said Marina. "You heard her. It's going to be a few hours. Besides, you know our entire family is going to be in the waiting room. Go check in with them."

"Fine, but I won't be long." He gave her a quick kiss. "I love you, angel." He walked down the hall to the waiting room. Just as Marina predicted their entire family was in the room.

"Frank, how is she doing?" asked Anna.

"The doctor just left. Everything is fine but it's going to be a few hours yet."

"How are you doing, son?" asked Jonas.

"I'm okay. I'm going to get a cup of coffee. Can I get anything for you?"

"George got us coffee."

"Okay, I'll be back soon."

Frank walked out of the elevator and down the hallway toward the cafeteria. He stopped half way down the hall and looked at the plaque above the door. He opened the door and stepped inside. The large room had several rows of wooden pews which were all empty. He took a seat in the front row and looked at the plaque hung on the wall. It bore symbols representing all the major religions.

"It's been a long time," he whispered. "but I just wanted to say thank you. Thank you for giving me two miracles, three when you count Marina. Having her in my life is certainly a miracle." He ran his hands through his hair. "I'm very grateful, really I am, but I want to ask you for something. You might think I have some nerve asking for something when I haven't talked to you for so long but here it is. Let me be there for them. Let me stay around long enough to get them a good start in life. Let me be there to help Marina raise our children. I'll do my best for them, I swear." He sat back against the seat and sighed. He was startled when a hand touched his shoulder. "Mom?"

"It looks like you and I had the same idea," she said softly. She sat down next to her son and took his hand. "Everything is going to be fine, sweetheart. I promise it will."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because you're here."

"Mom, I hate to tell you I haven't been to church in years."

She gave her son a smile. "You're here now. It means your family is your first priority. Being here says you'll do anything for them, even pray." She kissed his cheek. "I'm very proud of you."

"Thanks, Mom." He rested his head on his mother's shoulder as she held his hand. For just a moment, with only God as a witness, Frank let himself be a boy.

"Push," called the doctor.

Marina struggled and groaned while reciting a number of colorful Russian curses directed at the staff. He looked around to see if anyone was offended. Thankfully there were no other Russian speakers in the room. It had been ten hours since they'd come to the hospital. He didn't know how Marina was doing it because he was exhausted.

"I can't," she cried. "I can't do this."

"I know it's hard, sweetheart but it's almost over."

Marina's head snapped around toward him. "You know it's hard?!" When you pass a fourteen pound bowling ball you can tell me about hard."

Frank looked at the doctor who was smiling.

"Don't worry Frank, all mothers get like that during delivery."

"If you say so," he muttered as another contraction washed over Marina.

"Here we go," said the doctor as Frank watched her maneuver as he held Marina's back. She cried out as the doctor rotated and slid the baby out and set her on Marina's stomach. "Hello Anna," she said as she cleaned out her nose and mouth. With that she began to squirm and cry and was she ever loud. He couldn't believe he was looking at his daughter. One of the nurses took Anna and began to exam and weigh her.

"Where are you taking her?" cried Marina.

"We're just cleaning her up. In case you forgot, we aren't done here," said the doctor as she looked at the monitors.

"Oh God," Marina groaned as another wave of pain hit.

"It looks like Jonas doesn't want to be without his sister," smiled the doctor. He held Marina up while she gave one final push. She fell back against him as the doctor set their son on Marina's stomach. Jonas squirmed and cried as the doctor cut his cord and handed him off to another nurse.

Frank kissed Marina's head as he whispered to her in Russian. "You did it, angel. You're amazing. I'm so proud of you." Two nurses approached them with their children and placed them both in Marina's arms. Jonas cuddled up against his mother but Anna started fuss.

"You take her," Marina said.

"What? Me?"

She gave him a smile. "Yes you, Papa. Tell your daughter everything's okay." A nurse took Anna and placed her in his arms. He'd never held a baby, not even any of his friends' kids. In the classes they took they practiced with dolls. This doll was very much alive and was winding up for what looked to be a full-blown temper tantrum. He took a big breath and began to speak to his daughter in Russian. "Anna, everything is alright. Papa is here. Papa will take care of you, angel. Always." He leaned down and kissed her soft skin. A drop of water landed on her cheek and he realized he was crying. He kissed the tear away from his daughter's cheek and she immediately settled down.

