

Merry Freaking Christmas: A Scorpion Story

By Kate Simon

Paige swore as she tried to get comfortable at her desk. It was only a week until Christmas. Work was slow and she'd used the time to get a head start on end of the year paperwork. She pulled her keyboard on to her belly and her baby tried to kick it off. At eight months pregnant, she was very uncomfortable but she hadn't told anyone, especially Walter. He'd have her at home and confined to bed. He was easier to fool than Toby. She thought he had an idea of how she was feeling. Fortunately, everything with the baby was fine according to her doctor so she was able to keep everyone at bay. The last thing she wanted was everyone hovering, especially Walter. He didn't need to know how scared she was. The last time she did this she was young and naïve. Ralph was in college now. Okay, he was fourteen but he was definitely no baby.

Happy dropped a box of decorations on her desk. "Do we really need to put up all this stuff?"

Paige rubbed her belly and smiled. "I'd help but Walter doesn't want me on the ladder."

"Fine," she muttered as she picked up the box.

Paige smiled. Guilt was a powerful thing. "Ralph and Kathy should be here soon."

"That's true," she smiled. "What's the point of having kids if they can't do the heavy lifting for you?"

Paige smiled through the baby's tap dance on her kidneys.

Cabe looked at his phone and smiled. "The reservations came through." He opened the SUV door for Kate.

"That's great. Do you think the kids will go for it?" she asked.

He got in the car and grabbed his sunglasses. "I think so. It's been quiet at the garage and Katherine has cleared us for the next two weeks, barring threat of nuclear disasters."

"Fingers crossed."

"Well, she said that Tague is taking her to the Maldives for the holidays so anyone interrupting her vacation will cause her to rain hell fire upon their heads."

"Oh, I wouldn't want to be on the receiving end of that."

"Are you sure you're okay with all this? Renting four cabins is pretty pricy."

"We've talked about this, Cabe. I have more money than I could spend in three lifetimes. I love that I have people in my life I can indulge," she smiled. "And it's a lot of fun."

Thirty minutes later they arrived to the typical Scorpion chaos. Ralph and Kathy were both on ladders hanging decorations. Toby was at the bottom of Kathy's ladder, ready to catch his daughter if she fell. Sparks were flying around Happy as she welded on some piece of genius. Sly was wearing his headphones and engrossed in something on his screen. Paige was sitting at her desk, immersed in paperwork. Walter was out of sight, most likely in the loft away from the chaos. Cabe did the only thing that got all their attention at once. He let out a piercing whistle. They stopped and looked at him. Even Walter looked out from the loft. "Okay, now that I have your attention, I need everyone front and center. Kate and I want to give you all your Christmas presents early." Kate handed everyone a brochure. "We have rented cabins for everyone for two weeks."

"This is the Sequoia Resort," said Paige. "I've heard of it. Celebrities stay there."

"We're in," said Toby.

"I don't know," said Sly. A cabin in the woods? What if something happens? The team doesn't have a good history with cabins and Christmas."

Cabe looked at Kate. "A few years ago, we rented a cabin for Christmas. We ran into some bad guys."

Kate smacked his shoulder. "You tell me this now?!"

"We handled it. Frankly, I forgot about it."

"I didn't," said Sly.

"Sly, this isn't a cabin by itself in the woods. There are multiple cabins next to the main hotel. It's got an indoor pool and gym. Horseback riding, full spa services and a five-star restaurant. Everyone will have their own cabin with fireplaces and hot tubs."

"We're in," Toby repeated.

"I don't know," said Sly. "What if something happens?"

"Sly, the brochure says the main hotel has fifty rooms," said Paige. "And you know the rich and famous don't go places where they can't get the best of everything."

"We're in," Toby said, as Happy hit his shoulder.

"Okay," Kate smiled. "The Curtis-Quinn family is a yes. What about the rest of you?"

"What about our work? Director Cooper..." Walter started.

"Has already cleared us for the next two weeks," said Cabe.

"Paige is pregnant," Walter added.

"Paige is aware," she said as she rubbed her stomach. "I'm not due for another five weeks. I could use a lounge chair and some hot cocoa."

Walter rubbed his hand over her shoulder. "Are you sure?"

"If I'm relaxed, it's better for the baby." Paige looked over at Toby. "Speaking now would be good."

“She’s right. No work, feet up, all good,” said Toby. “And I’ll be there if there is any problem.”

“Kids, there’s ski lessons and lots of activities for teens.”

“Cool,” said Ralph.

“Okay, we’re in,” said Paige.

“Paige, I’m not sure...” Walter started.

“We’re in,” she repeated.

“I’m still not sure,” said Sly.

“Sly, everyone will have their own place,” said Kate. “You could invite someone to join you.”

“Ahh, I haven’t really been seeing anyone since Florence.” Florence had wanted to move forward with their relationship but he wasn’t ready.

Paige read from the brochure. “Sly, check it out. Every cabin has a sixty-five inch, “AMOLED” television with high-speed internet.

Sly smiled. “I’m in.”

Cabe and Kate pulled up to the resort in the Scorpion van. They'd decided it was easier to travel together. It had snowed the night before and there was about three inches of snow on the ground in the area. It made the California natives nervous to drive but it was nothing for Cabe as a native New Yorker.

Walter was happier to have the van. He was uncomfortable being cut off from their equipment. A laptop could only do so much. The main building of the resort was an enormous log cabin with the front wall of windows looking out at the mountains.

"Oh Cabe, this is beautiful," said Paige.

"This is Kate's choice."

"Well done, Kate," said Toby.

Kate smiled at Cabe. "I have excellent taste."

Toby caught the wink between them. Before he could say anything, Cabe whistled for everyone's attention.

"Okay, lets go register. The staff will get the luggage." They walked into the hotel and up to the desk. "Gallo Riley party checking in."

A young woman with dark hair smiled at them. "Yes, sir." Each couple signed in and were given a key card to their cabins along with a folder of activities.

"Ralph, look. They have a teen dance tonight," said Paige. She looked up when he didn't answer. She saw Ralph and Kathy talking to a group of kids. "Hey you two, we're going to our cabins."

"Mom, we were going to hang out here. It's time for hot chocolate." He pointed to a table where servers were serving chocolate and handing out large cookies.

Happy came up beside Paige. "What's going on?"

"Mom, we met some kids," said Kathy.

"What kids?" said Happy.

"Don't worry, Happy," said Ralph. "We'll stay together."

“Okay,” she sighed. Happy and Paige gave their kids keycards. “We’re in cabin eight. Ralph, you’re in cabin nine. One hour. Don’t make me come find you.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he said.

“Thanks, Mom,” said Kathy as they ran off to join their new friends.

Paige put her hand on Happy’s shoulder “Don’t worry. They’ll be fine.”

Cabe and Kate led the team to each of their cabins. Each was a small home with a full kitchen. They had beautiful views of the mountains and the ski slopes. Kate had made sure the kitchen was stocked with each one's favorites. Toby honed in on the smell of fresh egg bagels. He picked one up and smiled.

"You're the best, Kate."

"You're welcome, Toby. There should be plenty of food and drinks so you shouldn't have to go up to the main hotel unless you want to. Also, if you order anything, room service or at the hotel, you sign." She drilled them all with what appear to be an acquired and effective Gallo glare. "No arguments."

"Thanks, Kate," said Toby as he found the cream cheese.

"You're welcome."

