



Neighbor

TO THE

SEALS



LAYLA ROGUE

Neighbor to the SEALS

Midlife Secrets

Layla Rogue

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About Layla Rogue

Chapter One: Aria

“Not again.” I rested my forehead against the wheel after my car refused to start. Again. I tried one more time to start my fifteen-year-old car again. Nothing.

I needed to get to work today. It was only my second week on the job as an accountant in the city of Hopeton. I could work from home a lot of days, but reps from a new hockey team were coming in to do a proposal to come to town. My boss, Mayor Ted, was hoping I would be there to ask them some financial questions.

My forehead rested on the steering wheel again, as if that would will the car to start. Would my budget stretch to a Lyft? It would have to be both ways, too, unless one of my co-workers could give me a ride home. Plus, would it really be appropriate for me to ask for that two weeks into the job?

A knock at my window scared me, and I sat up quickly.

Of course, it was one of my hot new neighbors. They would see me in a broken-down car resting my head on the wheel. Those three men moved in with their very fit, muscular bodies almost a month ago. They’d inspired more than one session with my battery-operated friend.

After I was laid off three months ago, I'd been frantic to find something else and was busy interviewing and working temporary online accounting gigs, and didn't realize Frank, my neighbor, had moved out, while his son and friends moved in.

I saw them moving in boxes at one point, and I nearly drooled. I'd left wine at their doorstep with a note welcoming them and got a thank you note back, but then they seemed to be gone for a few weeks.

Clearly, it was too long since I'd been with anyone. Two years, to be exact, in a short-lived relationship with an old high school friend who'd known me and my late husband back in the day. Charlie and I got caught up in memories. Anyway, it didn't last long, and the sex wasn't that great.

I had to open the door as I couldn't power down the window.

The neighbor by my door seemed huge, with broad shoulders, and he moved to help me out of the car. I enjoyed the feel of his calloused hand and the strength in his arm as he helped me out.

"Aria? Are you having car trouble?"

I couldn't remember telling him my name. "Yes, it won't start."

"Pop the hood."

I fumbled for a minute getting that done, as I couldn't remember the last time I'd done that.

Big shoulders turned and yelled, "Grant!"

A really handsome African American man came, wiping his hands on what looked like a kitchen towel. "It gave out this time, did it?"

"Um, yes." I couldn't decide which of them was more handsome, and their third roommate was also hot.

"We have seen you trying to start it before. Likely the battery gave out." Grant peered at it.

“Can we give you a ride to work? We’ll charge the battery today and see if it works.”

Could this really be happening? I really needed to get to work, but what did I really know about these guys? “I couldn’t ask you to do all that; I can get a Lyft.”

“It’s no problem. Where do you work? I was on my way to the gym anyway.”

“He’s always on his way to the gym,” Grant said.

“I’m Leo, and this is Grant.” The man who’d been at my door said. I noticed the gym bag on the ground. “Edgar was heading to the gym with me.”

The third neighbor, a man with a beard, though not as big as Leo, came out of the house. He had a warm smile, and he extended his hand to me. “I’m Edgar. You can call me Ed.”

“You two take her to work and text me the address. When should I pick you up?” Grant asked.

“I can’t have you all do this.” This felt like an imposition. Plus, I didn’t know them.

“Really, it’s ok. I am teaching a class at the university until 4:30. Are you done at 5?” Ed said.

“I know you don’t really know us. Frank is my Dad. He moved to the 55+ community, and we moved in. Want me to call him to verify?” Grant asked.

“No, that’s fine.” But I was happy he mentioned that. They were very persuasive. “I owe you guys.”

“Let’s see if we can fix your car first,” Grant said, his smile lighting up his dark face.

“Do you have everything you need?” Leo asked, motioning towards the

black truck in their driveway.

I got my car key off my ring and handed it to Grant. “Thank you so much.”

He took it and put it in the pocket of his jeans. “We all had to do a stint with mechanics in the SEALS. We’ve got this.”

“Yes, and we rarely got to help anyone so pretty,” Ed said.

I felt myself blushing as I climbed into the truck. Why did I still blush at 40 years old?

To my surprise, I was sitting between Leo and Ed. The folds of my pleated black skirt lapped their thighs a little, though I kept trying to keep the folds of the skirt off their jeans. The problem was, that as big as the truck looked, it wasn’t possible to sit in there without touching one or both of them.

And they smelled good. Leo seemed to have a spicy aftershave, and Ed smelled like soap, a clean scent. I needed to try the over 40 dating apps, I thought, just like my mother kept trying to get me to do.

“Where do you work?” Leo asked.

“City of Hopeton building. I’m an accountant.” I always add more information when I’m nervous. Nothing about these guys should make me nervous, except I was picturing them without their shirts. I wondered if they did lawn care or hung out in their backyards without shirts. I hoped so.

I blushed again, thinking about that thought. They were likely at least 15 years younger than me, if not 20. I’m sure they never imagined I’d be fantasizing about them.

“Nice. Do you know the mayor? He’s my cousin,” Ed said.

“Ted? Wow. He’s terrific. Angelica brought in the baby for all of us to meet the other day. He’s such a little cutie. Ian.”

“I haven’t seen the baby yet. I’ve seen pictures, though, of the four of them.”

Ed's words reminded me that Ted and his best friend Rick were both married to Angelica. This town was famous for having many poly arrangements and had a thriving wedding business for those groups. Ted did the ceremonies for many of them.

"How do you like Hopeton so far?" I asked them. "You've only been here a few months, correct?"

"Yes, we haven't been able to stay at the house much over the past two years since Grant's dad let us buy it." Leo said. "He was happy to move now that we are retiring in a few weeks."

I'd noticed that Leo had a slight limp, and I wondered if that had anything to do with their retirement from the SEALs.

"I'll bet your work was fascinating, though. Do you have plans yet for your next work?" I wasn't sure of the right way to ask this, or even if I should be asking.

"Yes, I will be teaching at the University. Grant is helping at his brother's garage sometimes, though, which is why he's the car expert. He's rebuilding that vintage Camaro in the garage, too. It was his Dad's."

I hadn't even noticed.

Leo pulled into Starbucks. "Do you have time?"

"Yes, and it's my treat," I said.

They glanced at each other over my head. "Nah," Leo said, moving into the drive thru line. "I have points to use."

It made me smile that these big, muscular guys used points at Starbucks. "I'll find a way to thank you guys."

Another glance between them, but when I turned to look at Ed, he had an innocent, friendly smile on his face.

I knew how I'd like to thank them. But maybe I'd bake something for them

instead. It had always been my way to relax. And I had a feeling they would like it.

My wondering if they ate anything unhealthy was answered when both ordered big lattes and muffins.

I sipped my iced tea.

“Are you seeing anyone?”

Leo’s question nearly made me choke.

“No, I’ve been pretty busy with the new job. I’ve been thinking about signing up for some dating apps.” I shuddered thinking of the last time I’d tried online dating after Charlie and I stopped seeing each other. That man, a vet, gave me a wet kiss that seemed to cover from my nose to my chin. Then he insisted on walking me to my car. I wasn’t going to kiss him, but he pulled me close as I was trying to say goodbye.

Later, he’d texted that he was still thinking about it and could come over. I’d tried to nicely let him know that I didn’t really have time to date.

“How about you guys?” I thought there had to be some lucky ladies who were happy with these guys.

“We were thinking about posting on the town dating site.” Ed said. “Do you know anything about that from work?”

The town dating site? The place where groups looking for another partner for their poly arrangement posted? “You all date together?” I couldn’t help but say.

“It is Hopeton,” Leo said.

We pulled into the parking lot.

“What time are you done?” Leo asked.

Chapter Two: Leo

“She’s pretty terrific,” Ed said, which is the equivalent of anyone else saying they wanted to marry someone.

“She really is. Do you think she might be interested in us?” I turned the car towards the highway. We had to check in at the base. While we were technically off active duty while we got ready to retire, they could call us back to help with training over the next few months as part of our deal, even if that meant more travel.

“All three of us? Maybe. She didn’t seem shocked at the idea.”

“True, but it is Hopeton. Few people blink about groups around here. In fact, they invite more to come with their wedding business.”

I knew I’d convinced him when he smiled.

“Three weeks? That doesn’t seem so bad.” Grant was still underneath Aria’s car.

“We were hoping to have our neighbor over before then, maybe a few dates by then,” Ed said.

It disappointed me that we were called to do training overseas, but we all knew this might be a reality. I stretched my bad leg a little. Grant would be

working with physical training, while Ed and I helped with tactical. I was eager to get it done now, though, as the idea of dating Aria really appealed.

“My Dad called. Needs me to run him to the bank. I’ll bet he’s getting more money for Rose.”

Grant lost a brother to drugs when he was in high school. Rob had fathered a child and his girlfriend didn’t know until he’s passed away. We all liked Jeremy, who was now 10, but his mother struggled to do things on her own.

Grant slid out from under the car, wiping his hands on a rag. “I think I’ve fixed up her car, but she could use a couple of new parts. Do you think she’d be upset if I bought them and installed them for her? I could pick them up on my way back from the bank with my Dad.”

I grinned. We were definitely all on board with dating Aria.

“Do it.”

Ed slid into the car when I picked him up at the University. He’d insisted on joining me when I got Aria from work.

“Good meeting?” I asked. Ed was not one to offer information.

“Yes. They want me to teach kinesiology and military history in the spring.” Ed had his masters in physical therapy. “And then I can keep going on towards my PhD for no charge.”

“That sounds good, doesn’t it?” I couldn’t stand the thought of more school, and hadn’t gone since high school.

“Yes. It feels too good to be true though, honestly. Aria, new work, school, retiring. I’m afraid something will happen.”

This is what a life of constantly being pulled away for missions did to a person, and we were all younger than 30. I was only 22, and still couldn’t believe I was going to have to retire. I wasn’t sure what I would do, though

Grant and his brother Marcus said I could work in their garage. That sounded good for a while, but it didn't seem like the right fit.

I had a long time to figure it out; it seemed.

"You know you could recruit for the base," Ed said, reading my mind.

"Not sure yet." The only thing I knew for sure was in my future was dating Aria. But first, I knew we'd have to convince her.

"Thanks so much, you guys. Grant texted me not to get the car towed. I hope he didn't go to a lot of trouble."

"No, he loves working on cars. He's looking forward to helping his brother full time after we retire," I said, smiling that Ed got out of the truck and helped her in so she'd be in the middle again.

"How was work?"

"Well, it seems like Hopeton is going to have a hockey team, the Howlers. The basketball stadium can double as a rink, but we weren't planning on setting that up just yet. They had all the right financial answers, and will work with the college on a hockey program."

"That's outstanding," I said. "I used to play for a travel league in high school."

"The college wants some sort of adult community league, too." She looked at my leg. "Oh, I'm sorry."

"I likely could do that league," I said. "And don't worry. It's still healing."

"His leg is more titanium than bone from the knee down now," Ed said. "He'd be good at hockey."

"They might need adults to run it, too." Aria said, her hand brushing my thigh as she tried to settle her skirt without touching either of us.

"Not there's an idea," I said. "I need to practice some again and make sure I can still do all that stuff."

“He’s from Minnesota,” Ed told Aria. “I think they were all born knowing how to play hockey up there.”

“I have three step-brothers and a sister who play hockey. Two are in high school but one plays for the community college there.”

Aria smiled at me, and it almost distracted me from driving. Ed cleared his throat.

“Big families are nice. It was just me and my mom after my dad left while I was little.”

“You never married?”

Ed cleared his throat again. I definitely liked to ask questions and always excelled at interrogation in training.

“I married my high school sweetheart after college, then he died of a brain aneurism two years later.”

I gripped the wheel tighter. “I’m sorry.”

“Thank you. There are still times when I can’t believe it.”

I pulled into our driveway and saw Grant leaning against her car.

“It’s all set, Aria. Why don’t you try it?” He called out to her.

Ed helped her down from the truck, her skirt swirling around her gorgeous legs. We’d seen her running a few times.

“Are you serious? This is too much.” She moved to kiss each of us on the cheek. When she got close to me, she smelled so good. It was all I could do not to be a jerk and turn my head so our lips met.

Soon, Leo, I thought. It would happen.

“We should have invited her to get take-out with us or something,” I said a little while later when we saw her leave in the car through our front window.

“Too soon.” Ed said. “Be patient, man.”

“Never his strong suit,” Grant said.

He wasn't wrong. But I knew she was the woman for us. "She's it, guys. I can feel it."

"Normally you're the one to find reasons something won't work," Grant said. "What is it about Aria? I mean, I like her, too, but she's older. She might not be able to have kids."

"We'll have kids too, even if she doesn't carry them," I said. I could picture all of it. The guys in our unit always teased me I had a sixth sense about things. If only I'd expected that shooter who tore up my leg. I could feel something bad was going to happen, and was helping to drag another buddy out of there who'd been shot in his knee.

I shook my head. No time to think about that right now. Time to focus on my future.

But a look at my phone had me groaning. "I have to run to PT. Want me to pick up something on the way back?"

Ninety minutes later, I was limping from the truck into the townhome with sub sandwiches when I heard a laugh I recognized.

Aria was in our kitchen, near a plate of delicious looking muffins.

"Hi," she said, smiling at me. "I went to the store in my fixed car and got groceries to make you guys a thank you gift."

"Those smell amazing. Pumpkin?"

"Yes, I remembered you and Ed liked pumpkin flavored things from Starbucks this morning. I was hoping Grant likes pumpkin, too."

"Judging from how fast he ate three, I'd say he does," Ed said, dodging a fake blow from Grant.

Grant had a black belt in two different martial arts. If he wanted to really hit someone, he would.

"I'll put these in the fridge for later, so I can sample some of these."

“I didn’t mean to interrupt your dinner,” Aria said, getting up to leave. She tucked a lock of her soft caramel brown hair behind her ear, as I’d seen her do that morning.

“Please, stay.” All three of us said at once, making her laugh more.

I loved that laugh and wanted to hear more of it.

“So he had to run through base in his boxers,” Ed said, finishing a story about me a while later, when we sat in the living room.

Our comfortable L-shaped couch was perfect to sit on with her while we shared a bottle of wine Ed produced from somewhere.

We weren’t big wine drinkers, though Ed knew a little about wine from his mom, who’d worked as a bartender before becoming a vet tech.

She laughed so hard at the story that she tipped over a little, leaning into me.

“Sorry,” she said, straightening, then looking at her watch. “I didn’t mean to stay so late.”

“We like having you here,” Grant said. “There’s no hurry to go, is there? We could watch something.”

“Wait. You guys want to hang out more with me?” Then I could see on her face that she remembered we were looking for a woman to share.

“Yes. We’d love to get to know you better,” Ed said.

“I’m older than all of you. And you’re fit, and hot.”

We all grinned at that, and she blushed again. I loved that she did that.

“I think you’re incredibly sexy,” I said, leaning closer to her again. This time, I tucked the lock behind her ear.

She held my gaze, and I saw interest. She wanted us, but she wasn’t sure about all of us at once.

“Would you mind if we kissed you?” I asked softly.

She shook her head no, the tiniest amount.

I laid my hand on her soft cheek, angling her a little so my mouth met hers. Her lips tasted sweet, and faintly of wine. The little humming noise she made as I bit her lower lip lightly made me hard. We separated, and Ed was on her other side. He took her hand, and when she turned towards him, he kissed her, too.

We kept it soft and sweet, except for the little bite I gave her. Even Grant, when it was his turn, carefully helped her stand and gave her a soft kiss. We didn't want to scare her. Aria wasn't the one who was planning to be in a poly relationship. She was a widow, and didn't date too much.

I wanted her to see us as a realistic possibility.

She looked around at us, smiling. "That was very nice. I don't really imagine how this could work, though."

"You don't have to do anything extra. We can all date you, or even two of us at a time, and see if you enjoy getting to know us." Grant said.

"That sounds nice. Tonight was fun."

"Grant loves to play cards, and Ed likes movies. I enjoy sporting events, and I think there's some kind of fall festival in this town, right?"

She nodded. "It's a big moneymaker for the town."

She was so cute. Of course, her mind went towards the accounts.

"I'm sure you don't think accounting talk is sexy," she said, noticing my quick grin.

"I think it's really cute that your mind went there. Honestly. We just want you to give this a chance."

"Wow, it's a lot. Who wouldn't be incredibly flattered at the idea of spending time with you three amazing guys? I'd love to try it. I am not ready

to jump into all the physical stuff yet. We need to take this slowly. And you all might decide you want someone younger, with more energy.”

“Ed is older,” I said, and avoided his fake punch.

She laughed. “All of you are way younger than me. Let’s be real about that. I don’t know what you see in me, but I’d enjoy getting to know all of you.”

Grant walked her back to her place, and the smile he had upon returning told me he’d gotten another kiss.

But Ed and I were serious by then.

“What’s wrong?” Grant asked.

“We have to leave tonight instead of next week.” Ed’s voice was serious.

“Aw, that sucks,” Grant said. “Should we leave her a note?”

“Yes, and let’s ask her to watch our place so she knows we’re serious about being with her. It will be harder to tell herself this isn’t really happening that way.”

“Good point,” Ed agreed with me.

We drafted a note and added it, with some flowers Ed found at the gas station on the corner, to her front step so she’d see it when she left for work.

We were on a plane by the time she would find them.

Chapter Three: Aria

“We were called out. Is there any way you could monitor our place? Frank may be around occasionally, too. We really enjoyed last night and are looking forward to our next date.” I loved white flowers, and as I smelled these, I thought of all the white flowers I’d planted around my place. There were daisies and tulips in the summer, and just last week I’d added white mums to the small decorative pots on my porch.

Had they really noticed that my preference or were they the only flowers available? I had a feeling they’d actually noticed what I liked. They didn’t seem to miss much, those three men that were already becoming important to me.

The way they wrote the note made me think Ed wrote it. I could already note things about them. I brought the flowers with me to work and told my colleagues I’d bought them for myself, to liven up the office. I brought them back home with me the next night for the weekend.

The men had left their garage code and I went through the house before the dinner I’d planned with some friends from college.

The house was cool and neat. I’d noticed that the other night, of course, and

chalked it up to them being military men.

They certainly weren't straitlaced, though. I could feel my cheeks warming as I looked at the couch where I'd kissed them.

I went through the kitchen and living area, then saw a door for the basement. I used my basement mostly for laundry and storage, but wasn't surprised to see a fairly sophisticated gym down here in their basement. It was cleaner than the gym at the college, where I occasionally took zumba classes.

It even smelled clean. If I didn't know better, I'd think that they didn't use it that much, but of course the men were all super fit, and the equipment looked used.

Heading back upstairs, I went up another flight to the bedrooms. The first, I realized, was Grant's. I could tell this as I saw a picture of Frank, a woman who looked a little younger than me, and a school aged kid with a gap-toothed grin, all standing close together. Grant's room was neat, but he had silk sheets and pillowcases. I couldn't resist running my hand over the pillowcase. A thought came into my brain that maybe I could spend a night in this bed.

That thought had me hurrying to the next room, which was Ed's. There was a neat bookcase, and two types of computers. I spotted a pot of African violets and knew I would have to carefully tend these. I took it with me to look up how to care for it.

Leo's room had a cane leaning against the wall, but I couldn't tell if it was his or someone else's as it looked older. His closet was open, and I noticed a dress uniform. It wasn't surprising to see several medals on it. Giving in to my curiosity, I took my phone from my pocket and snapped a photo to look up what those were.

When I returned to my house, I sent the men a selfie with the plant.

“Hope your trip is going well,” I texted, not sure if they could even get messages where they were.

Later that night, when I was doing laundry in my basement, I got a text encouraging me to join a video call service so I could chat with them on Sunday nights.

“Our service is unreliable, and there are times we can’t make it,” Grant said. “But if we can, we’d love to see you.”

I let them know I would be on at the appointed time. And then there was nothing else. It didn’t even show that they read my text.

“How can I miss them so much?” I said later, to the plant. “I barely know them.”

I fell asleep looking up how to care for African violets.

I looked forward to Sunday night throughout the weekend. I kept myself busy with attending a local fall festival in a neighboring town, running errands, and visiting my mother in her condo an hour away on Sunday. She and I went to lunch, and I told her I had to be back.

I wasn’t sure how to explain why I was heading back. There was no way I could ever keep secrets from her, I knew.

“So, mom, I’ve met some men.”

“Men, plural?” She put down the roll she was buttering at the family owned café I took her to most weekends. “Hopeton is getting to you?”

I don’t know why I was shocked that she seemed to know about the town’s fame for poly relationships. “Maybe.”

“How many are there? I always wondered how some of those bigger groups managed. How does one woman have sex with over four men at a time?”

I stared at her.

“What? I like to read romance, you know. Reverse harem books are fun.” My 62-year old mother said. “I read one with ten men the other day. I got it from the library.” “Okay. There’s only three.” I couldn’t get the image of 10 men and one woman out of my head and tried to focus back on telling her about the men. “We’ve only had one sort of date, but then they were called out again.”

I told her about their work.

“Wow, SEALS. I read a lot of those stories, too. Are they really attractive?”

“Yes.” I wished I’d taken a picture of them before now. I would do that when they returned. “They’re a lot younger than me, though. They want to date me, but I just don’t know. I’m not really exciting, and I don’t think I can have kids.”

“Didn’t you get a referral for a fertility specialist from your ob-gyn over the summer?”

I had, but I wasn’t sure I could do it. She said all signs were I could still have a child by artificial insemination. “I don’t even know if they want kids. I’m still thinking about it, myself.”

“Go to the doctor and start taking whatever might be required, just in case, like vitamins or something like that. After all, your 40th birthday is next week.” “Don’t remind me.” But I knew I would make the appointment.

“I’ve been thinking I might try to date on one of those apps myself,” my mother said.

There seemed to be no end of surprises at this dinner.

By that night, I was ready for their call fifteen minutes before the appointed time. I couldn’t wait to talk to them, but I was also nervous. I’d done full makeup and a cute turquoise top.

When the signal came through, I almost clicked the wrong thing in my

excitement.

“Hey!” I said as soon as Ed popped on the screen. Leo and Grant then crowded in the frame, too.

“Hello, Aria,” Ed said, smiling. His smiles were rare, and they already made my heart beat faster each time I saw one.

“Hi.” I said again.

We all laughed, and the tension was broken.

“Your house is fine, though I’m worried about the plant, Ed.” I said. “I have been trying to research how to care for it.”

“It’s Ed’s third violet since we moved back,” Leo said.

I could tell Ed pushed him, as there was a slight scuffle among him and Leo. “It’s fine if it doesn’t last. I’m determined to care for it at some point. My mother keeps giving them to me.” “I’ll keep researching. How are all of you?”

“Good,” Grant said. “We’re busy, but they’ve said this is likely our last trip.” “They always say that,” Ed said in his usual dour way.

“But we think maybe they mean it this time.” Leo leaned in a little. “How are you doing? We miss you.” I sucked in a deep breath, which they likely heard, but I was so happy they missed me, too. “Is it crazy that we miss each other already?”

“No. We have a connection.” Leo said.

Leo was always so straightforward. Ed would be more of a puzzle to figure out, and Grant was thoughtful and quieter. It would be fun to learn more about each of their personalities.

“Tell us about what you’ve been doing.” Grant suggested.

I gave a G-rated version of the discussion I had with my mother, about how I told her I’d met three men.

“My Dad said we have good sense to be dating you, and if he was younger, he would have asked you out when you moved in.”

I felt the blush on my cheeks. “Your dad is so sweet,” I said.

Grant snorted. “I’ve never heard him described like that. He was military too, you know.”

Somewhere in my memory, I remembered Frank telling me that when I’d remarked on his neat house and landscaping. “Yes, I remember that.”

All three of them turned at some sound. “We might be home soon,” Leo whispered.

“Take care of yourselves.”

“You, too.” Ed said, as they all waved, and the connection ended.

All week, I looked for signs that they were back, but the house remained quiet and empty.

On Wednesday, I found a young boy sitting on their stoop.

“Hi,” I said, walking over to him after I’d pulled up in my driveway. “Are you looking for the guys?”

“Yeah, and Uncle Grant gave me the code, but I couldn’t remember it. My mom won’t let me have a phone. I’m the only 4th grader who doesn’t have one. I missed the bus and got lost.”

I could see tears on his face. “Do you happen to know your Grandpa’s phone number?”