The nurse who was standing next to him gasped. "I don't know what you said to her but that was amazing."

Frank smiled at the compliment and looked at his wife. She smiled at him as she placed a soft kiss on their son's head. Marina was crying too and he couldn't blame her. It isn't every day your dreams come true. Especially when it was a dream you didn't know you had.

"How do I look?" asked Marina. Frank was surprised by the question since she rarely mentioned her appearance.

"You're the most beautiful woman in the world," he smiled and gave her a kiss. "It's official. People magazine said so."

"No smart ass. That doesn't count. They only pick people who have a movie coming out. Seriously, do I look like crap? I sure feel like it."

He sat next to her on the bed and stroked her sweat damp hair. "Angel, I'm the last person who can give an objective opinion. I'm looking at the woman I love who just gave me two beautiful children. I can only see the most beautiful woman in the world." He gave her another deeper kiss.

"I love you too, Josiah.," she said, then smacked his chest. "But that's not helpful. I don't want to scare Mama when she comes in. Please get me a wash cloth and my small makeup bag."

Frank smiled and made an exaggerated sigh. "I suppose that's what my life is now. Toting and lifting for you and the kids." He smiled at his children who were in a portable crib next to Marina's bed.

She gave him her best movie star smile. "Absolutely."

He handed Marina the bag and a wet washcloth. With a hairbrush and a coated band she brushed her hair into a quick but tidy ponytail. She grabbed a couple of makeup brushes and small case of color. He watched in amazement as she went from haggard to maternal perfection in just a few moments. She caught him staring. "What is it?"

"How do you do that?"

"Years of practice, Josiah. Now I think it's safe to bring everyone in."

Marina smiled as her family came into her large private room. She rarely took advantage of her celebrity but this room was big enough to accommodate her family and satisfy Frank's security requirements. She watched as he accepted kisses and hugs. For just a moment things stood still and all she could see was Frank. He turned toward her and smiled. She smiled at him and mouthed, "I love you." He smiled and winked at her

as everyone gathered around her and the babies.

"Oh, my angel, how are you feeling?" asked Anna.

"Other than tired and sore, I'm fine, Mama." She heard her children starting to fuss. "Frank, give Jonas to your father and give Anna, to my mother. I think they should get to hold their namesakes first."

Anna held her granddaughter in her arms and smiled through tears. "Hello Anna," she whispered in Russian. "I'm your grandmother." She looked at Marina and smiled. She looks just like you did and she has your long legs."

"Do you think so?"

"Definitely."

Marina's attention switched to her son when she heard him fuss. Frank's father was smiling and rocking his grandson gently in his arms. "There there, little one. You're just fine."

Florence leaned over her husband's shoulder. "He's so beautiful." She touched the baby's chin. "Look Frank, he has your chin." She took baby Jonas hand and smiled when he wrapped his fingers around her finger. "Precious boy," she whispered.

Carolyn gave her brother a kiss as John patted his back. "Well done, Frank," said John.

Carolyn gave her husband a look. "Marina did the hard work."

"What do you think?" Frank asked, knowing they understood what he was asking.

"Honestly, they look wonderful. Healthy and robust. Excellent weight for twins, especially for being a few weeks early," said Carolyn.

"That's not going to be a problem, is it?"

"I doubt they would have let them stay in here with you unless your doctor felt the babies were completely developed and healthy," said John.

Frank smiled. "Thanks."

Val and Jake each gave Marina a kiss. "Well done, baby sister," said Jake in Russian.

"We're very proud of you," added Val.

"Thank you both. I hope I can teach them about our history as well as you taught me."

"Don't worry. We'll both be there to help," said Val.

"We're their godfathers," said Jake with a proud smile.

Mike leaned over to give Marina a kiss. "They're so beautiful."

"Thanks Mike," she smiled.

Katherine smiled and kissed Marina's cheek. "I'm so happy for you both."