They got Paige and Walter settled in their cabin. Walter checked to see if all the exits and walkways had been cleared of snow. He checked the landlines and the heat was working. "Walter, relax," said Paige.

"I'm just checking. We need to be prepared."

"Walter, I'm not due for another five weeks. I need you to relax so I can relax. That is the point of a vacation." Paige put her arms around his waist. "Please? For me?" The baby took that moment to kick her and Walter. She rubbed her hand over her belly. "Do it for our baby." Walter smiled and covered her hand with his.

"Okay."

Cabe and Kate walked a little way up the hill to Sly's cabin. They were most worried about him being alone in the cabin. Kate had made sure it was stocked with all his favorite treats but all Sly saw was the giant TV and game console. He dropped his bags and powered up the TV and the console. Bright, intense colors lit up the screen.

"Whoa," he said as his eyes widened.

"Sly, there's plenty of food in the kitchen," said Kate

“Huh?” Sly asked as he pulled up a role-playing game.

“Dinner in the main dining room at eight,” said Cabe.

“Huh? What? Dinner, eight, got it,” he said just as he blew up a bad guy and giggled.

Cabe put his arm around Kate. “Come on. He’s fine.”

Cabe and Kate were finally able to relax in their cabin. It was a larger cabin than the others, with a big deck and fire pit facing the mountain view. Kate had also arranged for a large Christmas tree. She’d shipped gifts up and they were already under the tree. Kate Riley was nothing if not thorough.

Kate started to unpack when Cabe took her hand. “That can wait. Let’s relax.” He pulled the bottle of champagne out of the fridge and popped the cork. He poured them each a glass and smiled. “So far so good,” he said.

She took a sip and smiled. “We have a few hours before dinner.”

Cabe grinned. “You read my mind.”

Cabe and Kate managed to pry Sly away from his new best friend, the giant TV. They walked into the restaurant to the large table that had been reserved for their party. The team was already seated and they joined them.

“This place is great,” said Toby. “The Jacuzzi is awesome.”

“I’m glad you’re enjoying yourself,” said Kate.

“Are we expecting someone else?” asked Paige as she pointed to two empty seats.

“We are,” Cabe smiled. He nodded toward the entrance. He smiled and stood to greet Katherine Cooper and Tague.

“Director Cooper?”

“Hello everyone,” she said as Tague held her chair.

“Hey guys,” said Tague.

“I thought you guys went on vacation?” asked Toby.

“Kate asked us to join you. By the way, the room is lovely.”

“I’m glad you like it,” said Kate.

“Especially that steam shower,” said Tague as he smiled at Katherine. “Very roomy.” She blushed as she slapped Tague’s hand.

“We’re staying the weekend. Then, two weeks in the Maldives. We have one of those cabins they build out over the water.”

“Oh, nice,” said Happy.

“You postponed a cabin over the ocean for us?” asked Sly.

Katherine smiled. “Christmas is for family.”

Cabe and Kate were wrapped up in the thick, hotel bathrobes. He smiled as he handed Kate a mug of coffee. Tague had been right about the steam showers. "Does everyone know to be here at noon?" he asked.

"Yes. The hotel said they'd deliver the food by eleven."

"Do you think they suspect anything?"

"I don't think so," she smiled. Cabe gave her a kiss that tasted of coffee and passion. Kate pushed against his chest. "Oh no you don't. You need to get dressed and make sure all the gifts are under the tree. I have to get ready. Now, go."

"Bossy little thing," he smiled.

"Ah, you love me anyway."

"More than I can ever say."

Paige held on to Walter's arm as they walked toward Cabe and Kate's cabin. The hotel had cleaned the walkway but Walter insisted she hold on to him and she didn't mind. The baby had been quieter since they arrived at the hotel. The baby must love hot chocolate as much as his mother. Ralph carried a bag with presents. They'd agreed not to go overboard on gifts, but Kate and Cabe renting these cabins for two weeks was the definition of overboard. It was hard to get used to the idea that Kate was one of the richest women in the state. But she had to admit, it was really nice to be indulged in a luxury suite. She was surprised when a hotel server opened the door.

"Good afternoon," she said.

"Ah, hello. Is Mr. Gallo here?"

"Hey kids, Merry Christmas. Come on in," said Cabe as he walked out from behind a magnificent Christmas tree. Cabe had a love of nice suits but this one was gorgeous.

"Wow, Cabe. You look great."

“Thanks, kid.”

“Why so fancy? I’m wearing my last pair of slacks that still fit.”

“Ralph, buddy, why don’t you put those under the tree?”

“Cabe, you didn’t answer my question. Why so fancy?” She pointed to the buffet being set out by two wait staff.

“You know Kate. She likes to do it up.”

“Uh, huh,” she said, not convinced.

Everyone had finally arrived, including Tague in a very nice suit. “Okay, what’s going on?” Paige demanded. “Tague’s here and no Katherine and Kate is still getting ready? Spill it, Gallo.”

Cabe grinned and clapped his hands together. “Okay, if I can have everyone’s attention. Yes, this is a little more than a Christmas brunch. It’s a wedding reception.” Cabe chuckled at a collective gasp that could have sucked the air out of the room. We decided now, with all our family here, would be the perfect time. Walter, would you do me the honor of being my best man?”

Walter shook his self from his surprise and extended his hand. “Of course, I will.”

Cabe took his hand and pulled him into a hug. “Thank you, Walter.” He smiled at Paige and nodded at the bedroom door. “I think Kate would like to talk to you.”

Paige knocked and was surprised when Katherine opened the door.

“Paige, excellent timing. Come in.” She stood aside and Paige got a glimpse of Kate.

“Oh my,” she gasped. Kate was wearing a beautiful, tea length dress. It was a cream-colored sheath covered in lace with lace sleeves. Her red hair was in a French Twist and threaded with baby’s breath. “Kate, you look beautiful.”

“Thank you, sweetheart.”

“Why didn’t you tell us?”

“I wanted it to be a surprise.”

Paige looked at Katherine in her elegant red dress. “But you told Katherine.”

Katherine smiled. “I needed the time to get my license to marry them.”

Kate smiled and took her by the hands. “Paige, will you be my matron of honor?”

“Kate, I’d love to but look at me. I’m wearing on of Walter’s old sweaters and slacks that barely fit. And don’t even get me started on my hair!”

Kate laughed. “I knew you’d say that so I’ve taken care of it.” She pulled a garment bag out of the closet.

“What about my hair?”

“Don’t worry, Paige. I worked my way through college as a hairdresser,” said Katherine.

Paige ran her hand over the powder blue chiffon dress. “It’s so beautiful.”

“Is that a yes?” asked Kate. Paige threw her arms around Kate.

“Yes, of course.”

Cabe was sipping a club soda while Kate and the girls got ready. The last thing he needed was alcohol. He was nervous enough. Not about marrying Kate. He was sure she was the best thing that ever happened to him. He hoped he could be the husband Kate deserved. The kids were looking at the Christmas presents. So was Sly. "Hey guys, those are for after."

Katherine came out of the bedroom. "Okay everyone. Let's get the party started."

Cabe took a spot next to the Christmas tree and indicated Walter should stand next to him. He nodded to Tague, who turned on a stereo and classical music started playing. Paige walked out first, looking beautiful in a dress Kate had selected. She was carrying a small bouquet of roses. She took her place opposite them and smiled. Then Kate walked into the room and everything disappeared. The music, the people, everything. All he saw was her. His love, his life, his future.