He thought for a minute. “I can’t remember all of it. But I have an uncle who owns a garage. He lets me watch him work on the cars.” I remembered Grant wanted to work there too, and the name came to me a minute later. With a quick search on my phone, I dialed the garage.

“Hi, My name is Aria Westall. I’m at the home of Grant, Leo and Ed, and there’s a young boy here who is trying to track down his family.” “Hold up.”

The man on the phone clearly called someone else to the phone. “I’m Marcus. Do you have Jeremy? My sister’s freaking out. My Dad’s about to call the police. I was going to leave and help look for him.” “Yes, he’s here with me. I have the code to the house, but I’d rather take him next door with me and give him a snack while we wait for you, if that’s okay.” “Yeah, thanks so much. Someone will be there soon.” “Jeremy, are you hungry? I can get you some cheese sticks and crackers while we wait for your family if that’s okay.” I said to the boy after telling him someone was coming.

He nodded and followed me into my house.

Frank was at my door within fifteen minutes. By that time, I’d helped Jeremy wash his face and hands and got him a snack.

“Aria,” Frank gave me a quick hug. “Thank goodness you found him.” “I got lost, Grandpa,” the boy hurtled toward Frank and hugged him tightly. “But I remembered how to get to your house.

“It’s okay, my boy.”

I felt tears in my eyes. At that moment, I knew I wanted a child.

“Jeremy!” a petite dark-haired woman ran into the house next.

“Mama!”

As more hugs ensued, I got Frank a glass of water.

“I’m Rose, Grant’s sister-in-law. I can’t thank you enough.” Rose gave me a hug too, and started crying.

Soon I had them all sitting around the table when Marcus arrived.

“Little man. I’m so glad you’re okay.” The big man said, after shaking my hand.

“He remembered your garage,” I told them. “Pretty smart to figure all this out.”

“I’m getting him a phone,” Frank said. “It can be a very simple one, but we

can't let this happen again."

"Can I exchange numbers with all of you, just in case?" I said.

"Yes, she's Grant's girlfriend." Frank said.

"Really?" Rose asked. "I knew he said he had a nice neighbor."

"His girlfriend?" Jeremy said. "We've just started dating."

Marcus grinned. "You're dating all three of them, aren't you? It's the Hopeton way, isn't it?" "There's a couple groups like that in my neighborhood," Frank said.

This conversation was surreal, but I was enjoying it.

We all exchanged numbers, and Jeremy asked if he could come by again.

"I'd love that," I told him. And meant it. Just because I was dating Grant didn't mean I couldn't be friendly with his entire family, even if we didn't stay together. It was hard to imagine wanting to break up with those three. But the alternative was too much for me to consider at this time. Married to three men? Nope. Not letting myself think about all that yet.

Chapter Four: Grant

“It looks like she's having a party,” Leo said as we pulled up to our house.

There were cars up, and down the street, and we could hear sounds in the backyard. We were exhausted from traveling for the better part of 20 hours from where we'd been, on the other side of the world.

“You really think she's having a party? I know she has lots of friends, but don't you think she would have mentioned a party?” Ed stepped out of the truck.

Then I spotted my dad's car. “That's my dad's car, in front of our house.”

“He didn't block our driveway,” Leo observed. “Maybe he was hoping we would come home?”

“Yes, I bet that's right,” I agreed. “I'd sent him a text during that marathon trip today and hoped he got it. I told him we wanted to surprise Aria.”

“Looks like the surprise is on us,” Ed said. “Let's just go over there.”

Leo nodded. “I'm sure she'll be happy to see us.”

As we dropped our bags inside our home, I thought of something. “We're kind of a mess. Don't you think we should wash up?” But I just wanted to go

see her. I didn't want to wait anymore, after thinking about her while we were gone.

Leo echoed my thoughts. "I can't wait another minute to see her."

"Let's just go to the back," I said. "I'm not sure anyone would hear the door." We walked over to her backyard, and through her open fence gate.

The sight that greeted us was an even bigger surprise. There were white lights all over her patio covering, and pumpkins seemed to be everywhere. There were little ones on tables, and some big orange, white and green pumpkins were set up at what was obviously a carving station.

Someone was playing music from a Bluetooth speaker, and her patio was covered with what looked like hay. A table seemed to have lots of sandwiches and cupcakes, and people were helping themselves to a bubbling liquid from what looked like a cauldron.

Ed pointed at a smaller table with an enormous cake. "It's her birthday."

We saw Aria, coming from the house with two packs of pop cans. She was wearing a tiara and a wine-colored dress that seemed to sparkle. Maybe I was that happy to see her, but it seemed as if she sparkled all over.

She put the packs of drinks in a cooler near the main food table.

She was definitely a sight for sore eyes. I couldn't believe she was right in front of me after not seeing her for almost three weeks. "Aria," Ed called.

She turned and nearly tripped over the cooler she'd just refilled. She ran over to us and embraced all three of us at once, her arms trying but failing to gather us all in.

When she went to kiss each of us, I thought I saw tears in her eyes. So if she hadn't told these people that she was dating three men, now they knew, and that was good, because it wasn't just women at this party. I spotted a few

guys in the group. It was good everyone would get the message that we were one lucky group. “Is it your birthday?” I asked, holding her hand.

“She’s 40!” A woman sitting nearby, sipping some of the bubbly, bright red drink from the cauldron.

“Is she drunk?” Leo asked me quietly.

Aria grinned. “That’s my friend Cat, from college. And no one has been here long enough to get drunk, I don’t think. You guys are right on time for this party, though. Come on.”

She paused and turned back to us. “I’m so happy you three are home. You’re right in front of me again. This is the best birthday present ever.”

She kissed me again, then Leo and Ed.

“Hey, son, aren’t you going to come say hello to your old man?”

We turned and saw Frank.

“All three of you can come say hello. You two are practically mine, too,” Frank said, as Ed went to help him out of his chair.

My dad was pretty spry, but I knew if he sat too long, he got stiff. Or maybe he was having trouble because he had a glass of that red bubbling stuff.

“What’s in that drink, Dad?” I said, taking a sip. “Whoa. That’s a lot of rum.” “It’s delicious.” The woman sitting next to Dad looked a lot like Aria.

“I’m glad you three could come to her surprise party. You must be Grant, and that’s Ed with the beard, so you’re Leo. I’m Eve, Aria’s mom.” “Okay, Mom, you’ve met them. I’m stealing them away now. Best surprise ever that you guys are here,” Aria said, pulling me and Leo towards the food. “Come on, you three. Have some food and cake.”

And we happily did. For the next few hours, we met her friends from work, college, a club she was in, and it seemed like a good percentage of the town.

Mayor Ted stopped in for a while with his wife Angelica and their baby Ian. Rick, Angelica's other husband, also came, bringing a big bowl of fruit.

"Leave it to the doctor to bring healthy food," Ted said.

Aira took a selfie with the three of us just then, before getting some with other people in the crowd.

"Are you three dating her?" Ted asked us. "You move fast, cousin Ed."

"Yes," Leo said confidently. He grinned at Ted. "We are embracing the Hopeton way."

"I'm glad to see it," Ted said. "Let me know if I need to officiate." "Tonight might be a bit soon," Ed said. "But we'll let you know."

Even in her short time working in the mayor's office, Aria was already well-liked.

"Here's the party!" A young man yelled as an entire group of athletic guys came in through the fence.

"Who are those guys?" Leo asked.

"That's the Howlers," Ted said, "Our hockey team."

Aria beckoned us over and introduced us to what seemed like very young guys. I'd noticed this before, when I met guys who hadn't been in the military. What we'd been through would always make us older, in many ways. It was why we wanted an older woman.

"Yo, you were SEALS?" One said to me. He shook my hand. "Thank you for your service."

So maybe they weren't all bad.

"I hear you play," another of them said to Leo. "Come practice with us sometime."

"I was injured," he said. "I enjoy playing, but it's likely not at your level."

Ed and I exchanged a look. We'd never forget the day Leo was shot. I

remembered tying the tourniquet and helping him into the helicopter. Ed was flying the helicopter and got him to medics.

Aria seemed to sense that Leo needed some comfort and put her arm around him. "Leo is interested in the adult league."

"Yeah, that's a great idea!" The guys pulled Leo into their fold.

"Uncle Grant!" I felt arms hug me.

I spotted Marcus and Rose walking up behind the little man, with a present for Aria.

They each hugged her.

"We were only gone three weeks," Ed muttered next to me.

I knew what he meant. Marcus had trouble dating, as he had a pretty gruff manner. Rose was always busy working, going to school, and taking care of Jeremy. Yet they were greeting Aria like an old friend.

"What? You didn't hear how she helped us with Jeremy?" Marcus said to me. To my surprise he hugged me fiercely. "Welcome home, bro."

He even shook Ed's hand. Leo came back to say hello to Jeremy.

As Rose told us the story again, we realized Aria glossed over her part in it.

What if no one had noticed Jeremy there for a while? I didn't want to think about it, or about how he made his way to the house on his own. I was happy my dad was buying him a phone. Kids these days seem to have phones way too early, but Jeremy happily showed me a flip phone I recognized as one of my dad's old ones. It could call home. And it could call all of us, but not do much else. It definitely didn't have Internet capability. "I can't believe that thing still works," Ed said. "Oh, believe it," Frank said. "He's able to call the important people in his life." And then I looked closely at the screen. "Is Aria one of your contacts?" I asked Jeremy. "Yep," he grinned. "She said I could come over again and have cheese and crackers snacks with her. She showed

me the plant she's trying to take care of for Ed, too.”I smiled at Jeremy. He certainly could tell that my new girlfriend was a winner, just like everyone else could.“And Jeremy spends a few hours after school with her now, once a week, when my classes run late,” Rose said.

I found the birthday woman and gave her an extra kiss. “Thank you so much for everything you did for Jeremy.”

“That was nothing,” she said.

“It wasn’t nothing.”“Think of what you do all the time. What you’ve spent the last few years doing for all of us. It was the least I could do.” She kissed me on the lips.I was in love.

When Aria opened her presents, we laughed at her blush as she pulled out a silky red negligee.

“A must have for living in Hopeton,” Angelica, Ted’s wife, called.

“We probably should have our own nudist colony,” Ted said.

“No,” several people said.

At one point, Aria pulled us over to the pumpkin carving area. Leo was done with his green one quickly. His was a humorous evil looking pumpkin.

Mine was more of a silly pumpkin, with a goofy grin and rounded eyes. I planned to give it to Jeremy.

Ed’s was an allover design. H spent a lot of time on it, and it certainly was beautiful.“That is a gorgeous pumpkin,” Aria said, echoing my thoughts. “I really like all three of them. They all show your personality. I never am good with knives, but I could see you three have had a lot of practice.”

Then she paused and looked at us, getting serious. “Wait, you have had a lot of practice working with knives, right? I forget sometimes all the scary things that you guys have had to do and be trained in.”

“Well, we are good with knives,” Leo said. “That's true, but it comes in

handy for fun things like this, too.”

I hoped she wouldn't ask if we'd ever had to use knives for a more dangerous reason. I'd had to cut ropes with them more than once or use them for tactical kinds of things. Happily, I hadn't had to stab anyone, but there was one time when someone got too close to Ed. I didn't wanna think about that right now.

The evening was a lot of fun, and even though the three of us were exhausted from our long travel. We couldn't have thought of a nicer way to be back home.

“It would be nice to take her home with us,” Leo said. “But maybe not after the long day and party.”

“I don't know, guys,” I said. “Maybe we should pace ourselves a little here.”

“Hey,” Aria said, coming over to us. “Is it too forward if I want to grab a-T-shirt and sweats and hang out with you guys tonight? I'm sure you're exhausted. We could all watch TV and unwind and if I fall asleep, I'll just wake up in the morning and come over here.”

She was trying to clarify that she wasn't ready for sex. Honestly, though I had energy for the party, I didn't think I had much left, especially for the time I wanted to spend when we first got together with her. I didn't want to rush our fences too much, either, and scare her away. I mean, it was one thing if there was only one of us, but sleeping with three of us would be a massive event. We had agreed on the way home that we would go slow with that too, maybe get with her one at a time, or two of us, to get her used to the idea of being with all of us.

Chapter Five: Aria

It took me a minute when I woke up to realize where I was. I could feel an arm around my waist, and I smiled, remembering.

Grant and I had moved up to his bed after Ed and Leo fell asleep on the couch downstairs. We just kissed and then Grant's eyes were closing, too.

My first morning in this house. I liked the feeling of seeing them all right away, to start my day. My fear of being with three guys disappeared, between missing them, my birthday, and the visit to the fertility clinic. I wanted to reach out and go for everything I'd ever wanted. Starting with these guys.

But I didn't quite have the nerve to jump them all right away. Plus, they'd just gotten back from being away. Maybe I'd start with getting them breakfast.

I sent them all a text and slipped quietly out.

An hour later, I returned with breakfast from a local restaurant. I wasn't sure what they liked, so I'd gotten a family meal with lots of choices. The idea of having a family meal with them made me smile even more.

I'd showered and put on fresh clothes. The house wasn't too bad even after the party, but I would finish cleaning it up later. First, I'd share the family

meal with my new guys.

Using the garage code in case they were still asleep, I crept into the kitchen, and nearly dropped breakfast at the sight of Grant in a towel, making coffee.

He turned, and his smile lit up his beautiful face. “Hi there. Do you need help with those bags?”

He still had a couple of droplets of water on his muscular chest. I wanted to lick them off. My knees actually felt weak. “Thank you.”

My voice was hoarse, and he looked at my face, to see me blush. He leaned forward to give me a quick kiss and take the food from me. His towel slipped and hit the floor.

“Oops, sorry,” he said, still moving to put the food away.

I suspected that living in close quarters with other people while in the military made him less shy around others. I had to close my mouth to keep my jaw from dropping at the sight of his gorgeous, muscled ass. When he turned to get his towel again, my gaze was stuck on his enormous cock. The muscles of his abs and the hair trail leading to his cock did not escape my attention, and suddenly, there were a lot more places I wanted to lick.

He was hard, and I wanted to touch him. He put the towel on, then stepped forward and kissed me, hot and hungry. My hands clutched his shoulders for balance as I strained to get closer to him. His soft skin covered hard planes and muscles, and I wanted to explore them all.

“You’re so sweet,” he muttered, pulling away to take off my tunic.

I wondered momentarily what kind of bra I’d put on and looked down to see it was the purple lace one I’d always thought of as my lucky bra. I’d gotten my job the day I wore this under a suit, and the day my car broke down and the men helped me was another purple bra day.

I suspected that today would be another landmark day.

He was turning me so I leaned against the kitchen island, as my lips trailed along his jaw to his earlobe. I felt his hands at my waistband and helped him push down my leggings.

He lifted me, and I was a little startled to feel my bare bottom on the counter. I had pushed my underwear off with the leggings. His mouth was on mine again then, and he stepped between my legs. I could feel the towel against my thighs, but loved the feel of his hard body between my legs.

He moaned, and his hands moved into my hair, holding my mouth still so his tongue could sweep inside.

This man knew how to kiss, and I was getting lightheaded before he tore his mouth from mine. He moved back a little and unsnapped my bra.

Holding my gaze as he trailed it down my arms, he whispered. “You are so beautiful, Aria.” Then his mouth was on mine again, but he was pushing at my shoulders. I leaned back as his mouth moved down. When his lips closed over my nipple, I tilted my head back and arched into his mouth. Had anything ever felt as good as the hot, wet pull of his mouth? I couldn’t remember anything, including my name at that moment.

“Now that is a sight to wake up to,” Leo said from the doorway.

“Absolutely,” Ed said.

Grant was fondling one of my breasts while sucking hard on the other as the men stepped to either side of us.

Ed leaned in to kiss me, and there was nothing awkward or any feeling of embarrassment that two other men were joining in. They leaned me all the way back against the counter.

Another mouth closed over my other breast, and I thought I might come from that feeling alone. Ed’s beard ticked my neck as he kissed me passionately.

Then I felt fingers gently stroking between my legs.

“She’s so wet,” Leo said.

Ed lifted his mouth from mine and moved to one of my breasts as I looked up, dazed, to see Leo lick his fingers, fingers that were covered by my wetness.

“Oh yeah,” Grant said. “I want a taste, too.” Then Grant moved between my legs, and his mouth was on my most private place.

I screamed in shocked pleasure as all three men chuckled.

“Been a long time?” Ed asked, tenderly moving the hair from my face as he bent down to kiss me again.

It was hard to focus on his words as I felt Grant’s tongue lapping at my clit. Then he slid two of his thick fingers into me, and I came, arching into the caresses and mouths of all three of them on my body.

They kept petting me as I came down, and then I felt Ed’s fingers inside me. He and Grant had switched places.

“My turn,” he said, and worked another finger into me.

I wouldn’t have thought this was possible, but I felt the tingling start again.

Leo’s hand lightly encircled my neck as he kissed me, and being held still by them seemed to heighten every response.

“You have more in you,” he said when he lifted his head.

Grant was back to sucking on my nipples. “Ummmm,” he said. “I can’t enough of her tits.” Grant using the crude word seemed to turn me on more. I tried to arch and move, and Leo laughed, moving to kiss me.

Then I felt Ed’s fingers move out, and his tongue entered me. Grant’s fingers moved down to strike my clit, and I came again.

I was panting on the counter, trying to rest, as Leo laughed more. “See, I knew you had it in you.”

“I can barely ever come once, let alone twice,” I said.

The men glanced at each other. Then looked at me.

“One more?” Leo said.

“At least,” Ed said, and they shifted positions again.

“We need to get you a birthday present,” Leo said much later, as we were all lying on the couch. The men were just wearing sweatpants and no shirts. I had my shirt and yoga pants on again, but I didn’t know where my panties and bra were. Was this really my life?

“You just gave me a birthday present,” I said. I meant it. I couldn’t remember ever having that satisfying of an experience. Ever. And they hadn’t let me reciprocate yet.

“What if you let us each take you out for a special birthday celebration?” Grant asked.

“That’s a lot,” I said. “I don’t want you to go to any trouble.”

“That’s a great idea, dude,” Leo said. “Who goes first?”

“Guys, really, that’s unnecessary.”

“I’ll go first,” Ed said. “I want to take you to the town Halloween festival next month in town here.”

“No fair,” Leo said. “We’ll all take you to that.”

“I’ll take you out in my dad’s Rolls,” Grant said. “Maybe a picnic.”

My breath caught. “That’s so romantic.”

“I can do better than that,” Leo said.

“Stop!” I stood up. “This is not a competition. I wouldn’t mind spending a little alone time with each of you to get to know you better, but I like simple, low key outings. Also, I still want to hang with all of you, like last night.”

“Ed and I fell asleep right away,” Leo said. “That was hardly fun.”

“Waking up here was fun.”

“In my bed,” Grant said.

I threw a pillow at him.

“We get your point, though,” Ed said. “You want to be with us alone and together? How about two at a time? There are several permutations that we could try.”

Leo and Grant threw pillows at Ed.

“Sounds fun,” I said. “I want to try them all.”

“You know, there are several positions for four people,” Leo said.

“Leo! I want to know you as people. And maybe I wouldn’t mind trying some of the positions.”

“I’m first,” Grant said. “I’m going to see my dad tomorrow, and we can get the Rolls and do the picnic if the weather is ok. Will that work?”

“Perfect.”

“But there’s still tonight,” Leo said.

“I’m sure you all have things to do now that you’re home. I was supposed to go hear a band at a pub tonight. Should we all go?”

“Yes,” Ed said. “That sounds fun.”

“Man, have you ever gone to hear a band at a bar?” Leo teased him.

“No, but it sounds like a fun evening.”

“We could do something else,” I said, trying to think of something.

“We’re in a new relationship,” Ed said. “I want to do something new.” Ed had caught some of my spirit, I thought, as I ran errands, did laundry, and finished clearing up from the party.

I still couldn’t believe this was my life. I kind of hoped we’d all fall asleep together again that night, too, though I still didn’t know if I was ready to be with all of them at once.

You sure enjoyed that scene in the kitchen this morning, my mind said. And

yes, I still felt tingly remembering how many orgasms I'd had. Wow!

Chapter Six

Ed

Loud noises and clubs were never my scene. All three of us tensed up a bit in noisy crowds from things that happened while we were in the military, but I wanted to do this tonight. It felt like a normal date, a fun time with a woman.

I'd dated a little when I was home on leave, but mostly they'd been friends of whoever the guys in my unit dated.

While Aria and the guys were busy that afternoon, I went to visit my mom about an hour away, where she was a vet tech in the town where I'd grown up. She'd always encouraged me to read and love books and wanted me to be a professor. She didn't understand my need to join the military, but she was so proud. There was more than one sign supporting the military and the Navy in particular around the clinic.

The books made me long for adventure. By the time I'd finished my masters, I was competing in Iron Man competitions, and wanted to try a different type of challenge, one that would take me around the world. I hadn't imagined I would actually make it through the BUDS training to become a SEAL, or that I'd have the courage to do what I needed to do in that job. But I'd done it, and met the men I loved as much as family, Grant and Leo. When they suggested we should all share with someone, and live in Hopeton, I knew it was right.

"You home for good now, Edgar?" Mom was adjusting the leg wrap on a German Shepard. The dog was leaning his body into her while she worked, as she frequently stopped to pet him and talk to him.

Being a Saturday, I knew his mother would be busy at work, but I hoped

she could take time to have lunch. I wanted to tell her about Aria. I'd given her a hint that we'd met somebody, but I hadn't told her much yet. She'd been at a conference before we left.

“I think we might be home for good now, Mom. Leo and I still have to do some training courses, but we wouldn't have to go further than San Diego, and it wouldn't be for long stretches. Grant is going to run maneuvers at the base for the next couple of months, too.”

“He's going to work in his brother's garage, isn't that right?”

At my nod, she continued.

“That's nice. And you're going to be teaching at the university. I'm so proud of you.”

“Yes. I like the faculty and program there, and they said they would let me finish my PhD while I was there. I want to publish the research I did for my master's dissertation, or do something about military history.”

“That's amazing,” she said. “My son, the doctor.”

She finished up with the dog and helped him walk a few steps on the floor. Then she looked up at me. I noticed more grey at the temples of her hair than I'd previously seen.

“Listen, I don't suppose you guys are ready to have an animal in that house of yours, are you? I've got a dog out back that has three legs. He's the cutest thing, and he's just looking for the right home.”

I had always said no to her when she asked about animals in the past, as I never knew when I'd be called away, but now maybe I could take one. “I don't know, Mom, we just got back. Let me talk to the guys. And we have a new girlfriend.”

She stopped what she was doing and looked up, smiling. The German Shepard barked, and she patted his head. “I haven't forgotten you, Oreo.”

“That German shepherd's name is Oreo?” I shook my head at that fluffy name for this big dog.

“It’s a cute name,” she said. “Don’t mind him, Oreo.”

“How many dogs do you have now, Mom?” “Well, I have four at home, but you know, maybe you would like one of those?”

I couldn’t resist, and petted Oreo’s head. “I’ll talk to the guys, Mom, I promise. But listen, have you ever thought about dating again after Dad died?”

Mom looked at me. “Son, I do date. I just don't always tell you about it. You’ve been in the SEALs for four years. Rick went to college a year after you left. I don't just sit around all the time hoping you and your brother will contact me. You two are out having your own lives, which is what I wanted. I have my own life.”

“Are you dating anyone serious, Mom?” Rick told me he thought Mom had a boyfriend during our last conversation, which was a few months ago. I knew Rick wanted to look for a place in Hopeton, too. I’d suspected at the time that Rick was looking for his own poly relationship with his roommate from college, Gavin.

I loved my Mom and brother, but my focus for the past four years had been all about the military. The cycle of training and going on missions was my entire life.

“Well, now that you mention it, there is someone I would like you and your brother to meet. Tim and I have gone out several times. I’ll tell you about him at lunch. Let me get Oreo here, back out to his human.”

As she grabbed her purse, I couldn’t resist asking a few more questions.

“How'd you meet Tim, Mom?”

“Oh, I was on Bumble. Isn't that how everyone meets now?”

I didn't want to think about my mother on a dating app. "What's he like, Mom? What does he do?"

"Well, it turns out he's also a mechanic, and he knows Marcus," she said. "Sometimes they swap parts, and they both belong to the same union. I told him you were in the Navy with Marcus's brother, and he thought that was amazing."

