

CHAPTER 1

France Hunter was excited about her first trip to the Rocky Mountains in Tennessee. Her family planned camping trips here in the past and she just loved it. Now that she graduated from the University of Michigan, with a degree in ornithology, she was more than ready to study her favorite bird: owls.

After setting up her tent and campsite she grabs her camera case and notebook and headed into the forest. France came across a female screech-owl sitting on its nest and started taking pictures. Since the owl was still she didn't use the video option on her camera.

She smelled something foul, then heard a low growl. As she slowly turned she saw a small black bear standing behind her just to her right. She couldn't help wondering where it's mama was. The bear growled harder and she felt herself freeze in place. France was sweating because of the hot day, but started to feel cold. She slowly went to reach for her bear spray in her belt, on her right side.

Suddenly that's when the bear got hold of her right forearm. She had to reach for the bear spray with her left hand. She turned toward it and sprayed. That only caused the bear to shake it's head while biting down harder on her arm. It pulled her so hard she fell on her knees almost facing the bear. France heard a snap and prayed the bear stepped on a branch and that it wasn't her arm breaking.

She thought she was dead, for sure. The bear was not willing to let go. France didn't feel any pain, yet. She was just scared; very scared, and started shaking. She kept telling herself not to panic. Once feeling in control she decided to spray the bear again, thinking only to aim directly for it's eyes and nose.

The bear finally let go France got up and ran like hell.

She was starting to feel a little light headed but knew if she stopped she would definitely be dead.

France kept going and ran into three guys who were out hiking that day. When they saw her they ran to her. She noticed one had a rifle and that made her feel safer.

One of them took her behind a large boulder and started working on her badly damaged arm, while the other two, Tony and Andy, followed and asked what happened.

"I was attacked by a small black bear and managed to get away," she said as she tried not to scream from the pain the one man caused while trying to check her arm.

"We bes' go check 'n see if'n that bear's comin' afer you," the other man said. She thought it was a Southern drawl, but couldn't be sure. The man caring for her arm didn't have an accent.

The other two decided to go around to where she came from and slowly

go down the path.

"My name is Jason Bradley. They call me Doc. I'm a retired Paramedic," he said. "Those two are my cousins, Andy and Tony Bradley. What are you doing up here alone anyway?" "I'm France Hunter," she told him wincing at the pain. "I just graduated and came to do a little investigating. I'm an ornithologist."

"Ah. A bird lady," Doc laughed.

"More like an owl lady," she smiled and winced again.

France and Doc heard a noise and were sure it was the bear. But then they heard Tony say, "Boy, you bes'n get up or that bear'll come 'n gettcha."

"Andy probably can't handle the amount of blood you lost," Doc said. "He didn't like bears much, either." This causes France to giggle, but wince.

"I would like to take you to the local hospital to be sure everything is OK," Doc started putting the unused bandages in his case when they heard a growl and then a gun shot. That made France and Doc jump.

Tony and Andy came around to tell them they shot and killed the bear and started talking about going to the ranger station to report this, when another bigger growl could be heard. A *really* angry one. They looked around the boulder to see where the sound was coming from. Tony was in a good spot to hit the other bear so he took the shot. Tony went to make sure they were both dead before walking back to them. Doc said their trucks weren't too far and carried her to them. France knew she couldn't walk and she was very weak by then. "The ranger knows I'm here," France told them. So Tony and Andy went to make the report and Doc took her to the hospital.

After her initial exam and x-rays the doctor came in. "Not good news," she said to France. "Both the radius and ulna are broken. The muscle is torn, and you'll need stitches. You'll have to stay for several hours, or maybe overnight. We'll start an IV here and prep you for surgery. Then someone will take you up to the OR."

France looked at Doc. "What about my things at the campsite?" she asked him.

"Don't worry. We'll get them for you," Doc assured her. "Then I'll be back to pick you up and take you wherever you want to go."

"I live in Michigan but I could just get a hotel here," France said.

"We'll worry about that later. Do you want me to call anyone?"

"No, I'll call home later, no sense getting them worried," France said. "They weren't too pleased about me traveling by myself."

Doc left and the doctor started to get things ready. "We'll have to start an IV and give you some twilight."

The doctor left the room and a nurse came in to start her IV. It was the same woman one who came in earlier to get all her information.

"I'm giving you the twilight now, so you'll start feeling a little

woozy," she said as she inserted a needle into a port on the IV tubing and injected the drug. After a few seconds France starts feeling the effect of the drug.

One hour later France was awake and hurting. She sees her right arm bandaged and decides not to try to move it. Her arm was wrapped five times its normal size.

France looked around and sees she must be in a recovery area.

"How are feeling?" a smiling nurse asked her.

"Fine, I guess. Never had to have anything like this done," France rubbed her head with her left hand.

"Would you like something for pain?"

"Sure. If it's as good as the last stuff you gave me." They both laughed and the nurse goes to get a shot for Frances pain.

It didn't take long for the nurse to return and inject the medication into the IV port.

"Your friend is here. Do you want me to bring him in?"

"Sure," France heard herself say, slurring her words. The nurse left and brings Doc in.

"Ready to go look for more owls?" Doc said with a wide grin.

"I think I'll wait until tomorrow," still slurring her words. "Feel a little out of it right now."

"They said you can leave in another hour but shouldn't be alone," Doc said. "You can stay with me and my wife, if that's OK with you."

France had trouble thinking. "I can't go home?"

"Nope. Flying is out of the question for awhile."

"Well, then I guess I'll stay with you," was the last thing she said before she fell asleep.