Kate tried to cover her nerves by holding tight to her bouquet. She was determined not to ruin her makeup by crying. Even happy tears would ruin mascara. There he was, standing in front of the Christmas tree. He looked so handsome in a steel blue suit. A halo of colored lights surrounded him. All her life, she'd dreamt of Cabe Gallo. Not the man, specifically, but the happiness she felt when she was with him. She'd spent most of her life, alone, hiding in the shadows. She told herself undercover work was her specialty. She was great at it. The truth was she was more comfortable in the shadows. That was until Cabe Gallo came into her life and he pulled her into the light. She wasn't alone anymore. Now they were making it official. They were a forever thing.

Paige sat on the comfortable chair with her feet up on an ottoman, thanks to Walter. Moving around was getting more and more difficult. She tried not to let him know, but she was also trying to let him help more. It was difficult for her to surrender control but she was making an effort to let Walter fuss over her. She guessed it was part of his learning to be a father. He smiled as he handed her a glass of sparkling cider. Kate made sure that the kids had something to toast with as Cabe handed out champagne. She saw Toby lean in and speak to Walter. He nodded and walked to the middle of the gathering.

“Toby has reminded me as best man that it is my duty to propose a toast.” He paused and took a breath. “I have known Cabe since I was younger than Ralph. He has always been my guardian, and then later, guardian of our team. He was always there for us. But now he finally has someone there for him. Kate has become his partner in work and his life. She saved him from an ill-advised undercover operation.” Everyone chuckled. Kate smiled and gave him a playful jab in the side. “She also saved all of us and half the country from a dirty bomb.”

Paige was surprised at Kate’s blush. As skilled an agent as Kate was, she was very modest.

“Cabe spent all these years having our back. Now, Kate has his.”

Cabe smiled and placed a kiss on her forehead.

“Kate, I know we gave you a hard time when you first joined us and I am sorry for that. You have shown us your loyalty. We also see how happy you’ve made Cabe. I see him smiling at you when you’re not looking.”

Now it was Cabe’s turn to blush.

“Cabe, I never knew how important it was having someone in your life until you helped open my eyes.” Walter looked at Paige and smiled. “I am happy that you two found each other. And I am very grateful that Kate is part of all of lives.” Walter raised his glass. “To Cabe and Kate.”

“To Cabe and Kate,” said everyone as they raised their glasses.

Paige sipped her cider and watched as Cabe gave Kate a gentle kiss. She also noticed as Tague slipped his arm around Katherine and whispered in her ear. Blushing seemed to be contagious today.

“Is it time for presents yet?” asked Ralph.

“Ralph!”

“Sorry, Mom.”

Kate sat down next to her and smiled. “It’s okay. Ralph, why don’t you start handing out the gifts?”

Paige reached for Kate’s left hand. “Okay, let’s see.” She saw a beautiful oval emerald with triangle shaped diamonds on either side. The wedding band was a twisted leaves set with emeralds and diamonds. “Oh, my. These are gorgeous. Happy, come see.” She held Kate’s hand up to her.

“Wow, those are beautiful.”

“Cabe designed them himself,” said Kate.

“No way,” said Happy.

“He did. He’s very...gifted,” she grinned.

Happy grabbed Kate’s hand and held it in the air. “Great job, boss.”

He walked over and joined them on the couch. “Thanks.”

“Hey Doc, take notes,” said Happy. Toby walked over and took a look at Kate’s rings.

“Wow. Impressive.”

“Ah, can I have my hand back? I’m starting to lose the feeling,” said Kate.

“Let’s see yours,” said Toby. Cabe held up his hand and show off his gold band with a row of inset diamonds. “Tasteful.”

“I like it,” Cabe smiled as he gave Kate a quick kiss.

“Okay, enough of the mushy stuff,” said Ralph. “It’s time for presents.” He and Kathy set presents before each person, including Katherine and Tague.

“Ah, we didn’t expect gifts. We didn’t bring anything,” said Katherine.

“You arranged for all of us to have two weeks off. That’ll do nicely, thank you,” said Cabe.

Thirty minutes later the floor was covered with torn gift wrap and everyone was admiring their gifts. Katherine held up her glittery gold hoops from Kate. “These are lovely, Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I thought you could wear them on your holiday.” Kate smiled as Katherine looked closer at the hoops and realized the hoops and glittery shine were very real.

She gasped and mouthed “Real?”

Kate smiled and waved away her question. “How do you like yours, Tague?”

Tague was chuckling as he went through the multi-leveled case. “Very funny, Kate.” He pulled out creams and brushes out of the professional makeup kit.

“I thought you’d find it helpful on your undercovers.”

“Actually, it could,” he chuckled.

“Mom, we want to go to Sly’s cabin to try out our new games,” said Kathy.

“Not before you pick up all the paper,” said Happy. She looked at Paige and smiled. “What’s the point of having kids if they don’t do some to of the toting and lifting.”

Paige touched Happy’s glass with hers. “Exactly.”

Cabe pulled Kate close to him and gave her another kiss. “Ummm. This marriage is starting off very well.”

“I agree, except this is how we started off the morning, too.”

“True, but this was the first time as a married couple.”

“Ah, yes,” she giggled. “You’ve made an honest woman out of me.”

He laughed and hugged her. “Come on, Mrs. Gallo. We have people waiting in the main hall for dinner. I’m going to grab a shower.”

“Want some company, Mr. Gallo?” she smiled.

“We’ll be late.”

Kate smiled and tossed the pillow at him.

Paige sat at the table, watching all the people that had become her family. From all the dysfunction that was her childhood, she could have never imagined this life. With her mother in prison and her father dead of a broken heart, Paige had always made her way on her own. Now, she had a husband, a son and another child on the way. She also had two chosen brothers, in Toby and Sly. She had a sister in Happy. Kathy was not only her son’s best friend, she was her niece. Katherine Cooper was the eccentric but much-loved aunt. Even Tague was working his way his way into their family. She chuckled as Tague enthralled Ralph and Kathy with a story that no doubt, had elaborate details with a minimum of facts. Tague’s life as an undercover operative was adventurous but he would never reveal national secrets to entertain the kids.

She looked up and smiled as the newly pronounced Mr. and Mrs. Gallo joined them. Cabe had become the father they all needed. Protected them, guided them and when they needed it, kicked their collective asses. Kate had slipped into the role of mother. She made sure they were all cared for and had everything they needed, sometimes to excess.

“Are you okay, dear?” asked Kate. “You look preoccupied.”

“I’m fine. Maybe just a little wistful.” She smiled and rubbed her belly. It’s a lot to take in.”

Wait staff began serving Christmas dinner. Each person received a large filet along with roasted potatoes and a mixed vegetable dish. When Kate discussed menus with Paige had suggested the filets. Everyone had more than enough turkey after Thanksgiving. The servers filled wine glasses for those who could drink. Paige really wished she could have a glass. This baby was going to be a handful when it was born because they were determined to make their presence known tonight.

“Katherine, I thought Kate said you were going someplace tropical for vacation?” asked Paige.

Katherine smiled and put her hand over Tague’s. “He’s taking me to the Maldives. A private, thatched roof cabin over the water. Tropical drinks and a private chef.”

“Wow, that sounds amazing.”

“We leave tomorrow morning.”

“Thank you for delaying your trip. It meant so much to both of us,” said Cabe.

“I wouldn’t have missed it for the world,” said Katherine.

“Toby and I are going to take the kids skiing tomorrow,” said Happy.