"I hope he knows you're amazing, Mom." I said.

She turned and kissed my cheek. "You're such a good boy, Edgar. Tell me about your new girlfriend."

"Aria is terrific," he said. "She lives next door to us, of all things, in her own townhome. She's an accountant. We like her a lot."

Mom smiled as I babbled on about Aria. "Do you think you three will be happy sharing her?"

"I really do, Mom. I know we will."

She nodded as we walked towards the waiting area. "That's that then. I've heard there're all kinds of groups that are happy in your town. Maybe I should get myself three or four guys."

She laughed at the expression I must have had on my face. "No," she said, "I'm pretty happy with Tim."

"We'll have you both over soon, and Rick, too. You can meet her then. Grant keeps talking about getting a fancy grill. We could have you guys over for a barbecue."

After she delivered Oreo to the mom and teen waiting for him, she pulled me to the backyard of the clinic to look at the three-legged dog.

The dog was very cute, some kind of poodle, I thought. It was fascinating how he walked with ease, even on three legs. It waited for me to pet him, then licked my fingers.

“What's his name?” I asked.

“Killer,” she said, “But I don't like that name. I'm hoping somebody would give him a different name. That was on his tag. The previous owner left him at the side of the road. When we contacted him, he said he couldn't care for him anymore.”

“Sarge.” It popped into my head. He did kind of look like a Sergeant who did some of our initial training. While tough, that man was determined to get us through the program. I couldn't believe the things I found myself doing for that man. I took a few pictures and sent them to Grant and Leo while Mom and I had lunch.

Two hours later, I was on the route back home with Sarge and a lot of equipment Mom and her co-workers gave me.

“See, most people here are in groups,” Aria said to me much later, when we were slow dancing at Mayor Ted's pub. “We fit right in.”

She fit nicely against me, with her head against my shoulder. My mind flashed back to the image of her spread naked on the counter. I wondered if we could eat meals off her that way. But I knew if I made that suggestion now, she'd blush.

Her hands stroked over my back. “Do you think Sarge is okay at the house?”

Aria had been as thrilled with Sarge as the guys were. Leo already took him for a short walk, and the animal was asleep in a huge pen in our study when we left.

“We won't stay long,” I said. I was hoping to leave after the next set. We could only hear each other during this break when Ted played music over the loudspeaker. I wasn't sorry that we'd listened to the band, though. We'd scored a table early and had taken turns sharing appetizers with Aria. She'd

rotated among each of us during the songs, sitting on our laps. She seemed determined to give us equal time, but we didn't care about that.

It got me going even seeing the others pleasure her, or have her on their laps. I would never have imagined that. We hadn't even tried dating the same woman before, but somehow this was working naturally for us.

"Do you think Sarge is okay?" Leo asked as we went back to the table.

Aria kissed him, then pulled him up to dance.

Leo had told us he couldn't dance as we got ready to go out that night and was worried about his leg. Somehow Aria sensed that and included him in slow dancing. She didn't fast dance at all.

"That dog is going to be spoiled rotten," Grant said. "My dad and Jeremy want to come see him soon."

The band took the stage again when Aria and Leo returned.

"Do you mind if we go now?" Aria asked. "I'm beat, and I want to check on Sarge."

We knew she wanted to come home with us, as she'd mentioned it casually when she came over to see Sarge. It felt right to bring her with us into the house.

"Do you need to get anything next door?" Leo asked.

"No, I brought over some clothes and a toothbrush before, along with my contacts case."

"I'll bet you look cute in glasses," Grant said.

"You'll find out tomorrow. I can sleep with the contacts sometimes, but I don't like to do that often," she said, stifling a yawn.

"We don't have to say up," I said as we all peeked in the study to find Sarge still asleep. "If you're tired, why don't you call it a night?"

I held my hand out to her, and she took it. "I'll sleep in your bed next time,"

she said to Leo.

“We aren’t keeping track,” he assured her with a kiss. “But that would be nice.”

“I don’t know how to do all this,” she said, looking at all of us. “How do I make sure none of you feel left out?”

“Let’s keep talking about it,” Grant suggested. “We’ll learn as we go. We’ve never done this before, either.”

That seemed to settle her, and after I’d brushed my teeth, I returned to my Queen bed to find her already asleep. I gathered her into my arms and fell immediately asleep.

In the morning, it surprised me that Sarge didn’t wake me. He’d been out a long time and would need to go to the bathroom.

Leo was outside with him when I heard a bark outside. Leo was tossing a tennis ball and Sarge was fetching it.

My shower was running. I had my own bathroom with my room, and Leo and Grant shared one. I guessed that meant Aria was in my shower.

“Sorry, I have to use the toilet,” I said to her when I walked in.

I finished my business and brushed my teeth so I could kiss her when the curtain opened.

“Want to join me?” She asked.

Chapter Seven

Aria

With Charlie, I’d waited until our sixth date to sleep with him. We’d fooled around some, but even when I slept with him, it was more because I felt like I should at that point. With these guys, I couldn’t wait another minute. And it wasn’t because they were hot, younger guys. I cared about them, and was already seeing a future with them.

I opened the shower curtain after I heard Ed finish his business and start brushing his teeth. I was glad I'd brought over a razor with my toothbrush and had shaved my legs and elsewhere, as had always been my habit since I was with my husband all those years ago.

Ed's hungry gaze on me told me this was the right move. I held out my hand, and he took it, coming towards me. "Wait," I said after he kissed me across the edge of the tub. "Take off your clothes. And do you have protection?"

The fertility doctor told me that my chances of conceiving were slim at this point. But they started me on fertility pills and would do a reading of my eggs and hormones next month. But I still had to talk about all that with the men, and didn't want to force any decisions yet.

He rummaged in a few drawers, which made me smile. Clearly he hadn't been expecting this and didn't have a woman over for sex often, if the way he couldn't find condoms at first meant anything.

"Here we go," he said, pulling out a strip of neon pink condoms.

At my grin, he shrugged. "One of our team got married a while back and we all got these as party favors. None of the three of us slept with the entertainment, I promise you. And we were just tested again before that last trip." "I trust you," I said. And it was a shock to realize I did trust all of them. Trust, after my husband Brent's death, took a long, long time. I didn't trust anyone in my life not to leave me. I didn't trust in any happiness for my future.

Everything about my relationship with these men was different, and not just the fact that there were three of them.

Ed finished undressing and stepped into the steamy shower with me. I was grateful for the two showerhead arrangement in the spacious tub, as he was a

big guy, everywhere. I was shaking.

“Hey,” he said. “We’re just showering. That’s all we have to do.” His thick, erect cock touched my belly as I moved in to kiss him, and I knew I wanted to do more. My hand closed over him, stroking, and he sighed.

“If we are going to make love, you’ll need to stop that amazing stroking soon or I won’t last.”

I loved he referred to sex that way. And it felt that way, for sure. This would change things with the men, and there was no going back or wondering what my decision would be.

As we kissed, I wondered how this would work physically in the tub. I hoped I didn’t have a hip cramp and have to stop partway through.

“Stop thinking,” he murmured, then lifted my foot to the ledge of the tub.

Pleasure quickly replaced any embarrassment at being exposed that way, as he stroked over my folds.

He made a growling noise as I stroked his cock more firmly. He slipped two fingers inside me, searching for that very sensitive place deep inside.

“Oh!” I said out loud as he stroked over a very sensitive spot.

Grinning, he kept stroking over that spot.

“I need you,” I said, sensing myself spiral upwards. “I want you inside me.”

For a big man, Ed could move quick. He grabbed his condom from the ledge where his razor sat and worked it on. He’d opened it already to make this easier, I’d noticed gratefully.

“You’ll have to help me,” he said.

I wasn’t sure what he meant until he picked me up under my bottom. My legs straddled him, and I tried to push down on his cock.

“Sweetheart, there’s no hurry,” he said, kissing me again.

“But you could guide me when you are ready.”

I did and soon felt him stretching me open. I couldn't seem to relax and let him in further.

Then I felt one of his fingers teasing along my back hole. And it didn't feel bad. Who knew there were nerves there?

He bit my earlobe and tried to work his fingertip in, and I felt myself sink further down on his cock.

"That's it," he said. "Take all of me." I wasn't sure that was possible, but it felt like a lot of him was inside me.

"You good?" He asked, biting my earlobe again.

"Oh, yes," I said.

He moved so I was braced against the tile. I didn't care that it was cool against my skin as he gripped my hips. The angle caused him to rub against my clit with every thrust. Thrust even felt like the wrong word, as it was a smooth movement.

I wanted to get closer, to take more of him inside me. I opened my mouth wider as he kissed me passionately while working my body into a frenzy of sensation and pleasure.

"Come with me," he said, his fingertip teasing my back entrance again.

And I did.

"I'm leaving to get the food and the Rolls," Grant was saying much later, as I still dozed on Ed's bed. I heard the men talking down in the kitchen.

Ed had carried me in here after our shower, and I'd fallen asleep. As I sat up now, I felt some soreness inside. I was pretty sure I hadn't been with anyone that big. What if the other two were also that big? Clearly, it was time for me to do yoga or some kind of stretching again.

My hair had dried into a mess, so I took another quick, hot shower, and found myself moving easier than.

When I went downstairs, Leo said “Good afternoon.” That stopped me in my tracks. “I’ve never slept this late.” “It’s only 11:30,” Ed said, pulling out the barstool next to me. “How are you doing?”

“Good,” I said, feeling myself blush.

Leo just laughed and put a bowl of cut fruit in front of me. “Grant went to get your lunch and the car for your picnic. We heard you guys this morning and let you sleep.” There was no sign of jealousy or any hint that now I owed him. He came over to kiss me, too, and said he would see me after my date with Grant. He was going to take Sarge with him to skate with the team.

“I’m so glad he is doing that,” I said to Ed, who turned off whatever he was reading on his iPad to talk to me.

“Play hockey? Yes, I’m glad too. I hope it won’t be too difficult. He’ll likely tell you about the injury sometime, but it is a miracle that he is walking again. Grant and I had a place near his rehab facility after Leo got out, when Frank mentioned he wanted to move.”

“I’m glad that happened,” I said.

“Me, too.” Ed said and kissed me.

We were still talking when Grant returned. He looked wonderful in a dark green polo with grey jeans.

“Okay, if we run to my house for a minute so I can change?” I’d said. “I feel underdressed.”

“It will just take a minute,” I said. “Or do you want to wait here?”

I hurried to put on a sweater and long skirt, as well as a soft blanket for our picnic, in case he didn’t have one.

I noticed him loading a waterproof tarp into the backseat of a beautiful Rolls Royce when I came back outside.

“Of course you thought of a tarp,” I said.

He grinned at me. “But your blanket is a good idea. I had nothing big and soft. The one we had is now in Sarge’s pen.”

“You look lovely,” he said, moving to kiss me as he opened the passenger side door.

Even sitting on the soft leather seats of the car felt luxurious. “This car is amazing.”

Grant pulled out of the driveway and started driving before replying. “We wouldn’t let Dad sell it. Marcus has it in mind to drive during weddings for some extra money. He keeps it at a storage facility his garage uses sometimes.”

“I love that idea.”

“It’s big enough to hold some groups for weddings around here,” Grant said.

He held out his hand, and I held it between us while he drove us to a forest preserve outside of town.

“This is lovely,” I said as we moved to sit on the grass in a clearing off the parking lot. There was a small pond there, and a few other groups of people were having picnics or walking around.

“Yes, though this woods is rumored to have werewolves and bears.” “Bears? This near Chicago?” I laughed, but could see he was halfway serious. “Well, in that case, it’s lucky I have my SEAL boyfriend with me. Plus, I’ve lived near here for years and have never heard that before.”

“Oh yes,” Grant said. “I’d protect you, but if we see bears, we are getting out of here, fast.”

I loved that Grant could make me laugh so easily.

“Have you always wanted to help with your brother’s garage?” I asked, as we started unpacking the sandwiches, cheese, and fruit.

He nodded. “Yes, but I also wanted to join the military. I used to party with our brother Calvin, the one who died, after our mother died. When he died, I needed to do something else, to straighten myself out.” “You might have done that at home.” He shrugged. “I’m not sure. I was afraid about it, and Marcus and my dad supported me going for the Navy, as my grandpa did. None of us believed I’d go for the SEALs or pass the training. As soon as I met Ed and Leo, we clicked instantly. We got each other through training, and then through missions.”

“That’s wonderful.” I gave him a quick kiss. “I’m glad you joined the Navy.”

“Yes. I might not have lived if I kept on the path I was on. And now here we are. I might take classes in automotive training, as my brother wants me to get training on electric cars.”

“That sounds really interesting,” I said.

“How did you get into accounting?” He devoured the second sandwich.

I’d wondered why he brought so much food and now realized Grant liked to eat. “I met my husband when we were in high school, and we went to Hopeton U at the same time. He was in marketing. We planned to start our own business, maybe an accounting firm. But then he died, and I was glad I had the degree. Numbers made sense and gave me something to rely on during those first terrible years.” He nodded. “That makes sense. But you didn’t marry again?”

I shook my head. “At first I was just surviving. My Mom and I helped each other a lot in those days. I always thought I’d meet someone, and even though I tried the online dating things, no one felt right.” Until now, I thought.

“I’m glad you waited,” Grant said. “We’ll convince you we’re right.” I didn’t doubt it.

When we got back to the house, I decided it might be a good time to talk to them all about the fertility treatments. But then we saw that Rose, Frank, and Jeremy were at the house, playing in the backyard with Sarge.

“This was a lovely date,” I said.

“It was,” he said. “We should do it again. Just being able to plan dates and have fun, peaceful afternoons like this will take some getting used to for me.”

I could imagine. “Are the others having trouble getting used to the idea of retiring, too?”

“Yes, especially Leo. He still has trouble sleeping sometimes, remembering the day he was shot.” “Oh, Leo.”

“Don’t let on that I told you that.” “No, I won’t say a word.” “Hey you guys, how was the date? You returned the Rolls already?” Leo was getting out of his truck before we got into the house.

“It was amazing,” I said. “And we went to get his car and bring Frank home for pizza, but he wasn’t in his home.” “He’s here, with Rose and Jeremy, playing with Sarge,” Grant said.

“Of course,” Leo said.

Grant and I said nothing, as we noticed his limp was more pronounced than usual.

Leo took a hockey stick and his bag of gear out of the back. “That was pretty fun today. I ended up coaching some guys, and the head coach asked me to come back tomorrow. I’m better at coaching than anything else, now, though I did okay with the skating.” “You’re amazing,” I said, moving to put my arm around him as we all walked into the house.

“I feel old,” he said, laughing.

“Then what am I?” I said, as we joined the hyper poodle and people in the backyard.

“Sarge likes me!” Jeremy said, coming to hug me.

“Of course he does.” I said.

“Maybe we have to be a little calmer with him,” Rose cautioned.

“I just ordered some pizza,” Ed said, from where he was tossing the tennis ball with Sarge.

“Next time invite your Mother, too,” Frank said to Aria.

“She’d like that,” I said, wondering how much she and Frank were going to like each other.

My phone buzzed, and I saw the name of one of my colleagues, Karyn. She was an admin from work and was a kind person. She’d been at the party Friday night.

“Aria? I’m sorry to bother you. Do you have a minute to talk?”

I moved back inside. “How are you?” I couldn’t imagine what this was about. We’d all exchanged numbers after they hired me, and Ted suggested it. What I hadn’t realized was that they were all getting my number so they could plan for the party.

“Well, I don’t know how to say this. I remember you saying you were going to the fertility clinic?” “Oh, yes.” I had mentioned that to her. I told the others I had an appointment, but she was such a nice, grandmotherly type. I felt like blurting out the truth when I’d left early on Thursday.

“My granddaughter is expecting a baby. And we’d like you to adopt it. Would that be something you’d be willing to talk about?” A few minutes later, I was dazed, getting off the phone with her.

“Everything okay?” Ed said, coming through to meet the pizza delivery person at the door.

“Yes, I think so. I want to talk to you three about something after everyone leaves. Nothing bad, I promise. But it might make some changes in my life.”

After Frank and the other left, Sarge immediately fell asleep in his bed.

“Jeremy loves that dog,” Grant said. “I’m glad you got him, Ed.”

“Me, too. My mom is already asking if Aria wants her own dog, though. I’ll hold her off as long as possible.” I laughed, and got out cups for hot chocolate and tea. Leo mentioned hot chocolate helped him sleep sometimes.

“Tell us what’s going on,” Leo said, leaning against the counter where I was boiling water.

“I went to a fertility doctor last week. I’d wanted to go for a while, and see if there was even a chance I could have a baby now. With this new job and turning forty, it seemed like the right time.”

I couldn’t tell from their expressions how they felt about that, so I continued. “I’m on fertility pills now, and I’ll go in and get hormones measured and eggs and all that stuff after my next period starts.”

Grant gave me an encouraging smile, so I told all of it about my colleague’s call.

“I don’t even know what made me tell her about my appointment Thursday.”

“Does she know about us?” Leo asked.

“Yes, she was at the party. I think everyone got the idea then.”

Ed grinned. “No doubt.”

“So, we might have a baby?” Leo asked.

I couldn’t help it. I burst into tears.

Chapter Eight

Leo

We all rushed forward to hug Aria.

“Why are you crying?” I asked her. “That all sounds good to us. Did you think we wouldn’t want kids? We didn’t bring that up yet because we didn’t

know how you'd feel about it." Ed finished making the tea and cocoa, and we sat down with her at our dining room table, rather than squeeze around the bar counter.

"I don't know," she said in a whisper. "It all seems too good to be true."

"You know, I think we understand that," Grant said. "We never trusted a quiet day on a mission. And you've lost one husband."

"I might not be able to have kids."

"I probably can't, either," I said. "The damage done to my leg affected my groin, too. Oh, I can still perform." Grant and Ed laughed, and after a minute, Aria did, too. "You know, that wouldn't have mattered to me," she said. "We can always get creative."

"Let's get married." I said.

Everyone kept laughing, but I was only halfway kidding.

Soon, Aria was yawning as we laughed and talked about other things. We knew we'd revisit the baby discussion, but not tonight.

"I know you said you'd go back to your house tonight," Grant said, "but we'd love it if you'd stay. We'll make sure you're up on time for work."

She hesitated, and I knew we had to give her space when she needed it. But I just didn't know if this was one of those times after she was upset.

"I'd like that," she said.

"It was Grant's date day," I said.

"It's all good with me," Grant said. "I know you are tired. Why don't you have a bath and get into bed? I'll be up in a while?"

She looked grateful. Definitely time to give her a little space.

After she went upstairs, we heard the bathwater running.

"What a weekend," Ed said. "I'd love all the options she mentioned."

"Agreed," I said. "But we don't want to push her into a future with us or

into creating an instant family, much as we might want it.”

“For sure,” Grant agreed. “Let’s keep on with our dating plan.”

The guys and I watched the game, and then I realized a quarter had passed.

“Is Aria still in the tub?”

We all got to our feet and headed up the stairs.

“Honey? You okay?” Ed opened the door as I called out.

“She’s just asleep,” Grant said, reaching into the tub and pulling her out. A lot of the water had drained out of the tub.

“Thank goodness for that leaky plug,” I said. “What if she’d fallen asleep and slid underwater?”

“What?” She was waking up. “I’m okay, Grant. You can put me down.” “No, Ma’am,” he said, moving her to his bed.

Ed pulled blankets over her. “I’m all wet,” she said. “I can get dry.”

I could see her teeth were chattering. “I’m going to go get some more tea.”

“Good idea,” Ed said.

By the time I made it and got it upstairs, she was sitting up in the bed, with Grant and Ed on either side of her, sitting under a pile of blankets. Ed looked like he was sweating.

“Here’s your tea,” I said.

“She’s still shaking. Let me help you, Aria,” Grant said. He took the tea and helped her hold it.

“I’m really okay,” she said, laughing.

I noticed she drank some tea, though.

“So, are we all sleeping in here?” I said, only half joking.

“Sounds good,” Ed said. Now Ed was the biggest of us, and none of us were small men.

“Maybe we’d do better on the couches downstairs, pushed together. Like a

huge bed.” Aria suggested.

And that’s what we did. Within a half hour, Grant and Ed were on either side of her on the couches. I took Sarge out in the backyard one more time. I’d learned already that I had to wake him up to go one more time at night.

I would rather have been next to Aira, but I was okay sleeping next to Grant. It wasn’t the first time the three of us had to bunk under tight circumstances.

And clearly, it wouldn’t be the last.

In the morning, Aria’s phone alarm went off. Then Sarge started barking. I got up to take him out. “Were you able to sleep at all?” She asked me when I got back.

“Yes,” I said, not wanting to tell her about some places we’d had to sleep.

Grant was stirring. I waved him back. “I’ve got her. I’ll take her to work. I’m going to go work out with the team this morning, too.”

“Awesome. I’m so glad you are hanging out with them. I know they had a core group of players and wanted to add more.” Aria smiled.

“I’ll never be well enough to join them. Plus, they make me feel like an old man.” “You’ve had a world of experience compared to them,” Aria said. “I’ll hurry. I’ll be back in about 20 minutes.”

“No hurry,” I said. “I’m not showering until after practice.”

Sarge took his time exploring the room this morning. Nothing about having only three legs phased him. Watching him, I realized I hadn’t scheduled PT on the base since we got back. I made that call while waiting on Aria and learned I could head back there in the afternoon.

PT was humiliating many times, when I’d lose balance or not be able to do things. It would be worse today after the trip, though I actually did my stretches while we were gone. It surprised me at how good they felt after the

travel and after long training and exploratory missions. Hopefully, it wouldn't be so bad today.

Aria was back quickly and gave me a hug as I put Sarge back in his cage. "Don't the other two have anywhere to be? Should we wake them?"

"Nah, none of us can sleep really late anymore."

"Military guys. I have some messy habits and like to sleep in sometimes. It will take some getting used to."

"We will balance each other out," I suggested.

She held my hand as we drove to her office.

"Oh! I forgot," she said, looking at her phone. "A group of us is heading out after work for another team member's birthday. I should have driven myself." "You could text us when you're ready." "Actually," she said. "I'd love it if you'd come. Any of you. All of you." It was fun to be included in her life like this. "Sounds fun," I said. "Want to text me when you're headed over there? I'll let the others know."

She nodded.

As we pulled close to her office, I parked. "I'm going to head to the bakery this morning before going to practice. Would you like anything from there?"

She nodded. "I have a little time before my meetings start today."

I went around and opened her door. As I helped her down from the truck, she gave me a kiss.

We turned towards the bakery, and there was a line out the door.

"Must be a pie day," I said. Most bakeries were closed Mondays, but the owner, Renee, kept the bakery and café open seven days now, with the help of college students.

Renee herself was behind the counter today. She came out to give me a hug. And to my surprise, she hugged Aria, too.

“Are you guys together now?” She asked.

I looked at her pregnant belly.

“Yes, we’re dating.” Aria said. “How are you doing?”

“I’m good. Three more months, and I think I eat as much as the customers when I’m here!”

I grinned. “How are the guys doing?” I knew Renee was married to three men.

“Really good. Are you three home now? Frank was telling us about it over the weekend.”

“Yes, they’re home. I’m dating all of them,” Aria said. She seemed to be announcing it to anyone who wondered, and the idea amused me. She was clearly getting used to the idea.

“That’s wonderful.”

Someone from behind the counter called Renee and she hurried off.

“I ate here a lot, even before I was hired at City Hall. I was working for a smaller firm and was laid off before this job,” she said. “I often had to come out here for the firm and of course, had my home here.”

“Aria!” An older woman was behind us, with a teenager wearing bulky clothes. I thought it was a girl, but she was well hidden.

“This is my granddaughter, Molly.”

“Hi, Molly. Leo, this is my colleague, Karyn. This is my boyfriend, Leo. I’m dating Leo, and his best friends Ed and Grant. They are retiring from the Navy SEALs.”

“Thank you for your service, young man.”

As I shook their hands, I realized this must be the woman who called Aria about the baby. And this was the pregnant girl? She looked pale and scared.

“I appreciate that,” I said. “Can I get everyone something?”

“My daughter was parking the car,” Karyn said.