Marina loved Val's wife, who was a sweet, kind woman but turned tiger when she was representing her clients. It was the reason she'd hired her to represent her in business matters. "Thank you, Katherine."

"Do you want me to release a statement?" asked Katherine.

"Give it to Jimmy first."

"He was hired full time by People. I think between the scoops he got with you and the stories he got from my clients, People made him an offer. He asked me to review it. It was very generous."

"Really? That's wonderful. He's such a nice kid. He always calls me Mrs. Nash."

Marina smiled as she watched her family fuss over her children. Standing in the middle of everything was Frank. He was holding Anna and the look on his face was a mix of love and pride. The connection between Frank and his child was tangible. Tears began to run down her cheeks.

"Sweetheart, what's wrong?" asked Frank as he set Anna in her crib. He sat on the edge of the bed and took her hand. "Sweetheart? Talk to me," he whispered.

"Nothing's wrong. It feels like I've been hit by an emotional tidal wave. I just can't seem to stop crying."

Frank pulled some tissues from the box and wiped her eyes. "It's been a pretty monumental day. We should let you and the children rest."

"That's an excellent idea, Frank," said her mother. She gave her daughter a kiss. "I will call you tomorrow."

Carolyn and John each gave her a kiss. "We have to fly out tomorrow so this will have to be good bye for a while. Thank you for having us."

"We're both so glad you were here for this. You know you're welcome here anytime."

Marina watched as Frank said goodbye to all their family. She leaned back against her bed and reached over to touch her sleeping children. She couldn't give words to the intensity of what she was feeling.

"Hey, how are you doing?" said Frank as he sat on the edge of the bed.

"I'm okay, really." She pried her eyes away from her babies and smiled at her husband. He sat down next to her and held her hand.

"Tell me the truth."

"I'm nervous. I'm going to be alone with them all night. What if I forget what to do?"

"Sweetheart, you're going to be fine. You're also not going to be alone. I called Kate Gallo and she arranged for them to bring an extra bed in here for me."

"Are you serious? How did she manage that?"

"Apparently she does more than just fund raise. I just have to let them know when I'm ready for it."

Marina pulled him into a tight hug. "Oh thank God."

"I thought I would get us something to eat. What would you like?"

"Right now all I want is this," she said as she buried her head in his strong chest. She rubbed her hands over his strong chest and inhaled his wonderfully male scent. "You smell so good."

Frank laughed. "I smell like I haven't had a shower."

She gave him a deep kiss. "I love how you smell. So male."

He stroked her face and smiled. "I love you, you crazy diva."

"Cheeseburger," she said.

"What?"

"I want a cheeseburger and fries. And a chocolate milkshake"

Frank laughed and stood. "Fine. I'll tell them to bring in my bed." He went to the crib and leaned over their children. "I'll be back soon. Your Mama gets very cranky when she's hungry." He reached for the door handle.

"Don't forget the mushrooms," she called.

Frank laid on his side, watching Marina sleep. He pushed the beds together and pulled down the bed rails so he could keep an eye on her. Oh, who was he kidding? He wanted to be close to his wife. He needed to be close to her. He'd seen some remarkable things in his life but nothing could have prepared him for today. Watching his children come into this world was the most amazing experience of his life. He was in awe of Marina's strength. Watching her nurse their children for the first time had brought him to tears. He still worried he might not be up to the task of being the father of twins. He hoped God was listening when he'd asked for his help.

He heard Anna start to fuss and got out of bed. He smiled to himself when he realized he recognized the sound as his daughter and not his son. They'd been fed and changed a short time ago so he knew it wasn't that. Anna was just being fussy.

He leaned over the crib where his children were sleeping. Jonas was sound asleep but Anna's eyes were open and she was moving her arms and legs. "Hey there, little one," he whispered. "You're going to wake everyone." He checked her diaper and found she was still dry. He picked her up and sat in a rocking chair. He kissed Anna's head, something he couldn't seem to get enough of. Moving quietly back and forth in the chair, she still showed no signs of going back to sleep. "What do you want, angel? I don't know any lullabys." Anna twisted and gurgled in his arms. "Okay, I do know one song and you're too young to criticize my voice, so be kind to Papa." Frank started to sing a slow, quiet version of the only song he knew by heart.