“You ski?” asked Paige.

“It’s simple physics. I’m sure we’ll be fine,” she smiled.

“Ahh...,” Paige started.

“I’ll be going along,” said Toby. “They’re scheduled for lessons and I’ll have my bag with me just in case.”

Paige smiled. “Thanks, Toby.”

Cabe thought he heard a fire alarm. He sat up and heard a second sound. He realized it was the emergency alerts on their cell phones. He picked his off the nightstand and read the message. "Well, damn," he said as he shook Kate awake.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Emergency alert. A storm has changed direction. We're going to be hit hard."

Kate looked at her phone. "Eighteen to twenty-four inches of snow! There's a shelter in place order."

He got out of bed and looked of the window. "Damn. It's already started. There's at least a foot of snow already."

"So much for our Christmas holiday," said Kate as she tossed her phone down. "Two feet of snow! We'll all be stuck in our cabins. We won't see anyone for days."

Cabe sat down next to her and stroked her arm. "That doesn't sound so bad."

"Stop it."

"I'm sure they have the equipment to clear the walkways. Katie, I know it's not what we expected but we're all in luxury cabins. We have a ton of food left over from the reception. I'll talk to the desk in the morning and see where we stand."

"We should check on everyone."

Cabe gave her a quick kiss. "Katie, it's three a.m. We'll talk to everyone in the morning."

Paige looked out the window at the blowing snow. She didn't need the cell phone alert to wake her. She pulled the resort bathrobe tight across her. She would have enjoyed the luxury robe if she hadn't been so uncomfortable. She didn't know how she was going to make it another five weeks.

"Are you alright?" asked Walter.

"I'm just a little restless."

He got out of bed and pulled the suitcase out of the closet.

“What are you doing?”

“Did you see the alert? We need to pack.”

She held back the drapes. “It’s too late. Look.”

He looked out the window and gasped. “This is bad, this is very bad.” He reached for his phone. Paige recognized Walter was about to spin out. She grabbed his hand.

“Who are you going to call? It’s three a.m.”

“You need to be near a hospital. You’re pregnant.”

She rolled her eyes. “Yes, I’m aware. We can’t go anywhere. There’s at least a foot of snow out there now and it’s blowing. They’ll be drifts.”

“What if you need medical care?”

“Toby is in the next cabin.”

“He’s not an obstetrician.” He started dialing.

“Who are you calling?”

“The governor. He can get us out of here and he owes me a favor.”

Paige took the phone from him and hung up. “Nothing will be moving in this weather, not on the ground or the air.” He sat down on the edge of the bed and stared out the window. She felt so bad because she knew that look. He was shutting down, frozen by a problem he couldn’t solve. She sat down next to him and took his hand in hers. “Walter, nothing and no one is moving for the time being. We have power and food in the fridge.” She pointed to the far wall. “We even have a fireplace. We’ll be fine.” She stood and flipped a switch and the fireplace jumped to life. “I love gas fireplaces. No chopping wood.”

“Maybe I should install one in our house,” he said. Paige understood. It was something he could plan. Something he could accomplish.

She sat back down next to him. "I would like that. Fireplaces are very romantic."
She leaned her head on his shoulder as they watched the wind blow.

Cabe looked out the window and sighed as the hotel manager got on the phone. “Mr. Roberts, where do we stand? I assured my wife you have the equipment to clear the walks to make sure we’re not trapped.” He didn’t feel confident when the man paused.

“Well, we have the equipment but not the staff. Most of the staff live offsite. We sent them home before storm and they can’t get back.”

“We have seven people who can help. How many guests do you have that can help?”

“Oh, I couldn’t ask our guests,” said Roberts.

“I could. My wife and I are Homeland Security agents. Get everyone together in the main lobby in an hour.”

“Do you have the authority to do that?”

“No, but they don’t need to know that. Find someone that can clear the walk from the main building to our cabins.”

“Yes, Mr. Gallo.”

“It’s Agent Gallo.” He hung up the phone and looked at a disapproving Kate.

“Since when do you use your badge to bully people?”

He walked to the window and pulled the drapes open. “Since there’s two feet of snow and three-to-four-foot drifts. We’ve got to make sure everyone is safe, especially Paige.”

“God, Walter must be freaking out.”

Cabe’s phone rang and he looked down. “Speak of the devil.” He answered the call. “Hello, Walter.”

“Cabe, we need to get out of here. We have to get Paige to a hospital.”

“Is she okay?”

Paige yelled from the background. “I’m fine.”

"It's not safe," said Walter.

"I agree. I've spoken with the manager. He's going to send someone to clear the walkway. Once that's done, bring Paige here and Kate will keep an eye on her. The rest of us will go up to the main hall. I told the manager to call all the guests together and we'll figure out what we can do."

"I want to dig out the van. We should have access to our equipment."

"The first thing to get are the coms. I want us to keep in contact."

"Good, good. That's the start of a plan. Now we have to work on getting Paige to a hospital."

Cabe sighed. "One step at a time, kid. As soon as the walks are clear, bring Paige to our cabin and we'll go to the main building." He hung up and sighed. "Walter is spinning out. We need to get him occupied. We'll organize getting as much snow as we can cleared out."

"Have Katherine call her contacts and see what the situation is with transportation," said Kate.

"Good idea. Okay, let's get moving."

It took nearly an hour for the walks to be cleared and everyone to gather at their cabin. Walter got Paige comfortable on the couch and covered her legs with an afghan. Cabe caught her eye roll. She was letting him fuss to give him something to do. "Okay, everyone, Kate and the kids will stay here with Paige. The rest of us will meet Katherine and Tague in the main hall."

"We can help," said Kathy and Ralph.

"I tell you what, once we get things sorted you can help us dig out the van," said Cabe.

“In the mean time, I’ll make some hot chocolate.” She turned the switch for the fireplace and nodded for Cabe to join her. She reached for the tea pot and filled it. “What if we lose power?” she said quietly.

“I’ll talk to the manager and determine the generator situation. I’ll try to get the van down here, just in case. There’s a charging station at the main building. I’ll get it recharged so we can use it if need be.”

“Now I think the most important thing is hot chocolate and getting Walter the heck out of here before he drives Paige nuts.”

Cabe smiled and gave her a kiss. “You’ve got this.”

“Yeah, I do.”

“I love you, Katie girl.”

“I love you too, boyo.”

Cabe and the team joined Roberts in his conference room. “This is our team, Scorpion. We contract for Homeland as problem solvers.” He indicated toward Katherine. “This is Katherine Cooper, Director of Homeland Security.”

Katherine didn’t wait for the man to speak. “I’ve been in touch with my contacts. Nothing is going to move at least until the snow stops and the wind dies down.” She looked at Cabe. “That means no chopper evacuations.”

“Damn,” said Walter.

“What? What’s going on?” asked Roberts.

“One of our team, Walter’s wife, Paige, is nearly eight months pregnant. Do you have any medical facilities?” asked Toby.

“We have a nursing station but our nurse can’t get in. We haven’t had any medical issues since last night.”

“Good. I’ll need to see what you’ve got so I can see what I’m working with,” said Toby.

“Who are you?”

“I’m the best doctor on this mountain.”

Happy pushed at his shoulder. “You’re the only doctor on this mountain.”

He smiled at his wife. “I’m still the best.”

“What is your generator situation?” asked Cabe.

“We have one that will keep our power facility running, but we haven’t had to use it for awhile.”

“I’ll take a look,” said Happy.