They were joined by a very thin woman in a brown pantsuit. “Mother! I don’t know why we had to stop here. I have to meet with Molly’s school today.” “Crystal, this is Aria. I told you about my colleague.” “You’re Aria?” The woman looked Aria up and down, which seemed to cause Aria to straighten her tunic and slacks.

“This is one of my boyfriends, Leo. Nice to meet you. Your mother runs the place over at City Hall. I couldn’t do my job without her.” “Nonsense, Aria.”

But I could tell the woman was pleased.

Crystal snorted. “Not another woman with several guys. Forget it, mother. This won’t work. Molly, we’d better go. You don’t need to gain more weight, anyway.”

And they left. Molly seemed to want to say something to Aria.

Karyn sighed as we got to the counter. She pointed at a treat.

Aria told me what coffee Karyn liked, and I ordered for everyone, getting a whole apple pie to take home.

“We’d better get into the office,” Karyn said. “I’m sorry about that.”

“It’s fine,” Aria said. “I know feelings must be running high about the entire situation. Molly seems lovely.” “She is. My daughter is too much like my ex-husband. She resents everyone and everything.”

I handed each woman their coffees and pastries in a bag and walked out with them.

“Will she really not let Aria adopt the baby because of us?” I asked. It made me sick to think that the guys and I might cost her the chance to have a child.

“I don’t know how much she can stop it. Molly is seeing a counselor I’m paying for, and that lovely person is helping us set up the legalities. The birth

father is willing to give the baby for adoption but is hoping to also have some contact in an open adoption.”

Aria nodded. “That makes sense. Is he a nice kid?”

Karyn nodded. “He is. Molly might still see him but my daughter threatened him with a rape charge if he was around her again.” The women were quiet on the walk to City Hall. When we arrived, I gave Aria a quick kiss on the cheek. “Just text me about later,” I whispered.

She seemed a little sad but squeezed my hand. “Thank you for everything this morning,” she said.

I drove home and walked in to the house to deliver the pie.

Both guys were up and having coffee. I told them about the interaction at the bakery.

“It might be hard for her to legally adopt if she’s with all of us,” Ed said. “We don’t want to stand in her way.” “Let’s not decide without her,” Grant said, cutting an enormous piece of pie. “But we will let her know we support whatever she needs to do to get a child.” “I’m going to do a little legal research about options today,” Ed said. “I have to go to a Faculty meeting anyway, and will visit the library over there and get access to some of the legal databases.”

I glanced at my phone. “I’d better get to hockey practice. I wanted to tell you all about this first, though.” I let them know about the possible plans for later and headed to the rink.

Practice was in a neighboring town, as the Hopeton stadium was set up for a basketball game the next night. When I arrived, one of our players was carrying an infant seat and struggling with the door. I hurried over to help him.

“Hey Tray,” I said. “Who’s this?”

“Hey, Coach,” he said. “This is my daughter, Elle.”

It made me smile that some of the kids called me Coach already. And they all felt like kids, even though they were only a few years younger than me.

“Natasha left her with me. She’s my ex-girlfriend, and I didn’t even know about Elle, before. I don’t know anyone here yet. My Mom wants to help, but has to work at her job in Missouri, and is calling day cares for me. I have to visit some after practice.”

“Tell you what,” I said, after listening to all that. “I’ll watch Elle during practice.”

To my surprise, he gave me a hug. “I don’t know what to do. I want to play on this team so much, maybe have a chance at the NHL. But I love Elle already.”

By the time practice started, Elle was asleep in her seat behind the bench. Tray said she was four months old, but she seemed tiny. She didn’t wake during the yelling for drills or during practice.

He had a bottle of formula made and I didn’t wander too far from the bench, wanting to hear her.

I used to watch my neighbor’s kids and my step-siblings when I was in high school, all the time. It was one reason going off to the military appealed. Order, and a place where my only responsibility was myself. My mother was mad at first, and I’m sure a lot of burden went to my oldest step-siblings, but I knew it was the only way I could get away.

“I have an idea,” I said to the head coach, Tom, a former NHL player. “Let’s try Tray as a goalie. I just have a feeling about it.” He looked at me, then went out and made the switch. The drill proceeded better. Our former goalie seemed too fast for the goalie net and made a better defender.

Then I heard a whimper and went to feed Ellie. She spent the rest of

practice in the crook of my arm or over my shoulder. She was a total sweetheart, but I wondered what Tray was going to do.

“Thanks, Coach,” he said to me after practice. He’d changed faster than the others and hurried out to take Elle from me. She protested a little, then smiled at her dad.

“Call me anytime for babysitting,” I said. “I live with two guys and our girlfriend.” So maybe that wasn’t strictly true, but hoped it soon would be.

I held Elle again while he added my number to his phone.

“Where are you staying?” I asked.

He told me about a room he was renting. “Natasha didn’t tell me she was pregnant. She just left Ellie with me last week. I don’t know what I’m going to do.” “Tell you what. Why don’t you come over to the house tonight and we’ll talk through some options,” I said. “We’ll feed you, too. We have a dog, though. Will that be a problem?”

“Not at all.”

We set a time for 7, when I figured I could leave Aria’s work party and be home to talk to him. I texted Ed that I needed him to do more research.

Then I hurried to my PT appointment, my mind full of too many things to worry too much about how the appointment would go.

Chapter Nine

Aria

I think my heart stopped a little when all three guys walked into the pizza pub down behind City Hall after work. Of course, several women in the room turned to look, too.

“Who are those guys?” Sylvie, the birthday woman, said to me.

She worked with me in accounting, and was quickly becoming a friend.

“Um, my boyfriends.” I said, then stood to greet the guys. I gave each one a

quick kiss, and by the time that was done, I noted my colleagues had moved around, so there were three chairs around me.

“I’m glad you could all make it,” I said. There wasn’t time to talk to them throughout the day, just to text. I wanted to talk about the conversation Leo and I overheard that morning, but now wasn’t the time.

I’d convince Karyn to join us, even though she was worried about Molly and wanted to go to her house after work.

I proudly told my colleagues who hadn’t already met them that my boyfriends were SEALS, and noted as usual that the men were shy about discussing that. I loved it that several colleagues thanked them for their service.

“Thanks for coming,” I said as they took slices of pizza. I’d ordered a few extra in case they could make it.

“Leo has to leave after too long,” Ed said.

I looked at Leo, who ran a hand through his spiky hair. “I told a player who has a baby that he could come over tonight and discuss options.”

As Leo told me the story, my heart went out to the young man and the baby. “Of course. I don’t need to stay too much longer myself. Let’s all go.” They all looked relieved. “You guys could have canceled.” “We want to be supportive,” Grant said.

“That goes both ways,” I said.

After a while, the group was breaking up, anyway. It was a Monday, and many had obligations and family to attend to. Ted left first, clapping the three guys on the back.

“Great to see all of you again,” he said.

Karyn was one of the last to leave. “You really think I shouldn’t go check on Molly?”

“Maybe give her mom time to cool off and think.” I said, hugging the woman. “You could let Molly know you’re available, though.”

She smiled. “I did that earlier. Hopefully, my daughter didn’t take her phone.”

When I got into Leo’s truck, I happily moved to the slim back row. “There’s no way you guys can fit back here,” I said.

“We might need a bigger car,” Ed said, grinning at me from the middle of the front seat.

I nodded, realizing I was thinking about long-term plans with these guys as they seemed to be, too.

Tray was delightful. I’d offered to go back to my home and leave them to talk, but all three of my men asked me to stay.

I could see he wanted to take care of the baby, but also was close to pursuing his dream. Leo had told us he was one of the best guys on the team. Getting a call from the NHL was a real possibility.

Elle was adorable. I loved seeing how easily Leo got her to stop fussing. Grant and Ed each insisted on a turn holding her, and Grant even changed her.

What if I couldn’t give them kids? Should I let them go now? “Maybe she’d be better off with an adoptive family,” Tray said, as Ed went over some options for him. “It would break my heart, but I want to do what’s best. I don’t want to be selfish about my career, though.”

“I don’t think it’s selfish exactly.” I said, moving to put my arm around the young man. Normally I’d never do such a thing, but I couldn’t stand seeing him cry like this. “You worked hard for this career a long time. You didn’t know about the baby until recently. It’s only honest that you’d want to follow your dream, too.”

He nodded, and Grant got him some Kleenex. My tough guys didn't seem phased by crying. I wondered what rattled them. You, a voice in my head said. They are as hopeful and unsure of this relationship as you are.

"You said there's an agency that has open adoption?" Tray said to Ed. He was still crying, but seemed to come to a decision.

"Yes, and they are connected with an attorney who is a long-time friend of my cousin Ted," Ed said, and opened his laptop to show Tray. "Why don't you make an appointment and at least talk to them?" "I could go with you, if you like," Leo said.

"That would be great, Coach."

"Do you think Natasha will sign away her rights?" Ed asked him.

He nodded. "I have a letter from her saying she can't be in our lives, ever. I think she found someone else."

The baby gurgled and tried to grab Ed's beard.

Tray left a while later. We all quietly gathered the glasses we'd used, thinking about the situation.

"Tom has a scout coming to watch Tray on Friday," Leo said. "I really feel for him." "He might resent that adorable girl if he has to give up his chance for her." Grant said.

Ed nodded. "I'm glad you're going with to the appointment, Leo. Someone to help him remember everything that is said."

"I might head back to my place and do some laundry tonight," I said, not sure if I should stay or not.

"We have a washing machine," Grant said.

"If you need space, we understand." Ed said, moving to take my hand. "A lot has been happening. We get it."

"Honestly, I'd rather stay. I don't want to crowd you guys, either."

An hour later, we were watching a Pixar movie on the couch. This choice of Grant's surprised me, but it seemed like they all needed something less serious. Of course, Ed was already asleep, snoring a little.

"Ed!" Leo hit him with a pillow, and he roused.

"You should go to sleep, honey," I said. I kissed him. "Don't feel you have to stay up for me." He nodded and went upstairs.

"This is the good part, too," Grant muttered.

I laughed as both guys moved closer to each side of me.

"I take it we're not all sleeping on this couch tonight?" "Ed's already ordered an extra large King bed, and it's going in my room," Grant said, moving to kiss my ear.

I shivered pleasantly. "The couch was that uncomfortable for him?"

"Don't get me wrong," Leo said. "Ed would sleep in the rough as we often did for missions, without complaining. But he's a big guy." I felt guilty about all of it as the movie ended. "Listen, maybe I should go back to my place. And I want to chip in for the bed." "Stay," Leo said. He turned to kiss my ear on his side.

I couldn't think now, as their hands and mouths moved over me. "I don't want to disrupt everything."

"We didn't have to buy much furniture. My Dad got new for his new place," Grant said. "You're worth a new bed and so much more."

"And it's hardly a disruption when you're everything we could have wanted," Leo said, helping me pull off the tunic and necklace I'd worn to work that day.

I was catching on to this new life of mine, and had worn a green lacy bra that day.

"That's nice," Leo said, his fingertip running over one of my breasts, above

the lace.

“It is lovely,” Grant agreed, before unsnapping the front clasp. “But this view is even better.”

They each leaned up and latched on to a breast with their mouths.

“Oh,” I said, feeling my knees give way.

They pulled me over them on the couch, continuing to suck on my very sensitive nipples. I was on my knees between them.

“Why do you both have your shirts on?” I asked.

They moved quickly, and soon we were all naked on the couch. I was getting a little nervous, not sure how I could take both of them.

Grant leaned over, still suckling at one of my breasts, while Leo pulled me to straddle him.

Grant lifted his head and moved to take more of the neon pink condoms out of the little table on the end of the couch. The sight of them made me smile.

“We definitely need to buy more,” Leo said. “We haven’t had a need until now.”

I had a hand on each of their cocks, stroking, while I alternated kissing them. It all felt natural, even being with two guys, and I was aching to take one of them inside me. I moved to take Grant’s thick cock into my mouth.

He sucked in a breath, hard, and I looked up.

“I’m good, so good,” he said, as his hands wound into my hair.

Leo was moving behind me, arranging me so he could enter me from behind. He tested me with his fingers, and we could all hear the wetness.

“Ready for me, sweetheart?” He asked.

I pulled off Grant while my hand kept stroking him. “Yes.”

But I wasn’t fully prepared for the thick, steady feel of him, while I had Grant in my mouth. That I was with two men at once was making me even

more excited, and I soon came, lifting my head only for the seconds at my peak, before returning to Grant.

“Whoa,” Leo said, chuckling. “Who likes this?”

Grant moved a hand under me to pinch my nipples as I continued to enthusiastically suck on him.

Soon Leo was thrusting into me at a rapid pace. It felt amazing. All of it. From the pleasure sounds Grant was now making as I fondled his balls and tried to get all of him into my mouth, to the feel of Leo reaching deep inside me.

“I’m gonna come,” Grant said in a low voice. He was trying to pull my head off, but I shook it slightly. I wanted him to come in my mouth and soon the salty feel of his semen filled my mouth faster than I could swallow.

I’d never done that before, and it felt so primal and good to do that with these men, while my other lover grunted and held himself deep inside me.

I noticed Leo was rubbing his thigh later as we lay on Grant’s bed, all three of us. We’d wanted to stay together.

“I’ll go on top next time. You should have said.” I said to him, helping to massage his thigh.

“Are you kidding?” He said, rolling over me. “That was the hottest experience in my life.” “You got that right,” Grant said, drowsily. “Let us rest now, woman.” I fell asleep laughing, resting my head on Leo’s chest.

Chapter Ten

Grant

I woke up before it was light out and heard Sarge snuffling a little. Untangling myself from the bed that barely fit Leo, Aria, and me, I went downstairs to let Sarge out to do his business.

The intrepid little dog was so cute as he explored around on three legs. I

couldn't believe this was my life.

When I entered the Navy, I think I'd pictured kids, but after my brother died, I knew I had a lot of growing up to do. Before then, I'd wanted a fast car, and girlfriends, and a house with a hot tub or some such foolishness. Although a hot tub with Aria might be fun, I thought with a grin as images from last night flashed into my brain again.

When Sarge ate the breakfast I put out for him, I heard Aria coming down the stairs. It amazed me to realize I would already identify her tread on the stairs.

"Good morning," she said in hushed tones. "I need to run next door for a shower and work clothes. Want to come with me?"

I did. We had seen little of her house beyond the kitchen and back patio at the party last week. It was a little messy, with some knitting and an iPad on a table, a desk with cords running everywhere, and some dirty laundry spilling out of a bin in her room. But it was colorful and fun, and the furniture looked comfortable.

"Want me to wait down here?" I asked. "Or do you want to shower with me?"

I was going up the stairs almost before she'd finished asking.

Soon we were soaping each other up in an erotic shower.

"What have you three done to me?" She asked as I lathered up her hair in the small space. "I want sex all the time now." "Me, too," I joked. "Maybe this is all you." Her hand slipped down to my already hard length. "Seems like you want it now."

"I wouldn't say now to making love with my gorgeous girlfriend, no." I said, helping rinse the shampoo out of her hair.

My finger slipped between her legs, and she was already wet and ready for

me. She wrapped a leg around my waist and soon I was inside her. It felt amazing. Hot and wet. I moved back. “We need a condom. Do you have any?”

She nodded and moved out of the shower to get one of those neon pink condoms. “I put it in my pocket before we came over here.” “Did you play to have your way with me, Aria?”

She kissed me and rolled the condom on me. I was so hard by then I knew this would be fast, indeed.

“Yes, I did.” She kissed me as we moved together in the shower.

I ran to the coffee shop while she kept getting ready. I had an idea I wanted to discuss with everyone before I took her to work. Her car was working fine now, but I sensed we all enjoyed driving her to and from work.

When I got back, she was sitting in the kitchen with the guys, her still damp hair in soft waves.

“I just had an idea.” I said, setting down the bag of pastries and the carrier of coffee. “What if we adopted Tray’s baby?”

By the time I’d dropped Aria off for work, Leo planned to talk to Tray about it before their meeting with the agency that day.

Aria said she’d ask Ted about a lawyer referral for us, too. The logistics of adoption for a family arrangement like ours might be complicated.

But we were all on the same page. We wanted to adopt her. No one mentioned marriage, but we were all making this plan together. I hoped it involved marriage, but I suspected the guys were with me in wanted to make sure Aira knew marriage with us was about her and not just about the possibility of a baby.

“Hey can you get out for a minute with me?” She asked as we pulled into the parking lot for City Hall.

I could see her friend Karyn waiting with a teen. This must be Molly, I thought.

“Hi Karyn, Molly. How are you guys?”

“Hello Aria,” Karyn said. “We might need your help.”

They invited me to join them to discuss the situation. Aria led everyone to a conference room. Ted came in to give everyone a hug and let us know we could have the room as long as we wanted.

It was hard to see Ted as a boss, but I was used to commanders. Different style, but no less effective, I thought, knowing from what Aria told us, just how hard she works.

“My Mom kicked me out,” Molly said.

“And I live in a 55+ community. I can have her stay with me a few nights, but that’s it.”

“That’s no problem. Come stay at my house. Both of you, until you figure this out.” Aria glanced at me, but I was totally on board with this idea.

“Come eat meals with us, and Molly can hang at our house before you get home from work,” I said to Karyn, guessing at some of her worries.

“This is too much,” Karyn said, tears spilling down her face.

“It’s not. I might sell my home before too long, anyway. But I will call a cleaning service in. You all shouldn’t have to go there as is.”

Karyn laughed. “I saw it for the party. It looked very nice. And I’ll be happy to have a break from my community. While my neighbors are good people, they are very nosy about my business.”

“Did they ask you about Molly?” I asked.

“Well, no, but they ask me too much about the two gentlemen I’ve been seeing.”

I gave my number to Karyn and Molly, who assured us she could get the

bus home from school and find the house.

Aria gave me a big hug when they left the room. “Thank you!”

“For what? It’s selfish. I’d love to have you living with us.”

“Well, this might be like that.” She said. “But don’t you think they need a lawyer? I might get her to ask Ted.”

“He’s going to give Leo a name for Tray’s baby, too.” I left Aria to her work then and called the guys on speakerphone. Ed assured me he’d be home all afternoon in case Molly had any trouble. “I’ll probably be back before that. I just need to go talk to my brother and see what my schedule might be at the garage.”

I saw Rose’s car as I got to the garage, but I didn’t see her in the waiting area. “Hey, Steve,” I said to the young man who worked the front office of the garage. “Is Marcus in the back?”

“Yes, but you might want to wait.” “What? Naw, he won’t mind me going back there, even if he has a customer.”

But it wasn’t a customer. When I walked back there, my brother was kissing Rose.

“Your brother’s been dead a long time,” Ed said to me a little while later. I’d left in a hurry, and didn’t think either of them had seen me.

“I know.” But Marcus and Rose? “It’s just so much right now, you know? Our lives were laid out for us with the SEALS. There was an order to it. Here it seems like one surprise after another. Some are good, like Aria, but I feel like I don’t know where I am. How am I supposed to work there? What if Frank knows?” “It might be good for Jeremy.” Ed said reasonably.

He’d been working on his laptop when I got home, and likely was hoping to have peace in the empty house while Leo and I were both gone.

“It might be. But it seems kinda like incest.” Ed laughed. “No. It’s not like

that at all. It's hard for you to get it from the outside, but you haven't been around."

"I feel like we've been on another planet." "We kind of were. At the faculty meeting, I discussed a new military research system, but it clearly hasn't hit the academic world yet as no one knew about it. We are still straddling two worlds."

"I think I'll go work out." Doing something physical always relaxed me. And while I'd enjoyed the workout with Aria that morning, I needed to use my muscles now. I didn't want the health club with the smoothie bar. I wanted punishing equipment. I headed to the base, but my brother called while I was on my way there.

"Hey, why didn't you stay? Steve said you stopped by." "You seemed busy." There was silence.

"Okay. I was going to talk to you about Rose. Jeremy and Dad don't even know."

"How long has this been going on?" I winced at my accusing tone. I thought about Aria, and about how she seemed accepting of everyone's situations. Even Leo was like that. "Wait, sorry. I was just surprised. It's not my business." "Calvin's been gone a long time."

"Yeah, I know. I miss him still." "I do, too. Don't you think he'd like someone from the family helping take care of his boy? Maybe if you had kids, it would make more sense. I've been the one here going to his soccer games, going to help her when he had homework., helping Dad."

"I know. And I might have a kid, soon." "What? Aria? Isn't she older? Don't you want kids?" "Okay, stop. She is 40, and aren't you 35? But not Aria. I can't say much about it, but we might be adopting."

"About that. Um, Rose might be pregnant."

The surprises kept on coming. “Okay. I wouldn’t mind another niece or nephew.” It was hard to be that positive about this surprise yet, but I did my best.

“We want to tell Dad and Jeremy soon.”

“That would be good. I won’t say a thing to anyone.”

“Thanks. And it would be incredible if you guys adopted. Another kid for mine to play with. But I still need you at the garage. Want to come back and talk about it?”

“Sure, but I need to go work out first.” Most people would need a little time after all these family revelations, especially ones that touched on my late brother and his family, but the SEALs have taught me resilience, if nothing else. Very few grudges were worth holding on to. Still, my mind cast over memories of my brother and of all three of us growing up, with my late mother, too, as I grabbed my gear to go work out.

Ed looked at me but didn’t ask how the conversation went with my brother. “I’ve got all this covered. I can get pizza or something for dinner too if need be.”

I nodded. “Thanks. I will go talk to Marcus after working out. Not sure how long I’ll be. Let me know how it goes with Leo at the lawyer’s and with Tray.”

Ed nodded. “Go do what you have to do.”

Chapter Eleven

Aria

I’d just finished a long meeting on finances for an upcoming music festival when Ed texted. Ed couldn’t text in short sentences. I’d noticed that, and it was kind of endearing. But as I read through his long texts, I couldn’t believe everything that was happening to us.

A month ago, I thought a new job was the most excitement I'd have all year. My mind flashed on images of sex with all the guys, including the session with two at a time, and I realized I could never have fantasized accurately about all the exciting things coming my way.

A blush spread across my cheeks again as I reached my desk. As soon as my bottom hit the chair, I heard someone call my name.

Leo and Tray were next to my desk, with the baby carrier.

“So we can adopt the baby, but the lawyer thinks it might be better if we have legal status among us.” Leo said in the conference room a few minutes later. “We can foster the baby now with a legal arrangement, then adopt her when we can get papers signed by the birth mother, too. The lawyer has a private investigator who can help with that, too.

Tray was still showing the baby around to my colleagues, who welcomed that cute interruption.

Leo eyed me, looking uncomfortable. What he was saying dawned on me.

Was I really ready to do this? To take a huge jump like this so quickly?

“Sounds good,” I said. “How can we make this happen?”

A consultation with Ted and Tray helped us see we could do a Hopeton poly wedding, but in this case, I'd be legally married only to Leo, at least for now.

Ted let me leave early that day to go home and talk things over with the others.

A text from Ed startled me when I got in the car. “Molly's here, playing with Sarge.” I'd forgotten about Molly and Karyn, and hadn't even told Karyn why I was leaving early.

“Great, thanks,” I said to Ed. “Order pizza.”

Even though I'd only known them a short time, I'd heard the men tease Ed

about his love for pizza. I hadn't seen it yet, but expected he liked a lot. I added to the text. "My treat."

Then I headed home to discuss my wedding.

We hadn't even said "I love you." I still had to go on dates with Leo and Ed. This was crazy. But I knew I wanted the entire package. It wasn't just the baby. Elle clarified what I wanted, and that was these men, and to be a family.

My mother was going to be shocked, I thought. But I also suspected upon meeting Elle, that she would help us pull this together quickly.

"Hello," Ed greeted me at the door of the guys' home. "The pizza will be here soon." "How did you get it to happen that fast?" I kissed him and leaned against him.

"I know which places are the best and have them all on my phone."

"You're so smart," I said, still not moving.

"Hey," he said. "Are you okay? Nothing has to happen fast. We can take our time with all these decisions."

I nodded. "I am okay. Just getting my bearings. And nothing's happening that I don't want. I just thought we'd date for a little while longer."

He laughed. "You mean before we get married and have a baby? Where's the fun in that?"

"Hi," Molly was still with Sarge in the backyard, but she was doing homework on a table. I saw a generous snack of crackers and cheese, with a glass of milk on the table besides her school laptop.

"How are you doing?"

She shrugged. "How would you feel about my boyfriend coming to stay in your house, too?"