*"From the halls of Montezuma
To the shores of Tripoli
We will fight our countries battles
In the air, on land, and sea
First to fight for right and freedom
And to keep our honor clean
We are proud to claim the title
Of United States Marine"*

Anna curled up in his arms and closed her eyes. After a few moments to be sure she was really asleep, he sat her back in the crib. He got back into bed and pulled the covers over himself.

"You know she's going to wind up being just like you," whispered Marina.

"Do you really think so?" he asked, wondering if she could see his smile in the dim light.

"Absolutely." She reached out for his hand. "And that, my love, is a very good thing."

It had been a long couple of days in the hospital. The children were fine but Marina's doctor wanted her to have a extra few days to recover from the difficult birth. Frank had stayed with them the entire time. He had to admit it was more for his benefit than for his wife and kids. He just couldn't bring himself to leave them. Not yet.

Once everyone was given the all clear, they headed home. It was a beautiful Saturday afternoon. The sun was shining, his children were secured in the back seat and Marina was sitting next to him in front. It couldn't have been a more perfect day. That is until they pulled up toward their home. There was a sea of reporters in the street all hoping to get the first picture of their children.

"Oh my God, Frank!" Marina grabbed his hand.

They wouldn't be able to get pictures while they were in the car. The babies car seats were covered with light blankets to prevent them getting too much sun in their eyes. "Scoot down so they don't see you. Let's not give them anything." The photographers didn't realize the plain sedan coming toward them was carrying their prey. Not until Frank made a sharp turn up the driveway and hit the button for the automatic garage door opener. Once the door was closed he gave Marina the all clear. When she sat up he saw she was crying.

"How could they do this? We can't go outside. We can't do anything. Oh God, when the family comes over..."

"Sweetheart look at me. Do you trust me?"

"What? Yes, of course."

"I have an idea to make sure they leave quickly and never come back." He was relieved to see her bright smile. "You do?"

"I think this will work. I just need to make a call. First, let's get the kids settled."

Frank closed the nursery door behind him and walked across the hall to their bedroom. He activated the baby monitor only his setup was a bit more high tech than most.

"Are you sure it's okay to close the door?" Marina asked.

"I tested the speakers myself and I added a little something extra." He picked up the tv remote and turned on the TV. He handed her the remote and pointed to a button he'd marked. "Hit that." She did and the TV showed a clear view of the babies in their cribs.

"Oh Frank, this is wonderful."

He took the remote and set it down. "Now, I want you get settled while I make that call."

"Are you sure this is going to work?"

Frank smiled and gave her a kiss. "Pretty sure." He closed their bedroom door behind him and walked into his office. He pulled his phone from his pocket and hit the contact icon. "Hello, Cabe? I need a favor."

Thirty minutes later he heard it. Still in the distance it sounded like the beginning of a thunderstorm. But this thunder never let up. As the sound got closer it became near deafening.

"What the hell is going on?" yelled Marina.

He led her to the living room window and parted the curtain. Lined up on their driveway were twenty Harley's with their riders. Leading the riders was Cabe Gallo.

"Boozefighters. Aren't they the guys you ride with?" she asked.

Frank smiled. "Yup." His phone rang and he saw it was Cabe. "Hey brother. Thanks for bringing the calvary."

"No problem. You want to listen in?"

"Hell yeah." He put his phone on speaker. They watched as Cabe, followed by the massive Sven and all their fellow Boozefighters walked toward the reporters.

"I understand you gentlemen are annoying some friends of ours," said Cabe.

"What's it to you, buddy?" Sven moved toward the paparazzi, blocking the sun in the process.

"Here's how this is going to work. You all are going to leave and never come back. If you do or we see any pictures from today published," he extended his arms to gesture to his companions who closed ranks. "we will be very unhappy. I really don't think you want that."

"Who do you guys think you are?" asked the paparazzi, who was now completely blocked by Sven.

Cabe got very close to the fool. "We're their uncles." Sven leaned over the man and growled. The group scattered like ants in a flood. The men held their ground until last car fled the scene. The Boozefighters broke out into applause and started patting each other on the back. Frank ran out the front door and pulled Cabe into a hug.