“Who are you?”

“The best engineer on this mountain, or any mountain,” Toby smiled. Happy blushed and pushed on his shoulder.

“We’ll need to dig it out. It’s set off from the main building.”

“I’ll deal with that,” said Tague.

“And who are you?” asked Roberts.

“Tague,” answered everyone.

“What’s a Tague?”

“Me,” Tague smiled.

“Mr. Roberts, do you have any staff?”

“Some. Our chef lives on site. Some of the wait staff and maintenance staff volunteered to stay and take care of the guests.”

“Sly, why don’t you check in with the staff. Check the stores and see where we stand. There’s no telling how long we’ll all be here.”

“How is he qualified to take over my kitchen?” asked Roberts.

“Sly is our math genius. He can look at your reserves and determine the distribution.”

“How many guests and staff are here?” asked Sly.

“Including all of you, one hundred and five.”

Sly nodded. “Where’s the kitchen?”

“Turn right in the hallway and go all the way to the end. The signs will lead you.”

Cabe took him by the arm. “Try not to scare the normals, buddy. If you have a question, call Paige. Okay everyone, get going,” said Cabe. “Katherine, I think the guests will be gathered by now. Walter, I’ll need you with the guests. We have to figure out people who can help us dig out.” He leaned in to Walter. “I know you’re stressed but take it easy on the guests. We need their help.”

“I’ll start with a hotel wide announcement,” said Roberts. “I need to alert all the staff.” Roberts led the way out of the conference room followed by the rest of the team. Cabe turned to close the door and when he turned around, found Katherine staring at him.

“The Maldives, Gallo! The freaking Maldives! Ocean hut. Private chef and a hot man all at my disposal!” she said through gritted teeth.

“I really am sorry, Katherine.”

“Merry freaking Christmas.”

He tried not to smile as she growled and walked down the hall. She may be his friend but she was also his boss and one of the most influential people in government. It didn’t pay to piss her off. He resolved to get her and Tague off on their vacation as soon as they got Paige off the mountain.

Mr. Roberts tapped on the microphone. "Thank you everyone for joining us."

"Where is brunch?" asked a woman in a fur vest. "It's an hour late."

"Yes, I will be addressing that. In the meantime, I want to introduce Katherine Cooper, the Director of Homeland Security."

"Homeland? Is there a threat?" asked a man in the back.

"Are there terrorists?" asked a woman wrangling small children.

Katherine took the mic. "It's snow, not anthrax." She pulled her wallet from her jeans and flashed her badge. "I'm Katherine Cooper," she nodded toward Cabe. "This is Special Agent Cabe Gallo." Cabe pulled out his badge and showed it to the crowd. "My contact tells me it will be a minimum of two days before they can evacuate this location."

"What? That's ridiculous. I have a very important meeting in LA tomorrow," said a girl with way too much makeup.

"That's not happening."

The girl gave her perfect, long blonde hair and indignant flip with perfect, long nails. "Do you know who I am?"

"Not a clue."

The girl stood and put her hand on her curvy hip. "I'm Brandy. I have eleven million followers on Insta."

"Good for you but not one of them is making it up this mountain. Now sit your ass down." The girl complied with a well-practiced huff. "If I may continue. Most of the staff are sheltered in their own homes, like the rest of three counties. The staff that are on hand volunteered to take care of you, so remember that. We will need assistance digging out areas. Cabe, do you want to take over?"

"Yes, Director. First, we need volunteers to help us dig out critical areas. If anyone has emergency supplies in their cars, we will do those first."

“I have an emergency kit in my van and a collapsible shovel,” said a man in high fashion ski wear.

“Good. I’ll need as many volunteers as I can get. This is Walter O’Brien. He will organize what gets shoveled when. His decisions are final.”

“You want us to shovel snow?” asked the fur vest woman.

Katherine turned to Cabe. “Who are these people?”

“Yes, everyone needs to pitch in.” He indicated toward Toby. “For anyone with medical issues, this is Doctor Curtis.

“If anyone has any medical supplies, like Epi-pens, let me know,” said Toby. A woman raised her hand. “Yes, snow bunny in the back.” Cabe smacked him on the shoulder.

“My name is Carol, not bunny. I’m an ER nurse.”

“Ah, hello Carol. If you can accompany me to the med station, I’d appreciate it.”

“Sure thing, doc.”

Cabe chuckled as Toby looked properly chastened. “Alright. Mr. Roberts, if you will direct us to the snow blowers and shovels.”

It took an hour just to get into the team's van. Until the wind died down, they were only digging out vehicles with supplies. Cabe got his weapon from the safe. He didn't dream he'd need it during his honeymoon but he didn't like traveling without it. He looked at the safe and grabbed Kate's weapon. You never know.

Walter pulled the coms out of the cases and handed one to Cabe. "I want to get these to everyone."

"Give me enough for our wives and the kids. I'll check on them."

"I should do that," said Walter.

"You're needed here. I need you to keep things going. Get coms to the others and we can link up. Check on the people out here. We should get them inside soon. We don't want to load Toby up with frostbite cases."

"Okay, but I want to know how Paige is doing."

"As soon as I get there. I promise."

Kate was relieved when Cabe finally returned to the cabin. Everything was fine inside, but outside it was still snowing. He stamped his feet to get rid of snow and shook off his coat. She helped him off with his and was surprised at its weight. He reached in one pocket and pull out his service weapon. "Is that really necessary?"

"You never know." He reached in the other pocket and pulled out her service weapon and handed it to her. He looked into the living room and saw Paige and the kids were playing a board game. "How's everyone doing?"

"Kathy is kicking our butts in monopoly," said Paige.

"She's ruthless," said Ralph.

Cabe pulled coms out of his shirt pocket. "Coms for everyone."

"Even me?" asked Kathy.

"Your parents want to keep in touch." He showed her how to put the com in her ear and how to switch it on. "Now say hello."

"Mom, Dad, can you hear me?"

"Kathy, honey, are you okay?" asked Toby.

"Kathy, do you need anything?" asked Happy.

"No, I'm good. I'm kicking butt in monopoly."

"That's my girl," said Toby.

"Kate, you'll tell me if she needs us," said Happy.

"Of course. They are being very helpful. Kathy has been waiting on Paige and Ralph figured out how to reverse the vacuum cleaner and keep the drifts away from the front door."

"That's good, Ralph," said Walter. "Paige, how are you feeling?"

"I'm fine. I am being waited on hand and foot."

"Good. Keep checking in with me."

“Walter, sweetheart, as hard as it is, I need you to stop worrying about me. Focus on keeping the hotel operating. That’s how you can take care of me.”

“Lunch is ready,” said Kate. “You get to back to work and we’ll take care of Paige.”

“Sly, are you on?” asked Cabe.

“I’m here.”

“How’s it going?”

“The kitchen is surprisingly well stocked. I recommended soups and chili to stretch the stores. As it is I’d say we have at least four days of food. We’ll run out of milk sooner but there are creamers. I’m going to come back. The chef has everything under control. He’s ex army.”

“Translation, he wants you out of his kitchen,” said Cabe.

“Copy that,” said Sly.

“Come to our cabin, Sly. We have plenty here for lunch,” said Kate.

“Happy, Tague, how are we doing?” asked Cabe.

“The generator station is old but it looks operational,” said Happy. “I’ll run some tests. Tague got the entrance cleared but we should clear it every thirty minutes. We can’t afford to be cut off.”