"If it's okay with Karyn, it's not up to me." She smiled, the first time I'd

seen her do that. “Seriously?”

“How old are you?” I asked. “And of course I’m serious. You and he have to make some decisions and need time and privacy to do that.”

I didn’t know where these ideas were coming from, but I wanted to be supportive. What if Elle was pregnant as a teen many years down the road? I would not kick her out, and I would try to work with her boyfriend. I thought it was admirable that Molly’s boyfriend wanted to be part of the process.

“I’m 17. I’ll be 18 next August. I was supposed to be going to State next year. It’s where my mom went, and she wants me to go there. But what if I want to keep my baby?” I thought about how comforting Ed’s words were to me. “You have time and options. I’m happy to provide you with a house to help you sort through all of it.”

“Thank you!” She got up to hug me, and I could feel how thin she was outside of her belly. “And I heard there’s even pizza coming.”

“There is, as much as you want, though you might have to fight a Navy SEAL for some.”

The impromptu pizza party ended up including Molly’s boyfriend Patrick, Tray and Elle, and my mom, who wanted to come see the baby as soon as I told her about the possibility.

She treated Tray like family also, and I could see that helped the stressed young man a great deal. He seemed relieved and happy that things were coming together for him, and for Elle.

When I walked her out to her car later, holding a sleepy Elle, she turned to me with tears in her eyes. “I’m so happy for you. All of you. This is a wonderful family. Don’t worry about the speed of all this. When your dad left, it made me realize that sometimes there is no time to wait. You’re giving

that young man his dream, and his daughter a wonderful home.”“I love you, Mom. I don’t know how you did it.”

“We helped each other, sweetheart. Just as all of you will do.”

And I knew she was right.

The men had almost finished clearing up the paper plates and cups. I helped Tray put Elle in her car seat and take her out.

“I know I’m doing the right thing for her, Aria.” He said as I hugged him. “You’ll always be a part of our family, Tray.”

He kissed my cheek and went off back to the room where he was staying. I suspected he would stay with us for future holidays and when he was in town.

“Having three guys sure comes in handy for clean up,” I said, when I went back in.

They laughed and took turns kissing me.

Then I suggested they sit down. “So much is happening,” I said. “I just wanted to take a moment and tell all of you I love you. Elle is moving our timeline forward, but when you guys had to leave on that last trip, I could picture a future together with you. I might not have babies with each of you as I’d like to, but this here, among all of us, our relationship, is the rock on which everything forward will spread out.” Ed cleared his throat. “I love you, Aria. I always will.”

“I love you,” Grant said. “I knew it when we saw you with your head on your steering wheel.” “I love you so much,” Leo said.

I yawned, and they laughed. “Not to break up this momentous day, but I’m wiped. So much has happened.”

“So true,” Grant said. “Should we push the couches together and just sleep?”

“No,” Ed said. “I can’t do that couch. I could bring my sleeping bag and

stay on the floor next to you guys, though.

Somehow that worked. We all wanted to be in the same room and the bed wasn't coming until the next week. I was asleep almost as soon as I stretched out on the couch.

Chapter Twelve

Ed

When Grant returned from taking Aria to work the next day, we had a few minutes to talk before Leo had practice, and Grant had his first day at the garage.

"Listen, guys," I said. "My mom has been holding my grandma's engagement ring for me for a long time. It has an emerald, ruby, and sapphire. She and my grandpa found it at an estate sale when they were just starting out, and my grandpa bought it in case."

"Three stones," Grant said.

"Yes," Leo said. "That sounds perfect."

"In all the hurry to get everything legally ready for our new family, we want to make sure we still romance Aria. It would be too easy to fall into our work and our baby routine. Let's let her know she is still first with us. I think that is what she was trying to do with the love confession last night."

"Yes," Leo said again. "You're right."

"Now, Leo, you and I should still have our dates with her."

"Mine might be when we marry at City Hall." Leo grinned.

I nodded. "Be sure to take her to a special dinner afterwards. I want to take her to a winery not too far from where my mom lives."

The guys were nodding.

"I'm worried about money," Leo said. "If something happens to me, she'll get military benefits, but I'll be making an assistant coach salary until I figure

out what comes next.”

“Nah, we’ll all share funds, and if something happens to you, we’ll take care of her,” Grant said.

“Absolutely,” I said. “I have campus benefit information, and it extends to a group arrangement like ours. I mean, it’s Hopeton.”

“I’ll bet her benefits are good at City Hall, too.”

Grant’s statement seemed to make Leo worry, judging from the furrow between his eyebrows.

“Listen, Leo, are you having second thoughts?” I felt a little impatient. He got to marry her first, legally. What was his problem?

“Either of you is a better bet than me.”

There was silence for a minute, then Grant slapped him on the back of the head. “Stop it. You’re just nervous. I sure hope you aren’t referring to your limp.” “You’re a Navy SEAL, Leo,” I echoed, resisting the urge to hit him as well. “You’re a hero. You’re already a coach on a new hockey team and are getting one of your players to the NHL. Aria is proud to be your wife and our wife.”

He nodded, though rubbing the back of his head a little. Then he smiled. “Damn right.”

“Now get your dress uniform and I’ll get it cleaned on my way to talk to my Mom.”

I took all three dress uniforms to the cleaners in town on my way to see Mom. The clerk actually asked if a wedding was happening, and I just smiled and said you never knew when the dress uniforms might be needed.

My Mom was busy with a feline patient this time, stitching up a cut on a cat who was asleep.

“We had to knock her out, but I’m almost done,” Mom said after I kissed

her cheek, not wanting to move her from her delicate work.

“It’s nice seeing you again so soon, Ed,” she said. “But is there a reason?”

“I need the ring.” The shout from my Mom should have woken the cat, but it didn’t. She threw her arms around me and hugged me.

An hour later, we were back in the diner, with the ring, and of course her patient was fine.

“I’ve waited for this day,” Mom was dabbing at her eyes. “But what about your brother?”

I knew this next part would make her even more excited than the idea of me getting married. “We’re in kind of a hurry. There’s a baby.” She shouted enough that time to draw attention in the diner, but she said “It’s all good.”

People went back to their food, as I explained.

After I promised there would be a proper reception and party when we all got married, and that she and Rick would be there, I drove back. To my delight, the same day cleaners made good on their word.

When I pulled up at the house, I saw Molly and a young man in front of Aria’s house. The young man had a few bags. Before Molly could lift one bag, I hurried over there.

“I’ve got that,” I said, though the young man had reached for the bag, too.

“Ed, this is my boyfriend, Patrick. Aria said he could stay here, too, and it’s okay with his parents.” Molly looked scared.

“Sounds good,” I said. “Why don’t you guys come over for a snack after getting Patrick settled in?”

“Grandma Karyn is headed home soon, too.” Molly’s eyes widened as another car pulled into Aria’s driveway.

“Mom.” She said in a quiet voice.

I stayed where I was after I saw a very thin woman with dark hair like

Molly's, hurry out of her car and approach the kids on the porch of Aria's house.

"Molly. I'm your mother. Get in my car this instant. Get away from that boy. I've already called the police. I'll have him arrested." "Hello, I'm Ed Arendson." I tried to step between her, and where she was trying to grab Molly's arm. "Why don't we all sit down and talk about this?"

"Shut up. This is none of your business. Now, Molly, or I'll have him arrested." I was kind of glad the police were called, and I wasn't at all sure Molly's mom could compel her to go when her mother was acting in a violent manner.

"Ow." Molly said. "Stop it, Mom. I'll come with you, but you need to leave Patrick alone!"

"Ma'am. Let's all calm down." I put some SEAL in my voice that time, and Molly's Mom looked at me.

Molly wrenched her arm away, and in doing so, fell backward onto the step.

"Stop!" I said as her mom went to grab her. Patrick hurried over and helped Molly up. "Are you okay?"

"I'm good, really." "Molly, come with me right now." The woman continued to try to reach Molly. "She took a pretty hard fall there. Let's not let anything else happen to her." I heard sirens.

"Get the hell out of here!" Molly's mom yelled to Patrick. "You get out, too!" She could try to say that to me, but I had dealt with worse foes than her. Many times. "No, that will not happen. Now it's time for everyone to calm down."

"Don't tell me what to do. This is my daughter. And my grandchild." Spittle was coming out of the woman's mouth.

“And that’s the father of your grandchild. This is a stressful situation and yelling isn’t helping.” “Don’t patronize me, you jerk.” Only she didn’t say jerk. She used language that would have been at home with any group of military people in the camp.

I thought maybe she’d finish venting and go, but she made one more grab for Molly.

I got her arms, but she’d already slapped her already crying daughter. Who would have thought I’d need instincts for my neighborhood like I did on missions?

“What’s going on?” Two police officers had parked at an angle on the street and were hurrying over.

“This woman hit her daughter.” I said calmly, “I’m Sgt. Major Ed Arenson, Navy SEALs.” “Ma’am, is that true?”

But Molly’s mom was beyond words. “Get that boy away from my daughter!”

I was sure they could hear her for miles.

“Molly there fell when her mother first tried to grab her.” I said evenly. The cops looked to where Patrick had his arm around Molly and put Molly’s mom in cuffs.

“Sir, we’ll need a statement from you.” It was hard to hear the officer over Molly’s mom’s screaming. “Yes, Ma’am.”

“Have you taken something?” I heard an officer try to ask Molly’s mother.

Within a few minutes, it was over. Karen was home, and was going to run Molly to her doctor’s with Patrick. I gave her our new lawyer’s number and suggested she try to see about at least temporary custody.

By the time I got back to the house, Sarge was barking to go out. I let him out, then heard Grant and Aria come home. I patted my pocket for the ring

box. In all the excitement with Molly, I'd forgotten to put it in our safe.

"Hello," Aria said. "Karyn texted me she had to run Molly to the doctor? And that you were helping her?"

I gave her a kiss and held her close for a minute before telling her and Grant about the ugly scene.

"Her mom got arrested?" Grant asked, moving to pet Sarge.

"I think so. Or else they are just going to hold her for a while. I hope Molly and the baby are okay. Molly said her mom has never hit her before, but she yells a lot."

"It's such a stressful situation," Aria said. "I don't want to judge, but hitting her is way over the line. But I kind of hope Karyn, Molly, and Patrick can make their decision in peace. If her mother influences her too much, the kids might never recover."

"Our situation seems so easy in comparison," Grant said.

"Yes." Aria said. "You guys seem to make everything easier in my life."

Grant and I each hugged her again.

"There's leftover pizza," I said. "I ordered extra, and we have salad fixings."

"Yes," Aria said. "Let's eat. Leo can join us after practice." "After dinner, I want to take you to a dessert tasting at a winery on the other side of town." First, though, I went upstairs and put the ring in the safe.

Chapter Thirteen

Aria

I went back to my house to find a nice outfit to go out with Ed that night. It surprised me in the middle of everything that he still wanted to do our date, but he said he wanted to always put us and our relationship as a priority.

I found a plum colored wrap skirt and a soft black sweater. Black suede

ankle boots completed the ensemble. No one was back at this house yet, though Karyn told me that Molly was ok. The doctors said she and the baby were fine, though her blood pressure was a little faster.

No wonder. Mine felt a little fast thinking about the scene as Ed described it. Ed found out that the police released Molly's mom and warned her to stay away from the kids for now. I hope that worked.

Ed held open the door to the truck as I hurried back over. "Thank you, sir," I said, before getting in. I slid over to the middle, so I'd be next to him while he drove.

"This is nice," I said, resting my head on his shoulder while he drove.

"It is," he said. "I know neither of us are big drinkers, but they are pairing some with desserts, and I thought that might be fun." The winery looked ancient. It was in a remote area of the Hopeton, next to a lake. The hostess said it had been in the owner's family for a couple hundred years.

We were led to a table with a few other groups. One woman had two husbands. Another man had two girlfriends. There was a male couple, and some heterosexual couples.

As the tasting got underway, it amazed me at the way the rich plum wines complemented the dark chocolate.

"This one is amazing," Ed said at one point, feeding me a forkful of a dark chocolate cake.

I'd never been knowledgeable about wine, but this was fun.

Some employees discussed the history and where the grapes were cultivated. Some were grown right here in Hopeton.

"It's magical," I said, tasting a bite of caramel cheesecake with a white wine.

Ed clinked his glass with mine. "We will have to get a couple of bottles of

these. Some desserts are for sale, too.”We’d had enough by about the fifth pairing, and went for a walk on the grounds. “It’s lovely here,” I said.

“You’re lovely.” He said, giving me a quick kiss.

“Ed,” I said. “Do you think you’ll miss the Navy?”

“I’ll miss seeing the guys in my SEALs group. I won’t miss the travel and some things we had to do.”I squeezed his hand. “I’m sure you all have a bond.”“Yes. I would be lost if I wasn’t at least living with some of the guys, as we are. We are telling the other guys about Hopeton. I think a couple more of them may settle into groups in our town.”

“That’s nice. I look forward to meeting them.”When we got back to the truck, I saw we had messages that Molly was doing well and was spending the night at the hospital.

When we got home, Grant and Leo were watching a basketball game.

“Listen,” Leo said after I gave each of them a kiss. “How would you feel about getting married tomorrow?”

Unbelievably, we’d fell asleep on the couches again, after discussing the wedding plan. Even Leo could sleep soundly that night. I would have thought I’d be up late with excitement over the upcoming wedding, but so much had been happening I was soon asleep.

The next morning, I met my mom at a bridal shop just outside of town. I’d taken the morning off, and Ted was going to marry Leo and me after lunch. Just my mom, Grant, Ed, Leo, Frank, and I would be in attendance. Ed’s mom was also going to come. Leo said he would invite his extended family to the reception party we were planning for a Saturday in a few weeks.

“How about this one?” Mom asked me, pulling out another white tulle number.

“No, that’s not it, Mom.”

The young woman working in the store had a nose piercing and pink hair. “My sister designs most of these. It’s her shop. But I am good at alterations, and I’m going to school in design, too.”

She came over to me. “No white, right? How about blue?”

“Do you have anything in Navy?” I loved the idea of blue, and Navy blue seemed fitting.

She grinned. “I have something. Do you like lace?”

The dress was a navy silk sheath, overlaid with a draped white lace piece, connected at the shoulder and wrist.

“It looks good on you,” my mother said. “It is different for a wedding dress. But then, everything about this is different.” She dabbed at her eyes. “You’re so beautiful.”

And I knew we had a dress.

As we waited for it to be bagged up, Rose came into the store. I was so surprised to see her it took me a second to take it in.

“Are you here for a wedding dress?” She asked me. “Hi, Rose. I altered the waistband of your dress. You’re set for your fitting.” The clerk called over. Rose and I stared at each other. “I’m marrying Marcus,” she said. “Frank doesn’t know yet.” And the waistband? I thought. Then I hugged her and said “Congratulations.”

My mom brought over the dress. “We’d better get going, Aria.”

And we did.

“Mom,” I said to her when we were seated across from each other at a diner a little while later. “I didn’t mean to ask you to pay for the dress. I have a good job now.”

“I want to pay for the nursery for Elle, too,” My mother said.

“How can you?” My mother worked as a legal secretary for years to

support us.

“Bitcoin.”

And I thought I’d encountered all the surprises in my life. “Can you teach me?”

At one that afternoon, Ted married Leo and I. He, Grant, and Ed all wore their dress uniforms, and I started crying at the sight of them.

“Come on, now, no tears,” Ed said. “I know Leo’s a bit much.”

That made me laugh. Before I knew it, we were repeating the traditional vows in front of our other two partners, Frank, my mother, and Viola, Ed’s mother, who’d rushed over from her job.

Karyn brought in a cake, and after the ceremony, we not only signed the license, but also the foster care license.

“This ring is perfect,” I said to Viola. “I consider all the men equal.”“Well, that’s all right.” She gave me a hug. “I’ve been waiting for this day. And I hear there’s a grandbaby.”Tray came in then, wearing a dress shirt and black pants. Elle had on a cute flowered dress.

“I got that call,” he said to Leo. I’d heard it as I was next to him.

Leo grinned. “Let’s have a toast.”

To my surprise, Ed brought out a couple of bottles of champagne from the winery. Soon we each had a glass. “To Leo, Aria, Grant, and Ed. The parents of my beautiful girl.”“And to Tray, who will always be a member of our family,” Leo said. “And to St. Louis’s newest NHL team member.”

Epilogue

Aria

I finished making up our new XL King bed when the men thought I was having a bath for myself after the wedding. When Tray and Elle left to go

sign more papers at his lawyer's office, and the parents left, we had Ted do vows again for all of us.

The men thought we were headed out to a place called Fantasy Inn. I'd actually made that reservation for the weekend. My Mom and Frank were on call in case Elle could be placed with us before then. If she wasn't with us yet, Karyn would watch the house with Molly and Patrick for a few nights. Karyn was working on getting guardianship of Molly, or helping her become an emancipated minor. I felt confident that they would work things out so Molly and Patrick could decide if they wanted to raise their baby or place it for adoption. Ed would help them both enroll in Hopeton University. Ted told me when I came back to work the next week, he wanted me to research the feasibility of an adoption agency for poly families in Hopeton. So many good things were happening.

But tonight I wanted us to have our first night on our bed, all together.

I put on the negligee with hearts that I'd received as a birthday gift, what felt like a long time ago.

I went downstairs to find the men enjoying a pizza.

"Ed? You ordered more?"

"We didn't want to rush you and figured this would tide us over until dinner."

I saw a lot of pizzas in my future.

"I've moved our reservation to the weekend," I said.

Leo came to hug me. "Is that why you're wearing this fetching thing?" He teased one of the spaghetti straps until it slid off my shoulder.

"It is, in fact. Our bed awaits."

Ed quickly closed up the pizza box, and Grant dumped his half-eaten piece in the trash.

Soon we were all on the bed.

“So, husbands, I don’t even know how this will work with all of us. Does one person watch?”

We all laughed, and I felt a lot less nervous.

“I bought normal condoms,” I said.

“As cute as that thing is you’re wearing,” Grant said, pulling me over his broad body, and sliding his hands on to my ass under the silk. “It’s time to take it off.”

Feeling six hands on me at once was better than any massage. “How will this work?”

Leo, sensing my slight apprehension, stopped biting my earlobe for a minute to whisper in my ear. “Eventually, we may want to take you in your rear and between your legs, but you’d need some prep for that. We’ll creatively take turns this time.”

The image in my mind of being with all of them at once like that, with one in my mouth too, was turning me on. “What about between my breasts?”

Ed groaned. “That’s a fantasy, but really, we don’t have to do everything at once.” I wanted to. “Do we have lube?”

Soon there were three mouths on me. I was kissing Grant, while Leo and Ed were each sucking hard at my nipples. I thought I could come like this.

I reached down to stroke whoever I would reach. From the groans, I got Leo and Grant in my hands.

Then I pulled my mouth off Grant’s for a moment to breathe. “I need someone inside me now.”

I felt like I was burning from the inside out. I raised up and kissed Ed passionately.

Hands were moving me as I kissed each of them, alternating. It felt amazing

to let myself stop thinking and let them all move and caress me.

Leo grabbed a condom from my fresh box.

“Finally!” I said. “Let me put it on.”

“No way, wife,” he muttered. “Your hand has worked me up so much I will be lucky if I can get you off before me.” “We’ll help with that,” Ed said. “Then we can have our turn that much faster.”

I laughed, something I’d never done in bed with anyone before, not even my late husband. Sex always seemed like such serious business. Now it was a lot more fun, and not just because there were more of us.

Leo pulled me backwards off Grant’s fabulous body, and as he moved to enter me from behind, I started sucking on Grant’s thick cock.

“That’s it, get him nice and wet.” Ed spoke in the low growly tone I only heard him use during sex.

Who knew the professor would be a dirty talker? I loved it. I lifted to stroke Ed. Then I decided, as he was kneeling next to me, that I could take him in my mouth, alternating with Grant.

Mostly this worked, though the feel of Leo’s thick cock stroking inside me, hitting all my pleasure spots, slowed me down.

Soon I felt the tingle and knew I was about to come. “Leo!” I screamed as I stroked Grant and Ed with my hands.

He was pressed so tight against me I could feel him throbbing deep inside. “That’s it, wife, come with me.”

And I did.

While I was catching my breath, I grabbed the condoms and put one on Grant, who was stroking my breasts. I slid right down on his long length and got nearly all of him inside.

His back bowed off the bed some. I watched his handsome face in pleasure

and knew I'd never forget a minute of this night.

“Losing energy?” Ed said, moving behind me. He had lube in his hand. “Don't worry. I know you're not ready for anal sex yet. But I had an idea.” Ed stroked himself with the lube, then pushed me down flat on Grant. I could feel him slip his cock in the crevice between my buttocks. From his groan, he enjoyed this.

Leo had recovered and was stroking my back.

I lifted my head and told him I wanted him in my mouth. He was already half hard again.

Grant's strong handed guided my hips on him, even as Ed moved behind me. I wouldn't have thought this would work, or that it would all be awkward, but it wasn't. It was lovely as we all moved together.

“I love you guys,” I whispered as their groans intensified.

Grant reached between us and stroked my clit, setting me off, which triggered his release.

Ed came all over my back, but I didn't care.

I was barely aware as they carried me into the filling tub.

Grant ran a washcloth over my back. “We love you, too, you know. Always.” Ed dropped a bath bomb into the water, and the other two teased him. “What?” He said. “I have a few. I could never get the feel of sand off me after our missions.”

“Maybe we should use them, too,” Leo said.

“No way,” I said. “There's only room for one here.” But as always, he surprised me, and fit in the tub, kissing me.

When Grant was rinsing my hair, and Leo was standing to rinse off, Ed came back in the bathroom. He'd gone to the other one to clean up.

“Will you still go to the fertility doctor?” He asked.

“That’s entirely up to you,” Grant cut in. “We’ll have Elle, and I’ll bet we will help my brother and Molly with their kids, too.”

“I’m not sure. I’ll go see what they have to say after the next tests. And we’ll decide together. But maybe we could look into surrogacy or something like that?”

As the men talked it over with me, I knew I would always have their respect and support. And, of course, I’d love them forever.

I fell asleep between Ed and Leo, with Grant on Leo’s other side, soon after that. And I knew that with all our found family members, that our life would be very busy and happy, and full of surprises.

You can enjoy more Hopeton stories, including [Voting for Love](#), the story of Mayor Ted, all on Amazon.

Chapter Six: Ed

Loud noises and clubs were never my scene. All three of us tensed up a bit in noisy crowds from things that happened while we were in the military, but I wanted to do this tonight. It felt like a normal date, a fun time with a woman.

I'd dated a little when I was home on leave, but mostly they'd been friends of whoever the guys in my unit dated.

While Aria and the guys were busy that afternoon, I went to visit my mom about an hour away, where she was a vet tech in the town where I'd grown up. She'd always encouraged me to read and love books and wanted me to be a professor. She didn't understand my need to join the military, but she was so proud. There was more than one sign supporting the military and the Navy in particular around the clinic.

The books made me long for adventure. By the time I'd finished my masters, I was competing in Iron Man competitions, and wanted to try a different type of challenge, one that would take me around the world. I hadn't imagined I would actually make it through the BUDS training to become a SEAL, or that I'd have the courage to do what I needed to do in that job. But

I'd done it, and met the men I loved as much as family, Grant and Leo. When they suggested we should all share with someone, and live in Hopeton, I knew it was right.

"You home for good now, Edgar?" Mom was adjusting the leg wrap on a German Shepard. The dog was leaning his body into her while she worked, as she frequently stopped to pet him and talk to him.

Being a Saturday, I knew his mother would be busy at work, but I hoped she could take time to have lunch. I wanted to tell her about Aria. I'd given her a hint that we'd met somebody, but I hadn't told her much yet. She'd been at a conference before we left.

"I think we might be home for good now, Mom. Leo and I still have to do some training courses, but we wouldn't have to go further than San Diego, and it wouldn't be for long stretches. Grant is going to run maneuvers at the base for the next couple of months, too."

"He's going to work in his brother's garage, isn't that right?"

At my nod, she continued.

"That's nice. And you're going to be teaching at the university. I'm so proud of you."

"Yes. I like the faculty and program there, and they said they would let me finish my PhD while I was there. I want to publish the research I did for my master's dissertation, or do something about military history."

"That's amazing," she said. "My son, the doctor."