"That was terrific." He looked towards the men. "I can't thank you enough guys. Marina was really frightened.

"I'm glad we could help," Sven smiled.

"Growling? Really?" Cabe smiled.

"Too much?" asked Sven as he pointed to his ear. "You know I can't really tell."

Frank slapped him on the back. "You were perfect!" All the men's heads turned toward the house and he realized that Marina had come out the front door. The men were transfixed. Even though she'd given birth to twins three days ago, she was still stunningly beautiful. She threw her arms around Cabe.

"Oh, I can't thank you enough."

"You're welcome, Marina."

She turned toward the men and smiled. "I can't thank you all enough for what you did. I'm grateful my husband has such loyal friends."

"You're welcome, ma'am," said Sven.

"Please, call me Marina, all of you."

"Well, we should let you get back to the children," said Cabe.

"No, please. We're having a family barbeque. You should all stay. After all, you are our children's uncles." The men all smiled and followed them toward the house.

"Are you sure about this?" asked Frank

"Positive. We have a enough time to call your father to bring more ribs and I'll get Val and Jake to bring more beer."

"What about the kids? Are they going to be okay with all this commotion?"

"I checked on them before I came out. They are both sound asleep."

"They slept through twenty bikers pulling into our driveway?"

Cabe laughed and slapped Frank on the back. "A Harley lullaby."

The party was big but not rauchous. Marina watched as the new uncles interacted with her family. Jonas was in his glory, manning the grill and enjoying the praise for his ribs. Mama and George were sitting close together and whispering to each other. She had to admit she hadn't seen her mother smile as much as this since Papa died. Her attention turned to the baby monitor as she heard her babies beginning to fuss. She glanced at her watch and realized they probably needed a change. She interrupted Frank's conversation with Jake.

"Hey Papa, time for diaper detail."

Frank smiled. "Duty calls."

Marina changed Anna's diaper while Frank took care of Jonas. She could see Frank and Anna's natural close connection and she wanted to make sure Frank's bond with his son was equally as strong. She smiled as she watched her big strong husband make faces at her smiling son.

"What do you say we bring them out to meet their adoring fans."

"Are you sure? It's a lot of people."

"They have a big extended family. They might as well get used to it now."

Marina and Frank returned to the party and were swarmed when the guest saw they'd brought the babies. They'd dressed them in little baby Harley T-shirts. Sven seemed to be particularly taken with Jonas. Frank glanced at Marina and she nodded.

"Would you like to hold him, Sven?" asked Frank.

Sven smiled broadly, "Yeah, sure."

Frank put the baby in his big arms. "Sven, this is my son, Jonas. Jonas, this is your Uncle Sven."

Marina was surprised when her normally quiet son squealed and waved his arms. "He likes you," she said. The big man beamed as his biker brothers hovered near. Jake leaned closed to Anna and smiled.

"Hello baby girl," he whispered.

"Do you want to hold her?" Marina tried to laugh at her brother's panicked

expression. "Sit down over there." Jake took a seat in the patio chair and Marina set Anna in his arms. "Anna, you remember Uncle Jake."

Marina stood back with Frank and watched everyone fuss over their children. "You know we could disappear and they would never miss us." She grabbed his hand and pulled him into the house.

"Marina, what are you doing?"

"Hush and follow." She pulled him upstairs to their bedroom and closed the door. "That's better." She slipped her arms around his waist and pulled him close. "I just wanted some alone time with you." She sat down on the bed and pulled him down next to her. "I want to check in with you. See how you're feeling."

He smiled. "I didn't just give birth to two large babies. I'm fine."

"No, I meant are you okay. Diaper duty, midnight feedings, it's pretty overwhelming. I want you to be honest with me."

"Okay, honestly, I'm still pretty nervous. Did I fasten the diaper right? Am I holding her right? But when I hear them make those cute noises when they hear my voice I think it's going to be okay. I'm going to be okay." He gave her a quick kiss. "How are you doing? You seemed okay with leaving the kids with the family."