“Agreed. Come back to our cabin when your done. Kate has lunch ready.”

“Do you have any whiskey?” asked Tague.

“Fully stocked bar.”

“Roger that,” said Tague.

“Toby, how are we set for medical?” asked Cabe.

“We’re fine. A couple of panic attacks but Carol has it well under control. I’d like to come back and check on Kathy. I gave Carol a com. She can contact me if she needs

me.” Toby spotted the look Carol gave him. “I’ll make sure I get her some lunch before I leave.” Carol nodded and went back to her supply inventory.

Cabe helped Kate lay out a large brunch. He’d wanted to help Ralph with the walkway but he’d taken great pride in his reverse of the vacuum and he assured Cabe he had everything under control. Everyone filtered in from their various assignments. Walter went straight to Paige.

“How are you feeling?”

She took his hand and placed it on her stomach. “We’re fine. I’ve barely moved.”

Toby and Happy came in and hugged Kathy. Katherine and Tague came in and Cabe pointed to the bar. Tague smiled and poured them both a whiskey. Katherine took a large sip and sighed. “I would rather run head long into a fire fight than deal with some of those people again. Fortunately, Sly and the staff got food service going.”

“Speaking of food service,” said Kate as she held up a platter of sandwiches.

Lunch was over and they were relaxing when Cabe got a call from Mr. Roberts. “Is there a problem?”

“Yes, but I don’t know if it’s something you can help with.”

“Are people sticking to the shoveling rotation?”

“Yes, actually between that guy Walter and the other agent with the red hair, people were intimidated. They are working in thirty-minute shifts.”

“That’s excellent. So, what’s the problem?”

“It’s the children. They’re running around the main floor like mad.”

“Can you open the pool?”

“With no guards on site, management won’t approve it. It’s a liability issue.”

“I don’t know what to tell you. Let me ask my team.” Cabe set his phone on the table and put it on speaker. “Mr. Roberts is having an issue with kids running around since they can’t go outside. Any thoughts?”

“I have an idea.” said Ralph.

“Is that a child?” asked Roberts.

“That’s Ralph and he is a member of the team. Go ahead, Ralph.”

“They have a giant TV in the main building. We could attach Sly’s new system and games and have a competition.”

“What?” asked Sly.

“Sly, it’s for the kids,” said Cabe. Sly nodded.

“Mr. Roberts, do you think the hotel could put up t shirts and sweatshirts for prizes?”

“Yes, I could manage that.”

“Great, we’ll be up as soon as we collect the equipment.”

“Thank you,” said Roberts. “I’ll see you soon.”

Cabe disconnect the call and smiled. “Well done, Ralph.”

“Thanks. Come on, Kathy. Let’s get going.”

“Excuse me?” said Happy.

“It’s for kids, and we’re kids. Besides, Kathy is ruthless when it comes to gaming. She’s an asset,” said Ralph.

“I don’t want her out in this weather.”

“I’ll walk them back,” said Toby. “I need to give Carol a break.”

“I’ll be with them,” said Sly. “I’m not letting anyone play on my system without being there.”

“Fine. You all get going and give Mr. Roberts some relief.”

Paige rubbed her stomach and regretted her big lunch. The food was so good and she was hungry. She was a little too obvious in her discomfort and Walter noticed right away.

“What’s the matter? Is it the baby?” he asked.

“No. It’s that huge Reuben sandwich I had.”

“Maybe I should call Toby.”

“No. It’s gas. I tell you what. I could lay down. Why don’t you come with me?” Paige was relieved when Walter helped her into the guest bedroom. He helped get comfortable and then she patted the bed. “Join me. Lose the shoes and get in here.”

“Okay, but you’ll tell me if you need me.”

“I promise,” she smiled. She closed her eyes and had a silent conversation with their baby. “You need to settle down, little one. Stop making Mommy pay for having a sandwich. It was so good.”

Kate freshened Katherine's drink as Cabe worked on the fire. They'd checked in on Sly and the kids. They'd organized a raucous video game competition that had the attention of most of the kids. Toby had given Carol a break from the med station and Happy was double checking the power station. With Paige and Walter resting in the guest room, that gave them some much needed quiet time.

Tague took a sip of his whiskey. "Not quite the Christmas we had in mind."

"I am sorry about that," said Kate.

"You don't control the weather," said Tague.

"You can leave for your vacation as soon as they dig us out," said Cabe.

"It won't matter," said Katherine. "All commercial flights are backed up because of the snow. I've been trying to rebook but I'm not having any luck."

"Well, I'm trying to help with that," said Kate. "I have a private jet waiting for you when we get dug out."

"What? Kate, that's amazing," said Katherine.

"The problem is I can't find an available pilot."

"No problem," said Tague with a smile and another sip of his whiskey.

"You're a pilot?" asked Cabe.

"I've been known to come in handy."

"You sure are," said Katherine with a wicked smile. Before the conversation could get anymore awkward, Paige and Walter came out of the bedroom.

"Did you get some rest?" asked Kate.

"We need to call Toby," said Walter.

Paige had tears in her eyes. "My water broke."

Toby and Carol arrived at the cabin with two large plastic tubs of medical supplies. Everyone had been alerted but told to stick with what they were doing. Ralph had taken some convincing but he relented when he agreed to take over the shoveling schedules for Walter. It was important to keep the entrances clear.

Toby got Paige comfortable in bed while Carol laid out the supplies. He sat Walter at the head of the bed to lead Paige comfort, and to keep him out of the field of vision. He took a deep breath to steady himself. Yes, he was a great doctor but he hadn't delivered a baby since his obstetrics rotation. He didn't think he could count saving a rare pregnant deer.

"Toby, it can't be time. It's too soon," said Walter.

"I'm afraid you child has other ideas."

"Oh, God, here we go," said Paige as a contraction hit her.

Cabe kept the coffee going as the everyone waited for news. Toby came out for a refill. "Shouldn't you be in there?" asked Cabe.

"We have a couple of minutes and I need some fuel. Carol's got things covered."

"I was surprised you brought help. You did go to Harvard," Kate smiled.

"She has a lot more experience with this and now is not the time for my ego."

Everyone stopped and looked at him. "Are they going to be alright?" asked Katherine.

"The baby is too early. If any of you have a deity on speed dial, I suggest you make a call."

The door opened and Carol stuck her head in room. "Doctor Curtis, I need you." Toby set down his mug and followed her back into the guest room. Katherine blessed herself and began to pray. Cabe reached out for Kate's hand. It felt like forever before they heard a baby cry.

“It’s a boy,” said Toby as he handed the baby to Carol. She quickly wiped him down and wrapped him in a blanket. She placed the baby on Paige’s chest. Paige wept and smiled and kissed her son’s head. Walter leaned over and kissed his son.

“Toby, he seems blue,” said Walter. He looked away from his son and saw Toby pulling apart the plastic tub. Carol was plugging in a small machine with plastic tubing attached. She turned on the machine and wrapped a nasal cannula around the baby’s head and handed the ends to Walter.

“Hold this on him while I find something to keep it on. It’s not meant for a child this small.” She found some medical tape and bound the tubes together, then taped it to his scalp.

“Toby, what’s going on?” asked Paige.

“The oxygen will help him breathe while I set up an incubator.”

“You’re putting my baby in a big Tupperware?”

Toby stopped and smiled. “Think of the possible endorsement deal when this works.” He used a scalpel to cut a hole in the side of the container as Carol unfolded a heating pad. She folded a small blanket over top of the heating pad.