She finished up with the dog and helped him walk a few steps on the floor. Then she looked up at me. I noticed more grey at the temples of her hair than I'd previously seen.

"Listen, I don't suppose you guys are ready to have an animal in that house of yours, are you? I've got a dog out back that has three legs. He's the cutest

thing, and he's just looking for the right home."

I had always said no to her when she asked about animals in the past, as I never knew when I'd be called away, but now maybe I could take one. "I don't know, Mom, we just got back. Let me talk to the guys. And we have a new girlfriend."

She stopped what she was doing and looked up, smiling. The German Shepard barked, and she patted his head. "I haven't forgotten you, Oreo."

"That German shepherd's name is Oreo?" I shook my head at that fluffy name for this big dog.

"It's a cute name," she said. "Don't mind him, Oreo."

"How many dogs do you have now, Mom?" "Well, I have four at home, but you know, maybe you would like one of those?"

I couldn't resist, and petted Oreo's head. "I'll talk to the guys, Mom, I promise. But listen, have you ever thought about dating again after Dad died?"

Mom looked at me. "Son, I do date. I just don't always tell you about it. You've been in the SEALS for four years. Rick went to college a year after you left. I don't just sit around all the time hoping you and your brother will contact me. You two are out having your own lives, which is what I wanted. I have my own life."

"Are you dating anyone serious, Mom?" Rick told me he thought Mom had a boyfriend during our last conversation, which was a few months ago. I knew Rick wanted to look for a place in Hopeton, too. I'd suspected at the time that Rick was looking for his own poly relationship with his roommate from college, Gavin.

I loved my Mom and brother, but my focus for the past four years had been all about the military. The cycle of training and going on missions was my

entire life.

“Well, now that you mention it, there is someone I would like you and your brother to meet. Tim and I have gone out several times. I’ll tell you about him at lunch. Let me get Oreo here, back out to his human.”

As she grabbed her purse, I couldn’t resist asking a few more questions.

“How’d you meet Tim, Mom?”

“Oh, I was on Bumble. Isn’t that how everyone meets now?”

I didn’t want to think about my mother on a dating app. “What’s he like, Mom? What does he do?”

“Well, it turns out he’s also a mechanic, and he knows Marcus,” she said. “Sometimes they swap parts, and they both belong to the same union. I told him you were in the Navy with Marcus’s brother, and he thought that was amazing.”

“I hope he knows you’re amazing, Mom.” I said.

She turned and kissed my cheek. “You’re such a good boy, Edgar. Tell me about your new girlfriend.”

“Aria is terrific,” he said. “She lives next door to us, of all things, in her own townhome. She’s an accountant. We like her a lot.”

Mom smiled as I babbled on about Aria. “Do you think you three will be happy sharing her?”

“I really do, Mom. I know we will.”

She nodded as we walked towards the waiting area. “That’s that then. I’ve heard there’re all kinds of groups that are happy in your town. Maybe I should get myself three or four guys.”

She laughed at the expression I must have had on my face. “No,” she said, “I’m pretty happy with Tim.”

“We’ll have you both over soon, and Rick, too. You can meet her then.

Grant keeps talking about getting a fancy grill. We could have you guys over for a barbecue.”

After she delivered Oreo to the mom and teen waiting for him, she pulled me to the backyard of the clinic to look at the three-legged dog.

The dog was very cute, some kind of poodle, I thought. It was fascinating how he walked with ease, even on three legs. It waited for me to pet him, then licked my fingers.

“What's his name?” I asked.

“Killer,” she said, “But I don't like that name. I'm hoping somebody would give him a different name. That was on his tag. The previous owner left him at the side of the road. When we contacted him, he said he couldn't care for him anymore.”

“Sarge.” It popped into my head. He did kind of look like a Sergeant who did some of our initial training. While tough, that man was determined to get us through the program. I couldn't believe the things I found myself doing for that man. I took a few pictures and sent them to Grant and Leo while Mom and I had lunch.

Two hours later, I was on the route back home with Sarge and a lot of equipment Mom and her co-workers gave me.

“See, most people here are in groups,” Aria said to me much later, when we were slow dancing at Mayor Ted's pub. “We fit right in.”

She fit nicely against me, with her head against my shoulder. My mind flashed back to the image of her spread naked on the counter. I wondered if we could eat meals off her that way. But I knew if I made that suggestion now, she'd blush.

Her hands stroked over my back. “Do you think Sarge is okay at the house?”

Aria had been as thrilled with Sarge as the guys were. Leo already took him for a short walk, and the animal was asleep in a huge pen in our study when we left.

“We won’t stay long,” I said. I was hoping to leave after the next set. We could only hear each other during this break when Ted played music over the loudspeaker. I wasn’t sorry that we’d listened to the band, though. We’d scored a table early and had taken turns sharing appetizers with Aria. She’d rotated among each of us during the songs, sitting on our laps. She seemed determined to give us equal time, but we didn’t care about that.

It got me going even seeing the others pleasure her, or have her on their laps. I would never have imagined that. We hadn’t even tried dating the same woman before, but somehow this was working naturally for us.

“Do you think Sarge is okay?” Leo asked as we went back to the table.

Aria kissed him, then pulled him up to dance.

Leo had told us he couldn’t dance as we got ready to go out that night and was worried about his leg. Somehow Aria sensed that and included him in slow dancing. She didn’t fast dance at all.

“That dog is going to be spoiled rotten,” Grant said. “My dad and Jeremy want to come see him soon.”

The band took the stage again when Aria and Leo returned.

“Do you mind if we go now?” Aria asked. “I’m beat, and I want to check on Sarge.”

We knew she wanted to come home with us, as she’d mentioned it casually when she came over to see Sarge. It felt right to bring her with us into the house.

“Do you need to get anything next door?” Leo asked.

“No, I brought over some clothes and a toothbrush before, along with my

contacts case.”

“I’ll bet you look cute in glasses,” Grant said.

“You’ll find out tomorrow. I can sleep with the contacts sometimes, but I don’t like to do that often,” she said, stifling a yawn.

“We don’t have to say up,” I said as we all peeked in the study to find Sarge still asleep. “If you’re tired, why don’t you call it a night?”

I held my hand out to her, and she took it. “I’ll sleep in your bed next time,” she said to Leo.

“We aren’t keeping track,” he assured her with a kiss. “But that would be nice.”

“I don’t know how to do all this,” she said, looking at all of us. “How do I make sure none of you feel left out?”

“Let’s keep talking about it,” Grant suggested. “We’ll learn as we go. We’ve never done this before, either.”

That seemed to settle her, and after I’d brushed my teeth, I returned to my Queen bed to find her already asleep. I gathered her into my arms and fell immediately asleep.

In the morning, it surprised me that Sarge didn’t wake me. He’d been out a long time and would need to go to the bathroom.

Leo was outside with him when I heard a bark outside. Leo was tossing a tennis ball and Sarge was fetching it.

My shower was running. I had my own bathroom with my room, and Leo and Grant shared one. I guessed that meant Aria was in my shower.

“Sorry, I have to use the toilet,” I said to her when I walked in.

I finished my business and brushed my teeth so I could kiss her when the curtain opened.

“Want to join me?” She asked.

Chapter Seven: Aria

With Charlie, I'd waited until our sixth date to sleep with him. We'd fooled around some, but even when I slept with him, it was more because I felt like I should at that point. With these guys, I couldn't wait another minute. And it wasn't because they were hot, younger guys. I cared about them, and was already seeing a future with them.

I opened the shower curtain after I heard Ed finish his business and start brushing his teeth. I was glad I'd brought over a razor with my toothbrush and had shaved my legs and elsewhere, as had always been my habit since I was with my husband all those years ago.

Ed's hungry gaze on me told me this was the right move. I held out my hand, and he took it, coming towards me. "Wait," I said after he kissed me across the edge of the tub. "Take off your clothes. And do you have protection?"

The fertility doctor told me that my chances of conceiving were slim at this point. But they started me on fertility pills and would do a reading of my eggs and hormones next month. But I still had to talk about all that with the men, and didn't want to force any decisions yet.

He rummaged in a few drawers, which made me smile. Clearly he hadn't been expecting this and didn't have a woman over for sex often, if the way he couldn't find condoms at first meant anything.

"Here we go," he said, pulling out a strip of neon pink condoms.

At my grin, he shrugged. "One of our team got married a while back and we all got these as party favors. None of the three of us slept with the entertainment, I promise you. And we were just tested again before that last trip." "I trust you," I said. And it was a shock to realize I did trust all of them. Trust, after my husband Brent's death, took a long, long time. I didn't trust anyone in my life not to leave me. I didn't trust in any happiness for my future.

Everything about my relationship with these men was different, and not just the fact that there were three of them.

Ed finished undressing and stepped into the steamy shower with me. I was grateful for the two showerhead arrangement in the spacious tub, as he was a big guy, everywhere. I was shaking.

"Hey," he said. "We're just showering. That's all we have to do." His thick, erect cock touched my belly as I moved in to kiss him, and I knew I wanted to do more. My hand closed over him, stroking, and he sighed.

"If we are going to make love, you'll need to stop that amazing stroking soon or I won't last."

I loved he referred to sex that way. And it felt that way, for sure. This would change things with the men, and there was no going back or wondering what my decision would be.

As we kissed, I wondered how this would work physically in the tub. I hoped I didn't have a hip cramp and have to stop partway through.

"Stop thinking," he murmured, then lifted my foot to the ledge of the tub.

Pleasure quickly replaced any embarrassment at being exposed that way, as he stroked over my folds.

He made a growling noise as I stroked his cock more firmly. He slipped two fingers inside me, searching for that very sensitive place deep inside.

“Oh!” I said out loud as he stroked over a very sensitive spot.

Grinning, he kept stroking over that spot.

“I need you,” I said, sensing myself spiral upwards. “I want you inside me.”

For a big man, Ed could move quick. He grabbed his condom from the ledge where his razor sat and worked it on. He’d opened it already to make this easier, I’d noticed gratefully.

“You’ll have to help me,” he said.

I wasn’t sure what he meant until he picked me up under my bottom. My legs straddled him, and I tried to push down on his cock.

“Sweetheart, there’s no hurry,” he said, kissing me again.

“But you could guide me when you are ready.”

I did and soon felt him stretching me open. I couldn’t seem to relax and let him in further.

Then I felt one of his fingers teasing along my back hole. And it didn’t feel bad. Who knew there were nerves there?

He bit my earlobe and tried to work his fingertip in, and I felt myself sink further down on his cock.

“That’s it,” he said. “Take all of me.” I wasn’t sure that was possible, but it felt like a lot of him was inside me.

“You good?” He asked, biting my earlobe again.

“Oh, yes,” I said.

He moved so I was braced against the tile. I didn’t care that it was cool against my skin as he gripped my hips. The angle caused him to rub against

my clit with every thrust. Thrust even felt like the wrong word, as it was a smooth movement.

I wanted to get closer, to take more of him inside me. I opened my mouth wider as he kissed me passionately while working my body into a frenzy of sensation and pleasure.

“Come with me,” he said, his fingertip teasing my back entrance again.

And I did.

“I’m leaving to get the food and the Rolls,” Grant was saying much later, as I still dozed on Ed’s bed. I heard the men talking down in the kitchen.

Ed had carried me in here after our shower, and I’d fallen asleep. As I sat up now, I felt some soreness inside. I was pretty sure I hadn’t been with anyone that big. What if the other two were also that big? Clearly, it was time for me to do yoga or some kind of stretching again.

My hair had dried into a mess, so I took another quick, hot shower, and found myself moving easier than.

When I went downstairs, Leo said “Good afternoon.” That stopped me in my tracks. “I’ve never slept this late.” “It’s only 11:30,” Ed said, pulling out the barstool next to me. “How are you doing?”

“Good,” I said, feeling myself blush.

Leo just laughed and put a bowl of cut fruit in front of me. “Grant went to get your lunch and the car for your picnic. We heard you guys this morning and let you sleep.” There was no sign of jealousy or any hint that now I owed him. He came over to kiss me, too, and said he would see me after my date with Grant. He was going to take Sarge with him to skate with the team.

“I’m so glad he is doing that,” I said to Ed, who turned off whatever he was reading on his iPad to talk to me.

“Play hockey? Yes, I’m glad too. I hope it won’t be too difficult. He’ll

likely tell you about the injury sometime, but it is a miracle that he is walking again. Grant and I had a place near his rehab facility after Leo got out, when Frank mentioned he wanted to move.”

“I’m glad that happened,” I said.

“Me, too.” Ed said and kissed me.

We were still talking when Grant returned. He looked wonderful in a dark green polo with grey jeans.

“Okay, if we run to my house for a minute so I can change?” I’d said. “I feel underdressed.”

“It will just take a minute,” I said. “Or do you want to wait here?”

I hurried to put on a sweater and long skirt, as well as a soft blanket for our picnic, in case he didn’t have one.

I noticed him loading a waterproof tarp into the backseat of a beautiful Rolls Royce when I came back outside.

“Of course you thought of a tarp,” I said.

He grinned at me. “But your blanket is a good idea. I had nothing big and soft. The one we had is now in Sarge’s pen.”

“You look lovely,” he said, moving to kiss me as he opened the passenger side door.

Even sitting on the soft leather seats of the car felt luxurious. “This car is amazing.”

Grant pulled out of the driveway and started driving before replying. “We wouldn’t let Dad sell it. Marcus has it in mind to drive during weddings for some extra money. He keeps it at a storage facility his garage uses sometimes.”

“I love that idea.”

“It’s big enough to hold some groups for weddings around here,” Grant

said.

He held out his hand, and I held it between us while he drove us to a forest preserve outside of town.

“This is lovely,” I said as we moved to sit on the grass in a clearing off the parking lot. There was a small pond there, and a few other groups of people were having picnics or walking around.

“Yes, though this woods is rumored to have werewolves and bears.” “Bears? This near Chicago?” I laughed, but could see he was halfway serious. “Well, in that case, it’s lucky I have my SEAL boyfriend with me. Plus, I’ve lived near here for years and have never heard that before.”

“Oh yes,” Grant said. “I’d protect you, but if we see bears, we are getting out of here, fast.”

I loved that Grant could make me laugh so easily.

“Have you always wanted to help with your brother’s garage?” I asked, as we started unpacking the sandwiches, cheese, and fruit.

He nodded. “Yes, but I also wanted to join the military. I used to party with our brother Calvin, the one who died, after our mother died. When he died, I needed to do something else, to straighten myself out.” “You might have done that at home.” He shrugged. “I’m not sure. I was afraid about it, and Marcus and my dad supported me going for the Navy, as my grandpa did. None of us believed I’d go for the SEALs or pass the training. As soon as I met Ed and Leo, we clicked instantly. We got each other through training, and then through missions.”

“That’s wonderful.” I gave him a quick kiss. “I’m glad you joined the Navy.”

“Yes. I might not have lived if I kept on the path I was on. And now here we are. I might take classes in automotive training, as my brother wants me

to get training on electric cars.”

“That sounds really interesting,” I said.

“How did you get into accounting?” He devoured the second sandwich.

I’d wondered why he brought so much food and now realized Grant liked to eat. “I met my husband when we were in high school, and we went to Hopeton U at the same time. He was in marketing. We planned to start our own business, maybe an accounting firm. But then he died, and I was glad I had the degree. Numbers made sense and gave me something to rely on during those first terrible years.” He nodded. “That makes sense. But you didn’t marry again?”

I shook my head. “At first I was just surviving. My Mom and I helped each other a lot in those days. I always thought I’d meet someone, and even though I tried the online dating things, no one felt right.” Until now, I thought.

“I’m glad you waited,” Grant said. “We’ll convince you we’re right.” I didn’t doubt it.

When we got back to the house, I decided it might be a good time to talk to them all about the fertility treatments. But then we saw that Rose, Frank, and Jeremy were at the house, playing in the backyard with Sarge.

“This was a lovely date,” I said.

“It was,” he said. “We should do it again. Just being able to plan dates and have fun, peaceful afternoons like this will take some getting used to for me.”

I could imagine. “Are the others having trouble getting used to the idea of retiring, too?”

“Yes, especially Leo. He still has trouble sleeping sometimes, remembering the day he was shot.” “Oh, Leo.”

“Don’t let on that I told you that.” “No, I won’t say a word.” “Hey you guys, how was the date? You returned the Rolls already?” Leo was getting out of

his truck before we got into the house.

“It was amazing,” I said. “And we went to get his car and bring Frank home for pizza, but he wasn’t in his home.” “He’s here, with Rose and Jeremy, playing with Sarge,” Grant said.

“Of course,” Leo said.

Grant and I said nothing, as we noticed his limp was more pronounced than usual.

Leo took a hockey stick and his bag of gear out of the back. “That was pretty fun today. I ended up coaching some guys, and the head coach asked me to come back tomorrow. I’m better at coaching than anything else, now, though I did okay with the skating.” “You’re amazing,” I said, moving to put my arm around him as we all walked into the house.

“I feel old,” he said, laughing.

“Then what am I?” I said, as we joined the hyper poodle and people in the backyard.

“Sarge likes me!” Jeremy said, coming to hug me.

“Of course he does.” I said.

“Maybe we have to be a little calmer with him,” Rose cautioned.

“I just ordered some pizza,” Ed said, from where he was tossing the tennis ball with Sarge.

“Next time invite your Mother, too,” Frank said to Aria.

“She’d like that,” I said, wondering how much she and Frank were going to like each other.

My phone buzzed, and I saw the name of one of my colleagues, Karyn. She was an admin from work and was a kind person. She’d been at the party Friday night.

“Aria? I’m sorry to bother you. Do you have a minute to talk?”

I moved back inside. “How are you?” I couldn’t imagine what this was about. We’d all exchanged numbers after they hired me, and Ted suggested it. What I hadn’t realized was that they were all getting my number so they could plan for the party.

“Well, I don’t know how to say this. I remember you saying you were going to the fertility clinic?” “Oh, yes.” I had mentioned that to her. I told the others I had an appointment, but she was such a nice, grandmotherly type. I felt like blurting out the truth when I’d left early on Thursday.

“My granddaughter is expecting a baby. And we’d like you to adopt it. Would that be something you’d be willing to talk about?” A few minutes later, I was dazed, getting off the phone with her.

“Everything okay?” Ed said, coming through to meet the pizza delivery person at the door.

“Yes, I think so. I want to talk to you three about something after everyone leaves. Nothing bad, I promise. But it might make some changes in my life.”

After Frank and the other left, Sarge immediately fell asleep in his bed.

“Jeremy loves that dog,” Grant said. “I’m glad you got him, Ed.”

“Me, too. My mom is already asking if Aria wants her own dog, though. I’ll hold her off as long as possible.” I laughed, and got out cups for hot chocolate and tea. Leo mentioned hot chocolate helped him sleep sometimes.

“Tell us what’s going on,” Leo said, leaning against the counter where I was boiling water.

“I went to a fertility doctor last week. I’d wanted to go for a while, and see if there was even a chance I could have a baby now. With this new job and turning forty, it seemed like the right time.”

I couldn’t tell from their expressions how they felt about that, so I continued. “I’m on fertility pills now, and I’ll go in and get hormones

measured and eggs and all that stuff after my next period starts.”

Grant gave me an encouraging smile, so I told all of it about my colleague’s call.

“I don’t even know what made me tell her about my appointment Thursday.”

“Does she know about us?” Leo asked.

“Yes, she was at the party. I think everyone got the idea then.”

Ed grinned. “No doubt.”

“So, we might have a baby?” Leo asked.

I couldn’t help it. I burst into tears.

Chapter Eight: Leo

We all rushed forward to hug Aria.

“Why are you crying?” I asked her. “That all sounds good to us. Did you think we wouldn’t want kids? We didn’t bring that up yet because we didn’t know how you’d feel about it.” Ed finished making the tea and cocoa, and we sat down with her at our dining room table, rather than squeeze around the bar counter.

“I don’t know,” she said in a whisper. “It all seems too good to be true.”

“You know, I think we understand that,” Grant said. “We never trusted a quiet day on a mission. And you’ve lost one husband.”

“I might not be able to have kids.”

“I probably can’t, either,” I said. “The damage done to my leg affected my groin, too. Oh, I can still perform.” Grant and Ed laughed, and after a minute, Aria did, too. “You know, that wouldn’t have mattered to me,” she said. “We can always get creative.”

“Let’s get married.” I said.

Everyone kept laughing, but I was only halfway kidding.

Soon, Aria was yawning as we laughed and talked about other things. We

knew we'd revisit the baby discussion, but not tonight.

"I know you said you'd go back to your house tonight," Grant said, "but we'd love it if you'd stay. We'll make sure you're up on time for work."

She hesitated, and I knew we had to give her space when she needed it. But I just didn't know if this was one of those times after she was upset.

"I'd like that," she said.

"It was Grant's date day," I said.

"It's all good with me," Grant said. "I know you are tired. Why don't you have a bath and get into bed? I'll be up in a while?"

She looked grateful. Definitely time to give her a little space.

After she went upstairs, we heard the bathwater running.

"What a weekend," Ed said. "I'd love all the options she mentioned."

"Agreed," I said. "But we don't want to push her into a future with us or into creating an instant family, much as we might want it."

"For sure," Grant agreed. "Let's keep on with our dating plan."

The guys and I watched the game, and then I realized a quarter had passed. "Is Aria still in the tub?"

We all got to our feet and headed up the stairs.

"Honey? You okay?" Ed opened the door as I called out.

"She's just asleep," Grant said, reaching into the tub and pulling her out. A lot of the water had drained out of the tub.

"Thank goodness for that leaky plug," I said. "What if she'd fallen asleep and slid underwater?"

"What?" She was waking up. "I'm okay, Grant. You can put me down." "No, Ma'am," he said, moving her to his bed.

Ed pulled blankets over her. "I'm all wet," she said. "I can get dry."

I could see her teeth were chattering. "I'm going to go get some more tea."

“Good idea,” Ed said.

By the time I made it and got it upstairs, she was sitting up in the bed, with Grant and Ed on either side of her, sitting under a pile of blankets. Ed looked like he was sweating.

“Here’s your tea,” I said.

“She’s still shaking. Let me help you, Aria,” Grant said. He took the tea and helped her hold it.

“I’m really okay,” she said, laughing.

I noticed she drank some tea, though.

“So, are we all sleeping in here?” I said, only half joking.

“Sounds good,” Ed said. Now Ed was the biggest of us, and none of us were small men.

“Maybe we’d do better on the couches downstairs, pushed together. Like a huge bed.” Aria suggested.

And that’s what we did. Within a half hour, Grant and Ed were on either side of her on the couches. I took Sarge out in the backyard one more time. I’d learned already that I had to wake him up to go one more time at night.

I would rather have been next to Aira, but I was okay sleeping next to Grant. It wasn’t the first time the three of us had to bunk under tight circumstances.

And clearly, it wouldn’t be the last.

In the morning, Aria’s phone alarm went off. Then Sarge started barking. I got up to take him out. “Were you able to sleep at all?” She asked me when I got back.

“Yes,” I said, not wanting to tell her about some places we’d had to sleep.

Grant was stirring. I waved him back. “I’ve got her. I’ll take her to work. I’m going to go work out with the team this morning, too.”

“Awesome. I’m so glad you are hanging out with them. I know they had a core group of players and wanted to add more.” Aria smiled.

“I’ll never be well enough to join them. Plus, they make me feel like an old man.” “You’ve had a world of experience compared to them,” Aria said. “I’ll hurry. I’ll be back in about 20 minutes.”

“No hurry,” I said. “I’m not showering until after practice.”

Sarge took his time exploring the room this morning. Nothing about having only three legs phased him. Watching him, I realized I hadn’t scheduled PT on the base since we got back. I made that call while waiting on Aria and learned I could head back there in the afternoon.

PT was humiliating many times, when I’d lose balance or not be able to do things. It would be worse today after the trip, though I actually did my stretches while we were gone. It surprised me at how good they felt after the travel and after long training and exploratory missions. Hopefully, it wouldn’t be so bad today.

Aria was back quickly and gave me a hug as I put Sarge back in his cage. “Don’t the other two have anywhere to be? Should we wake them?”

“Nah, none of us can sleep really late anymore.”

“Military guys. I have some messy habits and like to sleep in sometimes. It will take some getting used to.”

“We will balance each other out,” I suggested.

She held my hand as we drove to her office.