"Oh, half my brain is screaming to go outside with them but the other half is telling me to focus on us for a few minutes. I know they're safe with our family. I think with their twenty new uncles they are the safest kids in town. I feel the same way you do about my parenting skills but I know I have first rate back up. As good as I feel today, I do expect to get hit with a wave of post partum hormones so brace yourself for that."

He laughed. "Will do."

"I just want to make sure to check in with each other. I don't want to lose us in the craziness of being parents. Am I making any sense?"

"Yeah, you are. I think that's a great idea. Let's accept the premise up front that neither of us are going to be perfect at this and we need each other to make it work."

"Agreed," Marina gave him a deep kiss. "Speaking of making it work, it's going to be a while yet before I get the all clear but, " she smiled and reached for his belt.

"What are you doing? We have thirty people in our back yard."

"They won't miss us for a few more minutes." She pushed him back on the bed.

"Just relax, Marine, and enjoy the ride."

When they joined the party about thirty minutes later Marina was proven correct. Jonas was being held by his Grandpa George, as he had been designated. Anna was holding court with her cadre of biker uncles. They had not been missed. "Would it be okay if we took a picture?" asked Sven. He glanced at Marina who nodded. "Sure thing."

Katherine approached her and whispered in her ear. "Are you okay with that?"

"I think we can trust these guys."

"They look pretty rough."

"Cabe and Frank both ride with them. They wouldn't hang out with them if they couldn't be trusted." She noticed Kate had arrived in her absence. She excused herself from her sister in law and greeted her friend.

"I'm so glad you could make it."

"Wouldn't have missed it." Kate smiled. "So what were you two up to?" Marina's blush gave her away.

"Sometimes your being a cop is a pain in the ass."

Kate laughed "Agent, and don't worry. Your secret is safe with me."

"It's just so frustrating. It's going to be a while before we can be back where we were."

"No, I get it. When Cabe was recovering I felt guilty for feeling so frustrated," said Kate. She put her hand on Marina's arm and laughed. "But that first time after, definitely worth the wait."

Marina noticed George and her mother were still sticking close to each other. "Hey you two. What's up?"

"It's a lovely party, dear," said Anna

"No, what's up with you two. You've been whispering to each other."

"Anna, we have to tell them," said George.

"Very well. Marina, ask our family to come inside. We'll see you in there."

She left the kids with Cabe and Kate as she gathered her brothers and their wives along with Frank. The six of them found Anna and George sitting on the couch. George patted the chair next to him. "Sit here, sweetheart," he said to Katherine. She sat next to

her father with a worried look.

"What's going on?" she asked.

They waited for everyone to settle before Anna began. "We were going to talk about this at Christmas but then the children came and we didn't..." she stumbled and looked to George.

"What Anna is trying to say is I've asked her to marry me." He broke into a broad smile. "And she said yes." There were gasps followed by congratulations and hugs. Marina sat down next to her mother. The past six months had been difficult, seeing her with someone besides Papa. But then she saw it in her mother's eyes. A softness, a calm that hadn't been there before, at least not since her father died.

"You're very happy, Mama," she said in Russian. "Aren't you?"

"So happy, my angel. Happier than I ever thought I would be again in this life."

She put her arms around her mother and gave her a tight hug and a kiss. "I'm happy for you, Mama. I love you."

"I love you too, angel."

Marina sat back and saw the scene repeated between Katherine and her father. She nodded toward her sister in law, letting her know she understood. She knew Katherine loved Anna as much as she loved George, but seeing their parents with a new spouse was difficult. Then she had a sudden wave of panic. She had two new babies and her mother had promised to help her. She'd been counting on her. She switched to English.

"Mama, are you moving?"

"No, dear. Don't worry. I'm not going anywhere."

George smiled. "She doesn't want to leave her grandbabies and I don't blame her."

"Dad, what about our house, your garden?"

"Well I think it will be fun to plan a whole new garden. As for the house, I was thinking of giving it to you and Val."

"What?"

"It's not that far from the city and it's certainly bigger than your apartment. There are a lot of great memories in that house. I'd love to keep it in the family."

"Dad, I don't know what to say." She looked toward Val who smiled.