“Walter, help me turn this couch.” They moved a nightstand out of the way and replaced it with the couch, placed lengthwise next to the bed. Toby cut another hole in the bin on the side facing the bed. “You’ll be able to talk to him and touch him. Walter, why don’t you give us a minute. I need to check on both my patients.”

Walter looked at Paige. “Are you okay?”

“I’ll be fine. Everyone’s waiting for news.”

Toby extended his hand to Walter. “Congratulations, Dad.”

“Thanks.”

“What’s my patient’s name?”

Walter looked at Paige and smiled. “His name is Cabe.”

Walter walked out to his concerned friends. He tried to smile. "It's a boy."

Everyone smiled and Cabe reached out to shake his hand. "Congratulations, son."

"Thank you."

"How are they doing?" asked Kate.

"Paige seems okay." Walter paused and tried to compose himself. "Toby made a makeshift incubator for the baby."

"Toby's the best," said Katherine. "Your son is in the best hands."

"What's the tyke's name?" asked Tague.

Walter managed a genuine smile. "His name is Cabe. Cabe Gallo O'Brien."

Cabe gasped and stared at him. "I don't understand," he whispered.

"Paige and I both decided that the world needs all the Cabe Gallos it can get."

Cabe's eyes watered as he pulled Walter in a tight hug. "I'm honored," he whispered.

The women each gave Walter a hug and Tague shook his hand. "Thank you, everyone. Ah, I think I'll go to our cabin. Paige may want some fresh clothes."

Kate gave him a hug. "If you need some time to yourself, Paige will understand."

"He's so small," he whispered as he began to weep.

Walter pulled himself together and had gone up to their cabin. Toby came out of the guest room, looking worse for wear. "Coffee, please." Cabe handed him a mug and he had a deep sip. "Where's Walter?"

"He went to get Paige some fresh clothes. How are Paige and the baby?" said Cabe.

"Paige is tired. The baby needs support for breathing. I'd feel better if he were in a NICU. We're keeping him warm and doing our best."

“Is he going to be okay?”

Toby smiled and put his hand on Cabe’s shoulder. “Your namesake seems like a fighter. I’ll let you know when you can meet him.”

Walter came in with a suitcase and looked at Toby. “Are they okay?”

“They’re both stable. Let’s go in.”

Toby finally opened the door and invited them in. Paige was holding a tightly wrapped baby with an air tube taped on his head. “Hi, everybody,” she smiled.

“Oh, Paige, he’s beautiful,” said Kate.

“Congratulations,” said Katherine and Tague.

Paige noticed Cabe was hanging back. Then she saw the tears in his eyes. “Cabe, would you like to hold him?”

Cabe looked at Toby. “Is it okay?”

Toby nodded. “For a little bit.”

Paige patted the side of the bed and he sat next to her. He carefully took the baby and held him close. “Hello, little man. It’s very nice to meet you. If anyone gives you a hard time about your name,” he leaned in and whispered, “I’ll have your back.” He handed the baby back to Paige.

“Okay, people. That’s it. My patients need their rest,” said Toby. He reached for baby Cabe. Paige kissed his small head. Toby set the baby in plastic tub. He disconnected the tube from a small machine, threaded it through a hole in the tub, then reconnected the tube.

“You’re putting him in a Tupperware bin?” asked Katherine.

“That’s what I said,” said Paige.

“We’ve got a heating pad underneath the blankets. We’re generating the oxygen. This will keep him warm until we get these two out of here,” said Toby.

“And he can hear us,” said Walter. He leaned over and spoke into the opening. “Hello, son. It’s your father.” He was rewarded with the baby moving his hands. “See, he understands.”

“He’s obviously gifted,” Toby smiled.

“Obviously,” Walter replied with all seriousness.

Paige smiled and took his hand. “Of course, he is,” she smiled.

“Alright everyone. That’s enough for now. My patients need their rest. You too, Walter.”

“I should stay.”

“No, you should go rest. You won’t be far if we need you.”

“Toby’s right, Walter. Go get some rest.” She reached to touch her son’s tiny hand. “That’s what we’ll be doing.”

“If you insist.” He leaned in and gave Paige a kiss. “You did very well.”

“Thank you,” she smiled as she and everyone else tried not to chuckle

Walter leaned toward the opening in the incubator. “I won’t be far, Cabe. We both need some rest. Your mother will be right here next to you.” When he finally left the room, they finally let go with a few chuckles.

Paige smiled. “He read that if you speak to a baby in full sentences, they learn language quicker. He’s been talking to my stomach like that since I told him I was pregnant.

“Paige, I’m going to have Carol set up a line. You need the fluids.” Toby ushered everyone out of the room. Everyone was smiling, except Toby.

“What’s going on?” asked Cabe.

“We need to get them out of here as soon as possible. The baby needs more support than we can do here. Paige lost a lot of blood. They both need a hospital as soon as possible.”

Tague looked out the window. “The snow has stopped and the wind has died down a bit. Katherine, can you call in a chopper?”

“Yes, but there’s still there’s still the matter of where to land in four-foot drifts.”

“We get the snow blowers and shovels. We clear the parking lot and move all the cars. We keep shoveling until the chopper lands.”

“Are you sure?” asked Cabe. “The rotors will stir up a lot of snow.”

“An experienced pilot should be able to manage it.”

“Okay, I’ll make the call.”

Ralph followed Katherine and Tague into the main hall of the hotel where dinner was being served. It had been very emotional to see his mother and meet his baby brother. It was obvious to him that both of them needed immediate medical care. Tague's plan seemed to be the best way to get them both off the mountain.

Katherine picked up the microphone from the front desk. "May I have your attention, please. We need volunteers to help clear the main parking lot. Then everyone will need to move their cars to the lower lots to create a landing pad." There was a collective groan from the crowd. "There is a helicopter on it's way for an emergency medical evacuation. We have thirty minutes."

The Insta queen stood. "Finally. If I have to stay in this mob scene any longer, I'll just lose it."

Another man stood. "We've been shoveling for hours and you want us to do it again. What's in it for us?"

Ralph grabbed the mic from Katherine's hand. "What's in it for you? I'll tell you what's in it for you. I won't destroy your digital existence. A few key strokes from me and it's all gone, all of it. My mother and my brother may die. Their only hope is getting them to the nearest hospital."

"You can't do that," said the Insta queen. "You're just a kid."

"Actually, he could," said Tague. Ralph pulled out his phone and hit a few buttons.

Insta queen's phone beeped, followed by her scream. "My account! It's been blocked! You stole eleven million people from me. Put them back," she cried.

"Grab a shovel and I'll put them back. Anyone else want to test me?!" asked Ralph.

"I wouldn't if I were you," said Katherine. "The kid could hack your brain stem."

"This is blackmail," said one man.

"Call it what you want. This is me trying to save my mother and my brother. Now let's move it.

The organization of guests shoveling the parking lot was nothing short of amazing. Dozens of people cleared the main lot and moved the cars. Two of the hotel staff kept the snow blowers running. When they finally cleared as much as possible, Katherine pulled out her phone. "This is Director Cooper. We're ready for you." She looked at Ralph and Tague. "They're ten minutes out."

"Everyone back inside," said Tague.

Ralph touched his com button. "We're ready for you up here. Bring Mom and the baby to the main hall.

"Copy that," said Cabe. "Good job."