“Oh! I forgot,” she said, looking at her phone. “A group of us is heading out after work for another team member’s birthday. I should have driven myself.” “You could text us when you’re ready.” “Actually,” she said. “I’d love it if you’d come. Any of you. All of you.” It was fun to be included in

her life like this. “Sounds fun,” I said. “Want to text me when you’re headed over there? I’ll let the others know.”

She nodded.

As we pulled close to her office, I parked. “I’m going to head to the bakery this morning before going to practice. Would you like anything from there?”

She nodded. “I have a little time before my meetings start today.”

I went around and opened her door. As I helped her down from the truck, she gave me a kiss.

We turned towards the bakery, and there was a line out the door.

“Must be a pie day,” I said. Most bakeries were closed Mondays, but the owner, Renee, kept the bakery and café open seven days now, with the help of college students.

Renee herself was behind the counter today. She came out to give me a hug. And to my surprise, she hugged Aria, too.

“Are you guys together now?” She asked.

I looked at her pregnant belly.

“Yes, we’re dating.” Aria said. “How are you doing?”

“I’m good. Three more months, and I think I eat as much as the customers when I’m here!”

I grinned. “How are the guys doing?” I knew Renee was married to three men.

“Really good. Are you three home now? Frank was telling us about it over the weekend.”

“Yes, they’re home. I’m dating all of them,” Aria said. She seemed to be announcing it to anyone who wondered, and the idea amused me. She was clearly getting used to the idea.

“That’s wonderful.”

Someone from behind the counter called Renee and she hurried off.

“I ate here a lot, even before I was hired at City Hall. I was working for a smaller firm and was laid off before this job,” she said. “I often had to come out here for the firm and of course, had my home here.”

“Aria!” An older woman was behind us, with a teenager wearing bulky clothes. I thought it was a girl, but she was well hidden.

“This is my granddaughter, Molly.”

“Hi, Molly. Leo, this is my colleague, Karyn. This is my boyfriend, Leo. I’m dating Leo, and his best friends Ed and Grant. They are retiring from the Navy SEALs.”

“Thank you for your service, young man.”

As I shook their hands, I realized this must be the woman who called Aria about the baby. And this was the pregnant girl? She looked pale and scared.

“I appreciate that,” I said. “Can I get everyone something?”

“My daughter was parking the car,” Karyn said.

They were joined by a very thin woman in a brown pantsuit. “Mother! I don’t know why we had to stop here. I have to meet with Molly’s school today.” “Crystal, this is Aria. I told you about my colleague.” “You’re Aria?” The woman looked Aria up and down, which seemed to cause Aria to straighten her tunic and slacks.

“This is one of my boyfriends, Leo. Nice to meet you. Your mother runs the place over at City Hall. I couldn’t do my job without her.” “Nonsense, Aria.”

But I could tell the woman was pleased.

Crystal snorted. “Not another woman with several guys. Forget it, mother. This won’t work. Molly, we’d better go. You don’t need to gain more weight, anyway.”

And they left. Molly seemed to want to say something to Aria.

Karyn sighed as we got to the counter. She pointed at a treat.

Aria told me what coffee Karyn liked, and I ordered for everyone, getting a whole apple pie to take home.

“We’d better get into the office,” Karyn said. “I’m sorry about that.”

“It’s fine,” Aria said. “I know feelings must be running high about the entire situation. Molly seems lovely.” “She is. My daughter is too much like my ex-husband. She resents everyone and everything.”

I handed each woman their coffees and pastries in a bag and walked out with them.

“Will she really not let Aria adopt the baby because of us?” I asked. It made me sick to think that the guys and I might cost her the chance to have a child.

“I don’t know how much she can stop it. Molly is seeing a counselor I’m paying for, and that lovely person is helping us set up the legalities. The birth father is willing to give the baby for adoption but is hoping to also have some contact in an open adoption.”

Aria nodded. “That makes sense. Is he a nice kid?”

Karyn nodded. “He is. Molly might still see him but my daughter threatened him with a rape charge if he was around her again.” The women were quiet on the walk to City Hall. When we arrived, I gave Aria a quick kiss on the cheek. “Just text me about later,” I whispered.

She seemed a little sad but squeezed my hand. “Thank you for everything this morning,” she said.

I drove home and walked in to the house to deliver the pie.

Both guys were up and having coffee. I told them about the interaction at the bakery.

“It might be hard for her to legally adopt if she’s with all of us,” Ed said. “We don’t want to stand in her way.” “Let’s not decide without her,” Grant

said, cutting an enormous piece of pie. “But we will let her know we support whatever she needs to do to get a child.” “I’m going to do a little legal research about options today,” Ed said. “I have to go to a Faculty meeting anyway, and will visit the library over there and get access to some of the legal databases.”

I glanced at my phone. “I’d better get to hockey practice. I wanted to tell you all about this first, though.” I let them know about the possible plans for later and headed to the rink.

Practice was in a neighboring town, as the Hopeton stadium was set up for a basketball game the next night. When I arrived, one of our players was carrying an infant seat and struggling with the door. I hurried over to help him.

“Hey Tray,” I said. “Who’s this?”

“Hey, Coach,” he said. “This is my daughter, Elle.”

It made me smile that some of the kids called me Coach already. And they all felt like kids, even though they were only a few years younger than me.

“Natasha left her with me. She’s my ex-girlfriend, and I didn’t even know about Elle, before. I don’t know anyone here yet. My Mom wants to help, but has to work at her job in Missouri, and is calling day cares for me. I have to visit some after practice.”

“Tell you what,” I said, after listening to all that. “I’ll watch Elle during practice.”

To my surprise, he gave me a hug. “I don’t know what to do. I want to play on this team so much, maybe have a chance at the NHL. But I love Elle already.”

By the time practice started, Elle was asleep in her seat behind the bench. Tray said she was four months old, but she seemed tiny. She didn’t wake

during the yelling for drills or during practice.

He had a bottle of formula made and I didn't wander too far from the bench, wanting to hear her.

I used to watch my neighbor's kids and my step-siblings when I was in high school, all the time. It was one reason going off to the military appealed. Order, and a place where my only responsibility was myself. My mother was mad at first, and I'm sure a lot of burden went to my oldest step-siblings, but I knew it was the only way I could get away.

"I have an idea," I said to the head coach, Tom, a former NHL player. "Let's try Tray as a goalie. I just have a feeling about it." He looked at me, then went out and made the switch. The drill proceeded better. Our former goalie seemed too fast for the goalie net and made a better defender.

Then I heard a whimper and went to feed Ellie. She spent the rest of practice in the crook of my arm or over my shoulder. She was a total sweetheart, but I wondered what Tray was going to do.

"Thanks, Coach," he said to me after practice. He'd changed faster than the others and hurried out to take Elle from me. She protested a little, then smiled at her dad.

"Call me anytime for babysitting," I said. "I live with two guys and our girlfriend." So maybe that wasn't strictly true, but hoped it soon would be.

I held Elle again while he added my number to his phone.

"Where are you staying?" I asked.

He told me about a room he was renting. "Natasha didn't tell me she was pregnant. She just left Ellie with me last week. I don't know what I'm going to do." "Tell you what. Why don't you come over to the house tonight and we'll talk through some options," I said. "We'll feed you, too. We have a dog, though. Will that be a problem?"

“Not at all.”

We set a time for 7, when I figured I could leave Aria’s work party and be home to talk to him. I texted Ed that I needed him to do more research.

Then I hurried to my PT appointment, my mind full of too many things to worry too much about how the appointment would go.

Chapter Nine: Aria

I think my heart stopped a little when all three guys walked into the pizza pub down behind City Hall after work. Of course, several women in the room turned to look, too.

“Who are those guys?” Sylvie, the birthday woman, said to me.

She worked with me in accounting, and was quickly becoming a friend.

“Um, my boyfriends.” I said, then stood to greet the guys. I gave each one a quick kiss, and by the time that was done, I noted my colleagues had moved around, so there were three chairs around me.

“I’m glad you could all make it,” I said. There wasn’t time to talk to them throughout the day, just to text. I wanted to talk about the conversation Leo and I overheard that morning, but now wasn’t the time.

I’d convince Karyn to join us, even though she was worried about Molly and wanted to go to her house after work.

I proudly told my colleagues who hadn’t already met them that my boyfriends were SEALS, and noted as usual that the men were shy about discussing that. I loved it that several colleagues thanked them for their service.

“Thanks for coming,” I said as they took slices of pizza. I’d ordered a few extra in case they could make it.

“Leo has to leave after too long,” Ed said.

I looked at Leo, who ran a hand through his spiky hair. “I told a player who has a baby that he could come over tonight and discuss options.”

As Leo told me the story, my heart went out to the young man and the baby. “Of course. I don’t need to stay too much longer myself. Let’s all go.” They all looked relieved. “You guys could have canceled.” “We want to be supportive,” Grant said.

“That goes both ways,” I said.

After a while, the group was breaking up, anyway. It was a Monday, and many had obligations and family to attend to. Ted left first, clapping the three guys on the back.

“Great to see all of you again,” he said.

Karyn was one of the last to leave. “You really think I shouldn’t go check on Molly?”

“Maybe give her mom time to cool off and think.” I said, hugging the woman. “You could let Molly know you’re available, though.”

She smiled. “I did that earlier. Hopefully, my daughter didn’t take her phone.”

When I got into Leo’s truck, I happily moved to the slim back row. “There’s no way you guys can fit back here,” I said.

“We might need a bigger car,” Ed said, grinning at me from the middle of the front seat.

I nodded, realizing I was thinking about long-term plans with these guys as they seemed to be, too.

Tray was delightful. I’d offered to go back to my home and leave them to

talk, but all three of my men asked me to stay.

I could see he wanted to take care of the baby, but also was close to pursuing his dream. Leo had told us he was one of the best guys on the team. Getting a call from the NHL was a real possibility.

Elle was adorable. I loved seeing how easily Leo got her to stop fussing. Grant and Ed each insisted on a turn holding her, and Grant even changed her.

What if I couldn't give them kids? Should I let them go now? "Maybe she'd be better off with an adoptive family," Tray said, as Ed went over some options for him. "It would break my heart, but I want to do what's best. I don't want to be selfish about my career, though."

"I don't think it's selfish exactly." I said, moving to put my arm around the young man. Normally I'd never do such a thing, but I couldn't stand seeing him cry like this. "You worked hard for this career a long time. You didn't know about the baby until recently. It's only honest that you'd want to follow your dream, too."

He nodded, and Grant got him some Kleenex. My tough guys didn't seem phased by crying. I wondered what rattled them. You, a voice in my head said. They are as hopeful and unsure of this relationship as you are.

"You said there's an agency that has open adoption?" Tray said to Ed. He was still crying, but seemed to come to a decision.

"Yes, and they are connected with an attorney who is a long-time friend of my cousin Ted," Ed said, and opened his laptop to show Tray. "Why don't you make an appointment and at least talk to them?" "I could go with you, if you like," Leo said.

"That would be great, Coach."

"Do you think Natasha will sign away her rights?" Ed asked him.

He nodded. "I have a letter from her saying she can't be in our lives, ever. I think she found someone else."

The baby gurgled and tried to grab Ed's beard.

Tray left a while later. We all quietly gathered the glasses we'd used, thinking about the situation.

"Tom has a scout coming to watch Tray on Friday," Leo said. "I really feel for him." "He might resent that adorable girl if he has to give up his chance for her." Grant said.

Ed nodded. "I'm glad you're going with to the appointment, Leo. Someone to help him remember everything that is said."

"I might head back to my place and do some laundry tonight," I said, not sure if I should stay or not.

"We have a washing machine," Grant said.

"If you need space, we understand." Ed said, moving to take my hand. "A lot has been happening. We get it."

"Honestly, I'd rather stay. I don't want to crowd you guys, either."

An hour later, we were watching a Pixar movie on the couch. This choice of Grant's surprised me, but it seemed like they all needed something less serious. Of course, Ed was already asleep, snoring a little.

"Ed!" Leo hit him with a pillow, and he roused.

"You should go to sleep, honey," I said. I kissed him. "Don't feel you have to stay up for me." He nodded and went upstairs.

"This is the good part, too," Grant muttered.

I laughed as both guys moved closer to each side of me.

"I take it we're not all sleeping on this couch tonight?" "Ed's already ordered an extra large King bed, and it's going in my room," Grant said, moving to kiss my ear.

I shivered pleurably. "The couch was that uncomfortable for him?"

"Don't get me wrong," Leo said. "Ed would sleep in the rough as we often did for missions, without complaining. But he's a big guy." I felt guilty about all of it as the movie ended. "Listen, maybe I should go back to my place. And I want to chip in for the bed." "Stay," Leo said. He turned to kiss my ear on his side.

I couldn't think now, as their hands and mouths moved over me. "I don't want to disrupt everything."

"We didn't have to buy much furniture. My Dad got new for his new place," Grant said. "You're worth a new bed and so much more."

"And it's hardly a disruption when you're everything we could have wanted," Leo said, helping me pull off the tunic and necklace I'd worn to work that day.

I was catching on to this new life of mine, and had worn a green lacy bra that day.

"That's nice," Leo said, his fingertip running over one of my breasts, above the lace.

"It is lovely," Grant agreed, before unsnapping the front clasp. "But this view is even better."

They each leaned up and latched on to a breast with their mouths.

"Oh," I said, feeling my knees give way.

They pulled me over them on the couch, continuing to suck on my very sensitive nipples. I was on my knees between them.

"Why do you both have your shirts on?" I asked.

They moved quickly, and soon we were all naked on the couch. I was getting a little nervous, not sure how I could take both of them.

Grant leaned over, still suckling at one of my breasts, while Leo pulled me

to straddle him.

Grant lifted his head and moved to take more of the neon pink condoms out of the little table on the end of the couch. The sight of them made me smile.

“We definitely need to buy more,” Leo said. “We haven’t had a need until now.”

I had a hand on each of their cocks, stroking, while I alternated kissing them. It all felt natural, even being with two guys, and I was aching to take one of them inside me. I moved to take Grant’s thick cock into my mouth.

He sucked in a breath, hard, and I looked up.

“I’m good, so good,” he said, as his hands wound into my hair.

Leo was moving behind me, arranging me so he could enter me from behind. He tested me with his fingers, and we could all hear the wetness.

“Ready for me, sweetheart?” He asked.

I pulled off Grant while my hand kept stroking him. “Yes.”

But I wasn’t fully prepared for the thick, steady feel of him, while I had Grant in my mouth. That I was with two men at once was making me even more excited, and I soon came, lifting my head only for the seconds at my peak, before returning to Grant.

“Whoa,” Leo said, chuckling. “Who likes this?”

Grant moved a hand under me to pinch my nipples as I continued to enthusiastically suck on him.

Soon Leo was thrusting into me at a rapid pace. It felt amazing. All of it. From the pleasure sounds Grant was now making as I fondled his balls and tried to get all of him into my mouth, to the feel of Leo reaching deep inside me.

“I’m gonna come,” Grant said in a low voice. He was trying to pull my head off, but I shook it slightly. I wanted him to come in my mouth and soon

the salty feel of his semen filled my mouth faster than I could swallow.

I'd never done that before, and it felt so primal and good to do that with these men, while my other lover grunted and held himself deep inside me.

I noticed Leo was rubbing his thigh later as we lay on Grant's bed, all three of us. We'd wanted to stay together.

"I'll go on top next time. You should have said." I said to him, helping to massage his thigh.

"Are you kidding?" He said, rolling over me. "That was the hottest experience in my life." "You got that right," Grant said, drowsily. "Let us rest now, woman." I fell asleep laughing, resting my head on Leo's chest.

Chapter Ten: Grant

I woke up before it was light out and heard Sarge snuffling a little. Untangling myself from the bed that barely fit Leo, Aria, and me, I went downstairs to let Sarge out to do his business.

The intrepid little dog was so cute as he explored around on three legs. I couldn't believe this was my life.

When I entered the Navy, I think I'd pictured kids, but after my brother died, I knew I had a lot of growing up to do. Before then, I'd wanted a fast car, and girlfriends, and a house with a hot tub or some such foolishness. Although a hot tub with Aria might be fun, I thought with a grin as images from last night flashed into my brain again.

When Sarge ate the breakfast I put out for him, I heard Aria coming down the stairs. It amazed me to realize I would already identify her tread on the stairs.

"Good morning," she said in hushed tones. "I need to run next door for a shower and work clothes. Want to come with me?"

I did. We had seen little of her house beyond the kitchen and back patio at the party last week. It was a little messy, with some knitting and an iPad on a

table, a desk with cords running everywhere, and some dirty laundry spilling out of a bin in her room. But it was colorful and fun, and the furniture looked comfortable.

“Want me to wait down here?” I asked. “Or do you want to shower with me?”

I was going up the stairs almost before she’d finished asking.

Soon we were soaping each other up in an erotic shower.

“What have you three done to me?” She asked as I lathered up her hair in the small space. “I want sex all the time now.” “Me, too,” I joked. “Maybe this is all you.” Her hand slipped down to my already hard length. “Seems like you want it now.”

“I wouldn’t say now to making love with my gorgeous girlfriend, no.” I said, helping rinse the shampoo out of her hair.

My finger slipped between her legs, and she was already wet and ready for me. She wrapped a leg around my waist and soon I was inside her. It felt amazing. Hot and wet. I moved back. “We need a condom. Do you have any?”

She nodded and moved out of the shower to get one of those neon pink condoms. “I put it in my pocket before we came over here.” “Did you play to have your way with me, Aria?”

She kissed me and rolled the condom on me. I was so hard by then I knew this would be fast, indeed.

“Yes, I did.” She kissed me as we moved together in the shower.

I ran to the coffee shop while she kept getting ready. I had an idea I wanted to discuss with everyone before I took her to work. Her car was working fine now, but I sensed we all enjoyed driving her to and from work.

When I got back, she was sitting in the kitchen with the guys, her still damp

hair in soft waves.

“I just had an idea.” I said, setting down the bag of pastries and the carrier of coffee. “What if we adopted Tray’s baby?”

By the time I’d dropped Aria off for work, Leo planned to talk to Tray about it before their meeting with the agency that day.

Aria said she’d ask Ted about a lawyer referral for us, too. The logistics of adoption for a family arrangement like ours might be complicated.

But we were all on the same page. We wanted to adopt her. No one mentioned marriage, but we were all making this plan together. I hoped it involved marriage, but I suspected the guys were with me in wanted to make sure Aira knew marriage with us was about her and not just about the possibility of a baby.

“Hey can you get out for a minute with me?” She asked as we pulled into the parking lot for City Hall.

I could see her friend Karyn waiting with a teen. This must be Molly, I thought.

“Hi Karyn, Molly. How are you guys?”

“Hello Aria,” Karyn said. “We might need your help.”

They invited me to join them to discuss the situation. Aria led everyone to a conference room. Ted came in to give everyone a hug and let us know we could have the room as long as we wanted.

It was hard to see Ted as a boss, but I was used to commanders. Different style, but no less effective, I thought, knowing from what Aria told us, just how hard she works.

“My Mom kicked me out,” Molly said.

“And I live in a 55+ community. I can have her stay with me a few nights, but that’s it.”

“That’s no problem. Come stay at my house. Both of you, until you figure this out.” Aria glanced at me, but I was totally on board with this idea.

“Come eat meals with us, and Molly can hang at our house before you get home from work,” I said to Karyn, guessing at some of her worries.

“This is too much,” Karyn said, tears spilling down her face.

“It’s not. I might sell my home before too long, anyway. But I will call a cleaning service in. You all shouldn’t have to go there as is.”

Karyn laughed. “I saw it for the party. It looked very nice. And I’ll be happy to have a break from my community. While my neighbors are good people, they are very nosy about my business.”

“Did they ask you about Molly?” I asked.

“Well, no, but they ask me too much about the two gentlemen I’ve been seeing.”

I gave my number to Karyn and Molly, who assured us she could get the bus home from school and find the house.

Aria gave me a big hug when they left the room. “Thank you!”

“For what? It’s selfish. I’d love to have you living with us.”

“Well, this might be like that.” She said. “But don’t you think they need a lawyer? I might get her to ask Ted.”

“He’s going to give Leo a name for Tray’s baby, too.” I left Aria to her work then and called the guys on speakerphone. Ed assured me he’d be home all afternoon in case Molly had any trouble. “I’ll probably be back before that. I just need to go talk to my brother and see what my schedule might be at the garage.”

I saw Rose’s car as I got to the garage, but I didn’t see her in the waiting area. “Hey, Steve,” I said to the young man who worked the front office of the garage. “Is Marcus in the back?”

“Yes, but you might want to wait.” “What? Naw, he won’t mind me going back there, even if he has a customer.”

But it wasn’t a customer. When I walked back there, my brother was kissing Rose.

“Your brother’s been dead a long time,” Ed said to me a little while later. I’d left in a hurry, and didn’t think either of them had seen me.

“I know.” But Marcus and Rose? “It’s just so much right now, you know? Our lives were laid out for us with the SEALS. There was an order to it. Here it seems like one surprise after another. Some are good, like Aria, but I feel like I don’t know where I am. How am I supposed to work there? What if Frank knows?” “It might be good for Jeremy.” Ed said reasonably.

He’d been working on his laptop when I got home, and likely was hoping to have peace in the empty house while Leo and I were both gone.

“It might be. But it seems kinda like incest.” Ed laughed. “No. It’s not like that at all. It’s hard for you to get it from the outside, but you haven’t been around.”

“I feel like we’ve been on another planet.” “We kind of were. At the faculty meeting, I discussed a new military research system, but it clearly hasn’t hit the academic world yet as no one knew about it. We are still straddling two worlds.”

“I think I’ll go work out.” Doing something physical always relaxed me. And while I’d enjoyed the workout with Aria that morning, I needed to use my muscles now. I didn’t want the health club with the smoothie bar. I wanted punishing equipment. I headed to the base, but my brother called while I was on my way there.

“Hey, why didn’t you stay? Steve said you stopped by.” “You seemed busy.” There was silence.

“Okay. I was going to talk to you about Rose. Jeremy and Dad don’t even know.”

“How long has this been going on?” I winced at my accusing tone. I thought about Aria, and about how she seemed accepting of everyone’s situations. Even Leo was like that. “Wait, sorry. I was just surprised. It’s not my business.” “Calvin’s been gone a long time.”

“Yeah, I know. I miss him still.” “I do, too. Don’t you think he’d like someone from the family helping take care of his boy? Maybe if you had kids, it would make more sense. I’ve been the one here going to his soccer games, going to help her when he had homework., helping Dad.”

“I know. And I might have a kid, soon.” “What? Aria? Isn’t she older? Don’t you want kids?” “Okay, stop. She is 40, and aren’t you 35? But not Aria. I can’t say much about it, but we might be adopting.”

“About that. Um, Rose might be pregnant.”

The surprises kept on coming. “Okay. I wouldn’t mind another niece or nephew.” It was hard to be that positive about this surprise yet, but I did my best.

“We want to tell Dad and Jeremy soon.”

“That would be good. I won’t say a thing to anyone.”

“Thanks. And it would be incredible if you guys adopted. Another kid for mine to play with. But I still need you at the garage. Want to come back and talk about it?”

“Sure, but I need to go work out first.” Most people would need a little time after all these family revelations, especially ones that touched on my late brother and his family, but the SEALs have taught me resilience, if nothing else. Very few grudges were worth holding on to. Still, my mind cast over

memories of my brother and of all three of us growing up, with my late mother, too, as I grabbed my gear to go work out.

Ed looked at me but didn't ask how the conversation went with my brother. "I've got all this covered. I can get pizza or something for dinner too if need be."

I nodded. "Thanks. I will go talk to Marcus after working out. Not sure how long I'll be. Let me know how it goes with Leo at the lawyer's and with Tray."

Ed nodded. "Go do what you have to do."

Chapter Eleven: Aria

I'd just finished a long meeting on finances for an upcoming music festival when Ed texted. Ed couldn't text in short sentences. I'd noticed that, and it was kind of endearing. But as I read through his long texts, I couldn't believe everything that was happening to us.

A month ago, I thought a new job was the most excitement I'd have all year. My mind flashed on images of sex with all the guys, including the session with two at a time, and I realized I could never have fantasized accurately about all the exciting things coming my way.

A blush spread across my cheeks again as I reached my desk. As soon as my bottom hit the chair, I heard someone call my name.