"It's a great house and he's right about the location. Plus there will be plenty of

room for the family."

Katherine gave Val a tremulous smile. "Are you sure?"

Val nodded and smiled. "Yes, sweetheart. I'm sure."

Katherine smiled at her father and gave him a tight hug. "Thank you, Daddy."

Marina sat back and watched the exchange. George's eyes teared as he held his daughter. She caught him whisper, "You'll always be my baby." She faked a smile. "Excuse me for a minute, everyone." She tried not to bolt upstairs.

Frank watched Marina go upstairs and he knew something was wrong. "Go to her, Frank," said Anna. She'd seen it too.

He found her sitting on the edge of her bed sobbing into some tissues. He sat down next to her and took her hand. "What's wrong? Are you upset about George?"

She shook her head. "No. George is wonderful and he really loves Mama. She certainly loves him. They're good together."

"So tell me what it is."

"I miss my Papa," she whispered. "I saw how George and Katherine are together and I got this sudden wave of heartache. Papa was such a good man and I was his princess."

Frank wrapped his arms around her. "I know the stories you told me about him were great."

"The best," she said as she wiped her eyes. "You'll be like that for our kids, won't you? Be there for them. Tell them how much you love them all the time."

He tucked his hand under her chin and gave her a soft kiss. "I promise you," he whispered, "They will know that I loved them every day of my life."

She tucked her head onto his chest. "Make it a really long life, Josiah."

He smiled and kissed the top of her head. "I'll make Methuselah jealous."

She patted his chest. "Good answer."

Frank adjusted his tie and took a last look at his suit. He'd chosen the dark blue suit Marina liked so much. It had been a crazy, hectic, wild, wonderful six weeks. They'd managed to get the kids to a schedule where he was comfortable going to the office for short days. The truth was he couldn't bare to be away from his children for too long. Marina made a growling noise behind him. He turned to see his wife smiling at him. She slid her hands around his neck and pulled him into a deep kiss.

"Mmmmm. You look so good," she purred.

"So do you, babe." She was stunning in a fitted blue dress that was modest but sexy as hell. He'd been amazed at how fast she'd gotten back into shape. She had done some strength training with him and spent some time on the treadmill but her results were astounding. She really did have some amazing DNA. "I would love to explain in detail just how wonderful you look, but we have to go soon. We have to be at the church in thirty minutes."

"You know the kids weren't the only ones to get a good report at the doctor, today."

He pulled her close. "Is that right?"

Marina ran her hands over his chest. "I say we cut the party short, put the kids to bed and have some major alone time."

He gave her a deep kiss. "That sounds like a great plan. Now, let's get the kids and get moving."

They entered the Russian Byzantine Catholic church Anna had been attending since moving to California. Marina had accompanied her mother for several months until she'd been put on bed rest. Frank had gone with them, at first for security. After a few visits he'd realized he was going for himself.

The family gathered in the vestibule, Marina holding Anna and Frank holding Jonas. He fussed with the long skirt of his son's gown. They entered the church and found Cabe and Kate were already seated. Frank's parents took spots next to Anna and George. Carolyn and John had managed to get away for a long weekend and settled in behind the parents. Behind them were most the Boozefighters and their guests. Marina had issued

them personal invitations.

The church looked particularly beautiful. The altar had been decorated with large arrangements of roses mixed with lilies. Each pew was had a matching display attached.

"There must be a wedding today," said Marina.

"Looks like it," said Frank.

They gathered at the baptismal font. Val held Anna and Jake held Jonas. The service was brief but memorable, especially after Anna voiced her displeasure at getting her hair doused with cold water. Everyone came together for congratulations and hugs.

"We have lunch and cake at the house," Marina said.

Frank reached for her hand. "Sweetheart, we aren't quite done yet."

"What are you talking about?"

"You're right. There is a wedding today."

Marina's brow furrowed, then she gasped. "Mama? Today?" Her mother smiled and shook her head no. "Frank, what's going on?"

He pulled her aside and pulled both her hands to his lips for a soft kiss. "When I started coming here with you I told you it was for security, and it was. He looked around at the church and smiled. There's something about this place, the history, the continuity. We baptized our children to give them a foundation and a sense of their own history. I think that history should include their parents getting married in the church."