Ralph went into the main hall and waited for his family. He was waiting at the door when the Insta Queen came up to him. Her perfect hair was plastered to her face and her makeup was smeared. "Please put them back," she asked.

He pulled out his phone and hit a few buttons. "Okay, they're back."

She looked at her phone and began to cry. "Thank you," she whispered. She turned to leave, then turned back. "I hope your family is okay."

"Thank you," he said as he looked back out the door. Katherine came up from behind him and rubbed his shoulders.

"Are you okay?"

"I may need you to bail me out when one of these people charges me with blackmail."

She chuckled. "Don't worry. I've got you."

"Thanks, Katherine." He smiled when he saw his family and the rest of the team coming up the walk. He and Tague held open the doors as everyone piled in. They closed the doors behind them as they heard chopper blades. They watched as the helicopter tried to land. A gust of wind made it a rough landing.

"Oh, shit," whispered Tague. He opened the door and ran out to the helicopter. The blades stopped rotating and Tague came around the side of the with the pilot.

“Oh, shit,” said Ralph. Blood was coming down the pilot’s face. He held open the door. “Toby, we need you.”

Toby left Paige’s side and ran to the pilot. “Sit him down.” He pulled out a penlight and looked in the pilot’s eyes. Carol came to his side with gauze. He wiped the blood aside and saw the cut wasn’t too deep but there was a good-sized bruise. Carol handed him some butterfly bandages without Toby and having to ask.

“I’m fine,” said the pilot. “Let’s get going.”

“Sorry, buddy. You’re not going anywhere,” said Toby.

“I’m fine.”

“You hit your head. If you have a concussion, you could pass out at a higher altitude. Then everyone is screwed.”

“I’ve got it,” said Tague.

“Really?” asked Ralph. “This is my family.”

Tague put his hand on Ralph’s shoulder. “I swear. I’ve got this.”

Toby walked over to Paige and the baby. “Okay, change of plans. The pilot was injured on landing. Tague is going to fly you out.”

Tague smiled. “Are we ready to go?”

“Can you really do this?” asked Walter.

“It’s Tague.” Katherine slipped her arm around his waist. “Be careful. You still owe me cocktails with umbrellas.”

He smiled and gave her a kiss. “I always keep my word.”

Katherine’s eyes misted. “Yeah, you do. Let us know as soon as you land.”

“Okay people, your ride to Mercy Hospital is leaving in five minutes,” said Tague.

Ralph gave his mother a kiss. “I’ll be there when I can.” He looked at Toby. “Can you take the lid off for a second?”

“Sure,” he smiled and took the lid off the incubator.

Ralph leaned in and gave his brother a kiss. “I’ll see you soon, Cabe.” He leaned closer. “I love you.”

Toby replaced the lid when he saw Happy and Kathy standing together. He walked over and pulled them both into a hug.

“This is dangerous, Dad,” said Kathy.

“I won’t lie. It is, but it’s their only chance. It may not seem like it at times, but I’m a doctor and saving lives is in the job description.”

“I know. You saved mine,” said Kathy as she hugged her father.

Toby gave her a kiss on the head. He understood the look he saw on Happy. Worry, anger and love all mixed together in a Happy Quinn milkshake. “I’ll let you know as soon as we land.”

“You better,” she said as she gave him a rare, public kiss.

They all stood at the picture window as they watched Tague take off with the rest of their family.

Everyone was gathered together at Cabe and Kate's cabin, waiting for the call. Ralph had fallen asleep on the couch from a combination of exhaustion and nerves. Kathy was resting her head on Happy's shoulder. Katherine was looking out the window.

"The wind has died down."

Cabe put a hand on her shoulder. "He's going to be fine. He's Tague."

"Yeah, he is," she smiled.

"Come on. Kate has hot chocolate ready."

"Add a shot of whiskey and I'm in."

After the longest hour any of them could remember, Katherine's phone rang.

"Safe landing," said Tague.

"Oh, thank God." She looked out at the group. "They've landed at Mercy."

"How's my mom and Cabe?" asked Ralph.

"How are the patients?" she asked. "Okay. We'll be waiting for the call." She hung up the call. "He said they both did fine on the flight. Toby's getting them set up in the hospital and he'll call us as soon as he can."

"My dad is okay?" asked Kathy.

"He's fine," said Katherine.

"Of course, he is," said Happy as she kissed her daughter's head.

Kate and Sly handed out the hot chocolate. Cabe made sure Katherine's had a generous shot.

It took another twenty-four hours before they could get off the mountain and back to Los Angeles. Their first stop was the hospital. Katherine flashed her badge so they could all get in to see Paige. She was the only one awake. Walter and Toby were asleep in chairs on either side of her bed. Ralph ran to Paige's side for a hug.

"Hi kid," said Cabe. "How are you feeling?"

"Better. They gave me a couple of transfusions and some kick ass painkillers."

"Excellent," he smiled. "How's Cabe?" He chuckled. "That still sounds odd to my ear."

"He's doing better. The doctors said Toby did a great job supporting him."

"Of course, he did," said Kathy. The sound of his daughter's voice stirred him.

"Hi," he said as he pulled himself out of the chair.

Kathy threw her arms around him. "I was so worried."

"I'm okay, sweetheart." He looked at Happy and winked. He loved making her blush.

Walter stirred, then stood to greet everyone. "Hello." Cabe gave him a hug.

"How are you doing?"

"I'm fine."

"No, you're not," said Paige. "You're exhausted. Someone take him home."

"I should be here."

"You won't do me or Cabe any good if you're dead on your feet. Come back after you get some rest. Our Cabe's getting intravenous feeding for the next few days so I'm going to relax and enjoy my meds."

"Walter, your son is in the best of hands," said Toby. "I know this goes against every fiber of your being, but there's nothing you can do for him right now."

"Okay, we'll get everyone home," said Cabe.

“Where’s Tague?” asked Katherine.

“I think he’s asleep in the waiting room.”

Katherine found Tague curled up on a couch, sound asleep. She leaned down and whispered. “Time to get up, Percival.” She squealed when he pulled her on top of him.

“I told you not to call me that.”

“Where did you leave my chopper?”

“I called it in. They flew it back to base this morning.”

“Good let’s go get some sleep. We have a plane to catch and I need my pilot alert.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” he smiled as he gave her a kiss.

Cabe and Kate finally got home after dropping everyone off at their homes. He opened the sliding door to the deck and listened to the waves. “Well, this is not the honeymoon we expected,” said Cabe.

“No, but it was unique,” smiled Kate as she wrapped her arms around his waist.

“That it was.”

“You have a namesake.”

“I still can’t get over that. Why would they honor me like that?”

Kate pushed at him and rolled her eyes. “Oh please. You are as close to a father as any of those kids have ever had. It makes perfect sense they would name the baby after you. I agree with Walter. The world needs all the Cabe Gallos it can get.”

Cabe smiled and tried to hide his blush. “Thank you, sweetheart.”

“Now, on to pressing matters.”

“What pressing matters?”

“We are officially husband and wife.”

“That we are,” he smiled.

“Listen to that,” she said.

“All I hear is the ocean.”

“Exactly. It’s just you, me and the ocean for at least the next twenty-four hours. I suggest we take advantage of the situation.”

Cabe smiled and picked her up in his arms.

“What are you doing?”

“Carrying you over the threshold.”

Kate pointed to the front door. “We already came over the threshold.”

“Huh, so we did. I guess the bedroom will have to do,” Cabe smiled as he carried his new wife upstairs.