Marina gasped. "Are you serious?"

"Absolutely. So...," he said as he got down on one knee. "Marina Sokolov Nash, will you marry me again?"

She nodded and smiled through her tears. "Yes," she whispered.

Frank stood and gave her a quick kiss. "If you will go with the ladies, they will help you get ready."

"Get ready?"

"Sweetheart, when a Marine plans a wedding, we do it right."

Frank stood at the mirror in the men's dressing room and adjusted his collar. He'd had Cabe deliver his dress blues to the church ahead of time, explaining it was part of his best man duties. "How do I look?" he asked.

"Like a squared away Marine, Colonel," said Cabe.

"You're looking pretty good yourself, Major."

Cabe patted his stomach. "Having a wife like Kate forces me to keep in shape. Otherwise the witch would run me ragged."

Frank laughed. "Tell me about it."

"You ready?"

"Hell, yeah."

Frank and Cabe stood at the altar and looked at back of the church. He'd hired an organist and the church had recommended two singers who were quite good. They were singing an excellent version of "My Prayer." The duet finished and the organist began to play and the Kate began to walk down the aisle carrying a small bouquet. He didn't know who she'd ask but he wasn't surprised. Kate stood opposite them at the altar. The organist began the wedding march.

There she was, as beautiful as she was nearly a year ago. His dress blues weren't the only thing he'd arranged. He'd gotten her wedding gown out of storage and made sure it was ready for her. She was carrying the large bouquet of roses in various shades of pink. The last time she'd walked down the aisle with Val. Today she was on George's arm.

Marina handed her bouquet off to Kate and took Frank's hand. The priest who'd baptized their children now officiated their wedding ceremony. The priest guided them through what they would have known if they'd had a rehearsal. Once they got to the vows, Frank went first and of course, in Russian.

"Marina my love, I knew that life would you would never be dull, and boy, was I right." Frank smiled at his brothers in law who were snickering. "I could have never imagined two years ago what my life would be like today. I had no idea I could love someone as much as I love you and our children." He took a breath, telling himself he could not cry while in uniform. "So today I pledge to you again, I will love you for the rest

of my days."

"The ring," said the priest.

Marina made a move to slip off her wedding band but Frank stopped her. "No, sweetheart, I've got this." He turned to Cabe who handed him a ring. "With this ring I thee wed, again." She gasped when he slipped it on her finger above her engagement ring. It was a perfect reverse of her original band making her engagement the center of the set. She was so taken with her new ring Frank cleared his throat to get her attention. "This is the part when you say something nice about me." She looked at him with a smile that held such love her thought he might break his vow of no tears.

"Nice? You mean I shouldn't call you goon?" Everyone snickered and she began to speak her vows in Russian. "My wonderful husband, two years ago I was alone. I thought I would never find my true place in this world. Then you came barreling into my life and I knew everything was about to change. You saw me, all of me, good and bad. You found the courage to love me. You gave me our two beautiful children." She tried to catch her breath but lost the battle of tears. "Every day I feel the love you have for me and our life. Every day I look at you and know I found my true place. It's you, my Josiah, you are my true place."

"The ring," the priest repeated.

She looked at Frank's ring finger and started, "Ahh..."

"Don't worry. I've got this," he said.

Marina laughed. "Of course you do."

He turned to Cabe who handed him a gold band. He handed it to her and she slipped it on his finger. It was thinner than his original band and fit tight against it. "With this ring I thee wed, again."

The priest held up his hands over both of them. "By the power vested in me by the Church and the State of California, I now pronounce that you are husband and wife, again." The priest was too late to tell Frank to kiss his bride because he'd immediately pulled her into a passionate kiss. Once the cheers turned to hoots and hollars he pulled away and turned to face the gathering. He looked around and saw his family, all of them. The one he was born to and the one that he'd made. He'd lived a solitary life until this Russian whirlwind blew his way. His life was never the same again. He glanced back over

his shoulder at the cruifix above the altar. He smiled and whispered, "Thank you."

To be continued....