Leo and Tray were next to my desk, with the baby carrier.

"So we can adopt the baby, but the lawyer thinks it might be better if we have legal status among us." Leo said in the conference room a few minutes later. "We can foster the baby now with a legal arrangement, then adopt her when we can get papers signed by the birth mother, too. The lawyer has a private investigator who can help with that, too.

Tray was still showing the baby around to my colleagues, who welcomed

that cute interruption.

Leo eyed me, looking uncomfortable. What he was saying dawned on me.

Was I really ready to do this? To take a huge jump like this so quickly?

“Sounds good,” I said. “How can we make this happen?”

A consultation with Ted and Tray helped us see we could do a Hopeton poly wedding, but in this case, I’d be legally married only to Leo, at least for now.

Ted let me leave early that day to go home and talk things over with the others.

A text from Ed startled me when I got in the car. “Molly’s here, playing with Sarge.” I’d forgotten about Molly and Karyn, and hadn’t even told Karyn why I was leaving early.

“Great, thanks,” I said to Ed. “Order pizza.”

Even though I’d only known them a short time, I’d heard the men tease Ed about his love for pizza. I hadn’t seen it yet, but expected he liked a lot. I added to the text. “My treat.”

Then I headed home to discuss my wedding.

We hadn’t even said “I love you.” I still had to go on dates with Leo and Ed. This was crazy. But I knew I wanted the entire package. It wasn’t just the baby. Elle clarified what I wanted, and that was these men, and to be a family.

My mother was going to be shocked, I thought. But I also suspected upon meeting Elle, that she would help us pull this together quickly.

“Hello,” Ed greeted me at the door of the guys’ home. “The pizza will be here soon.” “How did you get it to happen that fast?” I kissed him and leaned against him.

“I know which places are the best and have them all on my phone.”

“You’re so smart,” I said, still not moving.

“Hey,” he said. “Are you okay? Nothing has to happen fast. We can take our time with all these decisions.”

I nodded. “I am okay. Just getting my bearings. And nothing’s happening that I don’t want. I just thought we’d date for a little while longer.”

He laughed. “You mean before we get married and have a baby? Where’s the fun in that?”

“Hi,” Molly was still with Sarge in the backyard, but she was doing homework on a table. I saw a generous snack of crackers and cheese, with a glass of milk on the table besides her school laptop.

“How are you doing?”

She shrugged. “How would you feel about my boyfriend coming to stay in your house, too?”

“If it’s okay with Karyn, it’s not up to me.” She smiled, the first time I’d seen her do that. “Seriously?”

“How old are you?” I asked. “And of course I’m serious. You and he have to make some decisions and need time and privacy to do that.”

I didn’t know where these ideas were coming from, but I wanted to be supportive. What if Elle was pregnant as a teen many years down the road? I would not kick her out, and I would try to work with her boyfriend. I thought it was admirable that Molly’s boyfriend wanted to be part of the process.

“I’m 17. I’ll be 18 next August. I was supposed to be going to State next year. It’s where my mom went, and she wants me to go there. But what if I want to keep my baby?” I thought about how comforting Ed’s words were to me. “You have time and options. I’m happy to provide you with a house to help you sort through all of it.”

“Thank you!” She got up to hug me, and I could feel how thin she was

outside of her belly. “And I heard there’s even pizza coming.”

“There is, as much as you want, though you might have to fight a Navy SEAL for some.”

The impromptu pizza party ended up including Molly’s boyfriend Patrick, Tray and Elle, and my mom, who wanted to come see the baby as soon as I told her about the possibility.

She treated Tray like family also, and I could see that helped the stressed young man a great deal. He seemed relieved and happy that things were coming together for him, and for Elle.

When I walked her out to her car later, holding a sleepy Elle, she turned to me with tears in her eyes. “I’m so happy for you. All of you. This is a wonderful family. Don’t worry about the speed of all this. When your dad left, it made me realize that sometimes there is no time to wait. You’re giving that young man his dream, and his daughter a wonderful home.” “I love you, Mom. I don’t know how you did it.”

“We helped each other, sweetheart. Just as all of you will do.”

And I knew she was right.

The men had almost finished clearing up the paper plates and cups. I helped Tray put Elle in her car seat and take her out.

“I know I’m doing the right thing for her, Aria.” He said as I hugged him. “You’ll always be a part of our family, Tray.”

He kissed my cheek and went off back to the room where he was staying. I suspected he would stay with us for future holidays and when he was in town.

“Having three guys sure comes in handy for clean up,” I said, when I went back in.

They laughed and took turns kissing me.

Then I suggested they sit down. “So much is happening,” I said. “I just

wanted to take a moment and tell all of you I love you. Elle is moving our timeline forward, but when you guys had to leave on that last trip, I could picture a future together with you. I might not have babies with each of you as I'd like to, but this here, among all of us, our relationship, is the rock on which everything forward will spread out." Ed cleared his throat. "I love you, Aria. I always will."

"I love you," Grant said. "I knew it when we saw you with your head on your steering wheel." "I love you so much," Leo said.

I yawned, and they laughed. "Not to break up this momentous day, but I'm wiped. So much has happened."

"So true," Grant said. "Should we push the couches together and just sleep?"

"No," Ed said. "I can't do that couch. I could bring my sleeping bag and stay on the floor next to you guys, though."

Somehow that worked. We all wanted to be in the same room and the bed wasn't coming until the next week. I was asleep almost as soon as I stretched out on the couch.

Chapter Twelve: Ed

When Grant returned from taking Aria to work the next day, we had a few minutes to talk before Leo had practice, and Grant had his first day at the garage.

“Listen, guys,” I said. “My mom has been holding my grandma’s engagement ring for me for a long time. It has an emerald, ruby, and sapphire. She and my grandpa found it at an estate sale when they were just starting out, and my grandpa bought it in case.”

“Three stones,” Grant said.

“Yes,” Leo said. “That sounds perfect.”

“In all the hurry to get everything legally ready for our new family, we want to make sure we still romance Aria. It would be too easy to fall into our work and our baby routine. Let’s let her know she is still first with us. I think that is what she was trying to do with the love confession last night.”

“Yes,” Leo said again. “You’re right.”

“Now, Leo, you and I should still have our dates with her.”

“Mine might be when we marry at City Hall.” Leo grinned.

I nodded. “Be sure to take her to a special dinner afterwards. I want to take

her to a winery not too far from where my mom lives.”

The guys were nodding.

“I’m worried about money,” Leo said. “If something happens to me, she’ll get military benefits, but I’ll be making an assistant coach salary until I figure out what comes next.”

“Nah, we’ll all share funds, and if something happens to you, we’ll take care of her,” Grant said.

“Absolutely,” I said. “I have campus benefit information, and it extends to a group arrangement like ours. I mean, it’s Hopeton.”

“I’ll bet her benefits are good at City Hall, too.”

Grant’s statement seemed to make Leo worry, judging from the furrow between his eyebrows.

“Listen, Leo, are you having second thoughts?” I felt a little impatient. He got to marry her first, legally. What was his problem?

“Either of you is a better bet than me.”

There was silence for a minute, then Grant slapped him on the back of the head. “Stop it. You’re just nervous. I sure hope you aren’t referring to your limp.” “You’re a Navy SEAL, Leo,” I echoed, resisting the urge to hit him as well. “You’re a hero. You’re already a coach on a new hockey team and are getting one of your players to the NHL. Aria is proud to be your wife and our wife.”

He nodded, though rubbing the back of his head a little. Then he smiled. “Damn right.”

“Now get your dress uniform and I’ll get it cleaned on my way to talk to my Mom.”

I took all three dress uniforms to the cleaners in town on my way to see Mom. The clerk actually asked if a wedding was happening, and I just smiled

and said you never knew when the dress uniforms might be needed.

My Mom was busy with a feline patient this time, stitching up a cut on a cat who was asleep.

“We had to knock her out, but I’m almost done,” Mom said after I kissed her cheek, not wanting to move her from her delicate work.

“It’s nice seeing you again so soon, Ed,” she said. “But is there a reason?”

“I need the ring.” The shout from my Mom should have woken the cat, but it didn’t. She threw her arms around me and hugged me.

An hour later, we were back in the diner, with the ring, and of course her patient was fine.

“I’ve waited for this day,” Mom was dabbing at her eyes. “But what about your brother?”

I knew this next part would make her even more excited than the idea of me getting married. “We’re in kind of a hurry. There’s a baby.” She shouted enough that time to draw attention in the diner, but she said “It’s all good.”

People went back to their food, as I explained.

After I promised there would be a proper reception and party when we all got married, and that she and Rick would be there, I drove back. To my delight, the same day cleaners made good on their word.

When I pulled up at the house, I saw Molly and a young man in front of Aria’s house. The young man had a few bags. Before Molly could lift one bag, I hurried over there.

“I’ve got that,” I said, though the young man had reached for the bag, too.

“Ed, this is my boyfriend, Patrick. Aria said he could stay here, too, and it’s okay with his parents.” Molly looked scared.

“Sounds good,” I said. “Why don’t you guys come over for a snack after getting Patrick settled in?”

“Grandma Karyn is headed home soon, too.” Molly’s eyes widened as another car pulled into Aria’s driveway.

“Mom.” She said in a quiet voice.

I stayed where I was after I saw a very thin woman with dark hair like Molly’s, hurry out of her car and approach the kids on the porch of Aria’s house.

“Molly. I’m your mother. Get in my car this instant. Get away from that boy. I’ve already called the police. I’ll have him arrested.” “Hello, I’m Ed Arendson.” I tried to step between her, and where she was trying to grab Molly’s arm. “Why don’t we all sit down and talk about this?”

“Shut up. This is none of your business. Now, Molly, or I’ll have him arrested.” I was kind of glad the police were called, and I wasn’t at all sure Molly’s mom could compel her to go when her mother was acting in a violent manner.

“Ow.” Molly said. “Stop it, Mom. I’ll come with you, but you need to leave Patrick alone!”

“Ma’am. Let’s all calm down.” I put some SEAL in my voice that time, and Molly’s Mom looked at me.

Molly wrenched her arm away, and in doing so, fell backward onto the step.

“Stop!” I said as her mom went to grab her. Patrick hurried over and helped Molly up. “Are you okay?”

“I’m good, really.” “Molly, come with me right now.” The woman continued to try to reach Molly. “She took a pretty hard fall there. Let’s not let anything else happen to her.” I heard sirens.

“Get the hell out of here!” Molly’s mom yelled to Patrick. “You get out, too!” She could try to say that to me, but I had dealt with worse foes than her.

Many times. “No, that will not happen. Now it’s time for everyone to calm down.”

“Don’t tell me what to do. This is my daughter. And my grandchild.” Spittle was coming out of the woman’s mouth.

“And that’s the father of your grandchild. This is a stressful situation and yelling isn’t helping.” “Don’t patronize me, you jerk.” Only she didn’t say jerk. She used language that would have been at home with any group of military people in the camp.

I thought maybe she’d finish venting and go, but she made one more grab for Molly.

I got her arms, but she’d already slapped her already crying daughter. Who would have thought I’d need instincts for my neighborhood like I did on missions?

“What’s going on?” Two police officers had parked at an angle on the street and were hurrying over.

“This woman hit her daughter.” I said calmly, “I’m Sgt. Major Ed Arenson, Navy SEALs.” “Ma’am, is that true?”

But Molly’s mom was beyond words. “Get that boy away from my daughter!”

I was sure they could hear her for miles.

“Molly there fell when her mother first tried to grab her.” I said evenly. The cops looked to where Patrick had his arm around Molly and put Molly’s mom in cuffs.

“Sir, we’ll need a statement from you.” It was hard to hear the officer over Molly’s mom’s screaming. “Yes, Ma’am.”

“Have you taken something?” I heard an officer try to ask Molly’s mother.

Within a few minutes, it was over. Karen was home, and was going to run

Molly to her doctor's with Patrick. I gave her our new lawyer's number and suggested she try to see about at least temporary custody.

By the time I got back to the house, Sarge was barking to go out. I let him out, then heard Grant and Aria come home. I patted my pocket for the ring box. In all the excitement with Molly, I'd forgotten to put it in our safe.

"Hello," Aria said. "Karyn texted me she had to run Molly to the doctor? And that you were helping her?"

I gave her a kiss and held her close for a minute before telling her and Grant about the ugly scene.

"Her mom got arrested?" Grant asked, moving to pet Sarge.

"I think so. Or else they are just going to hold her for a while. I hope Molly and the baby are okay. Molly said her mom has never hit her before, but she yells a lot."

"It's such a stressful situation," Aria said. "I don't want to judge, but hitting her is way over the line. But I kind of hope Karyn, Molly, and Patrick can make their decision in peace. If her mother influences her too much, the kids might never recover."

"Our situation seems so easy in comparison," Grant said.

"Yes." Aria said. "You guys seem to make everything easier in my life."

Grant and I each hugged her again.

"There's leftover pizza," I said. "I ordered extra, and we have salad fixings."

"Yes," Aria said. "Let's eat. Leo can join us after practice." "After dinner, I want to take you to a dessert tasting at a winery on the other side of town." First, though, I went upstairs and put the ring in the safe.

Chapter Thirteen: Aria

I went back to my house to find a nice outfit to go out with Ed that night. It surprised me in the middle of everything that he still wanted to do our date, but he said he wanted to always put us and our relationship as a priority.

I found a plum colored wrap skirt and a soft black sweater. Black suede ankle boots completed the ensemble. No one was back at this house yet, though Karyn told me that Molly was ok. The doctors said she and the baby were fine, though her blood pressure was a little faster.

No wonder. Mine felt a little fast thinking about the scene as Ed described it. Ed found out that the police released Molly's mom and warned her to stay away from the kids for now. I hope that worked.

Ed held open the door to the truck as I hurried back over. "Thank you, sir," I said, before getting in. I slid over to the middle, so I'd be next to him while he drove.

"This is nice," I said, resting my head on his shoulder while he drove.

"It is," he said. "I know neither of us are big drinkers, but they are pairing some with desserts, and I thought that might be fun." The winery looked

ancient. It was in a remote area of the Hopeton, next to a lake. The hostess said it had been in the owner's family for a couple hundred years.

We were led to a table with a few other groups. One woman had two husbands. Another man had two girlfriends. There was a male couple, and some heterosexual couples.

As the tasting got underway, it amazed me at the way the rich plum wines complemented the dark chocolate.

"This one is amazing," Ed said at one point, feeding me a forkful of a dark chocolate cake.

I'd never been knowledgeable about wine, but this was fun.

Some employees discussed the history and where the grapes were cultivated. Some were grown right here in Hopeton.

"It's magical," I said, tasting a bite of caramel cheesecake with a white wine.

Ed clinked his glass with mine. "We will have to get a couple of bottles of these. Some desserts are for sale, too." We'd had enough by about the fifth pairing, and went for a walk on the grounds. "It's lovely here," I said.

"You're lovely." He said, giving me a quick kiss.

"Ed," I said. "Do you think you'll miss the Navy?"

"I'll miss seeing the guys in my SEALS group. I won't miss the travel and some things we had to do." I squeezed his hand. "I'm sure you all have a bond." "Yes. I would be lost if I wasn't at least living with some of the guys, as we are. We are telling the other guys about Hopeton. I think a couple more of them may settle into groups in our town."

"That's nice. I look forward to meeting them." When we got back to the truck, I saw we had messages that Molly was doing well and was spending the night at the hospital.

When we got home, Grant and Leo were watching a basketball game.

“Listen,” Leo said after I gave each of them a kiss. “How would you feel about getting married tomorrow?”

Unbelievably, we’d fell asleep on the couches again, after discussing the wedding plan. Even Leo could sleep soundly that night. I would have thought I’d be up late with excitement over the upcoming wedding, but so much had been happening I was soon asleep.

The next morning, I met my mom at a bridal shop just outside of town. I’d taken the morning off, and Ted was going to marry Leo and me after lunch. Just my mom, Grant, Ed, Leo, Frank, and I would be in attendance. Ed’s mom was also going to come. Leo said he would invite his extended family to the reception party we were planning for a Saturday in a few weeks.

“How about this one?” Mom asked me, pulling out another white tulle number.

“No, that’s not it, Mom.”

The young woman working in the store had a nose piercing and pink hair. “My sister designs most of these. It’s her shop. But I am good at alterations, and I’m going to school in design, too.”

She came over to me. “No white, right? How about blue?”

“Do you have anything in Navy?” I loved the idea of blue, and Navy blue seemed fitting.

She grinned. “I have something. Do you like lace?”

The dress was a navy silk sheath, overlaid with a draped white lace piece, connected at the shoulder and wrist.

“It looks good on you,” my mother said. “It is different for a wedding dress. But then, everything about this is different.” She dabbed at her eyes. “You’re so beautiful.”

And I knew we had a dress.

As we waited for it to be bagged up, Rose came into the store. I was so surprised to see her it took me a second to take it in.

“Are you here for a wedding dress?” She asked me. “Hi, Rose. I altered the waistband of your dress. You’re set for your fitting.” The clerk called over. Rose and I stared at each other. “I’m marrying Marcus,” she said. “Frank doesn’t know yet.” And the waistband? I thought. Then I hugged her and said “Congratulations.”

My mom brought over the dress. “We’d better get going, Aria.”

And we did.

“Mom,” I said to her when we were seated across from each other at a diner a little while later. “I didn’t mean to ask you to pay for the dress. I have a good job now.”

“I want to pay for the nursery for Elle, too,” My mother said.

“How can you?” My mother worked as a legal secretary for years to support us.

“Bitcoin.”

And I thought I’d encountered all the surprises in my life. “Can you teach me?”

At one that afternoon, Ted married Leo and I. He, Grant, and Ed all wore their dress uniforms, and I started crying at the sight of them.

“Come on, now, no tears,” Ed said. “I know Leo’s a bit much.”

That made me laugh. Before I knew it, we were repeating the traditional vows in front of our other two partners, Frank, my mother, and Viola, Ed’s mother, who’d rushed over from her job.

Karyn brought in a cake, and after the ceremony, we not only signed the license, but also the foster care license.

“This ring is perfect,” I said to Viola. “I consider all the men equal.” “Well, that’s all right.” She gave me a hug. “I’ve been waiting for this day. And I hear there’s a grandbaby.” Tray came in then, wearing a dress shirt and black pants. Elle had on a cute flowered dress.

“I got that call,” he said to Leo. I’d heard it as I was next to him.

Leo grinned. “Let’s have a toast.”

To my surprise, Ed brought out a couple of bottles of champagne from the winery. Soon we each had a glass. “To Leo, Aria, Grant, and Ed. The parents of my beautiful girl.” “And to Tray, who will always be a member of our family,” Leo said. “And to St. Louis’s newest NHL team member.”

Epilogue

I finished making up our new XL King bed when the men thought I was having a bath for myself after the wedding. When Tray and Elle left to go sign more papers at his lawyer's office, and the parents left, we had Ted do vows again for all of us.

The men thought we were headed out to a place called Fantasy Inn. I'd actually made that reservation for the weekend. My Mom and Frank were on call in case Elle could be placed with us before then. If she wasn't with us yet, Karyn would watch the house with Molly and Patrick for a few nights. Karyn was working on getting guardianship of Molly, or helping her become an emancipated minor. I felt confident that they would work things out so Molly and Patrick could decide if they wanted to raise their baby or place it for adoption. Ed would help them both enroll in Hopeton University. Ted told me when I came back to work the next week, he wanted me to research the feasibility of an adoption agency for poly families in Hopeton. So many good things were happening.

But tonight I wanted us to have our first night on our bed, all together.

I put on the negligee with hearts that I'd received as a birthday gift, what

felt like a long time ago.

I went downstairs to find the men enjoying a pizza.

“Ed? You ordered more?”

“We didn’t want to rush you and figured this would tide us over until dinner.”

I saw a lot of pizzas in my future.

“I’ve moved our reservation to the weekend,” I said.

Leo came to hug me. “Is that why you’re wearing this fetching thing?” He teased one of the spaghetti straps until it slid off my shoulder.

“It is, in fact. Our bed awaits.”

Ed quickly closed up the pizza box, and Grant dumped his half-eaten piece in the trash.

Soon we were all on the bed.

“So, husbands, I don’t even know how this will work with all of us. Does one person watch?”

We all laughed, and I felt a lot less nervous.

“I bought normal condoms,” I said.

“As cute as that thing is you’re wearing,” Grant said, pulling me over his broad body, and sliding his hands on to my ass under the silk. “It’s time to take it off.”

Feeling six hands on me at once was better than any massage. “How will this work?”

Leo, sensing my slight apprehension, stopped biting my earlobe for a minute to whisper in my ear. “Eventually, we may want to take you in your rear and between your legs, but you’d need some prep for that. We’ll creatively take turns this time.”

The image in my mind of being with all of them at once like that, with one

in my mouth too, was turning me on. “What about between my breasts?”

Ed groaned. “That’s a fantasy, but really, we don’t have to do everything at once.” I wanted to. “Do we have lube?”

Soon there were three mouths on me. I was kissing Grant, while Leo and Ed were each sucking hard at my nipples. I thought I could come like this.

I reached down to stroke whoever I would reach. From the groans, I got Leo and Grant in my hands.

Then I pulled my mouth off Grant’s for a moment to breathe. “I need someone inside me now.”

I felt like I was burning from the inside out. I raised up and kissed Ed passionately.

Hands were moving me as I kissed each of them, alternating. It felt amazing to let myself stop thinking and let them all move and caress me.

Leo grabbed a condom from my fresh box.

“Finally!” I said. “Let me put it on.”

“No way, wife,” he muttered. “Your hand has worked me up so much I will be lucky if I can get you off before me.” “We’ll help with that,” Ed said. “Then we can have our turn that much faster.”

I laughed, something I’d never done in bed with anyone before, not even my late husband. Sex always seemed like such serious business. Now it was a lot more fun, and not just because there were more of us.

Leo pulled me backwards off Grant’s fabulous body, and as he moved to enter me from behind, I started sucking on Grant’s thick cock.

“That’s it, get him nice and wet.” Ed spoke in the low growly tone I only heard him use during sex.

Who knew the professor would be a dirty talker? I loved it. I lifted to stroke Ed. Then I decided, as he was kneeling next to me, that I could take him in

my mouth, alternating with Grant.

Mostly this worked, though the feel of Leo's thick cock stroking inside me, hitting all my pleasure spots, slowed me down.

Soon I felt the tingle and knew I was about to come. "Leo!" I screamed as I stroked Grant and Ed with my hands.

He was pressed so tight against me I could feel him throbbing deep inside. "That's it, wife, come with me."

And I did.

While I was catching my breath, I grabbed the condoms and put one on Grant, who was stroking my breasts. I slid right down on his long length and got nearly all of him inside.

His back bowed off the bed some. I watched his handsome face in pleasure and knew I'd never forget a minute of this night.

"Losing energy?" Ed said, moving behind me. He had lube in his hand. "Don't worry. I know you're not ready for anal sex yet. But I had an idea." Ed stroked himself with the lube, then pushed me down flat on Grant. I could feel him slip his cock in the crevice between my buttocks. From his groan, he enjoyed this.

Leo had recovered and was stroking my back.

I lifted my head and told him I wanted him in my mouth. He was already half hard again.

Grant's strong handed guided my hips on him, even as Ed moved behind me. I wouldn't have thought this would work, or that it would all be awkward, but it wasn't. It was lovely as we all moved together.

"I love you guys," I whispered as their groans intensified.

Grant reached between us and stroked my clit, setting me off, which triggered his release.

Ed came all over my back, but I didn't care.

I was barely aware as they carried me into the filling tub.

Grant ran a washcloth over my back. "We love you, too, you know. Always." Ed dropped a bath bomb into the water, and the other two teased him. "What?" He said. "I have a few. I could never get the feel of sand off me after our missions."

"Maybe we should use them, too," Leo said.

"No way," I said. "There's only room for one here." But as always, he surprised me, and fit in the tub, kissing me.

When Grant was rinsing my hair, and Leo was standing to rinse off, Ed came back in the bathroom. He'd gone to the other one to clean up.

"Will you still go to the fertility doctor?" He asked.

"That's entirely up to you," Grant cut in. "We'll have Elle, and I'll bet we will help my brother and Molly with their kids, too."

"I'm not sure. I'll go see what they have to say after the next tests. And we'll decide together. But maybe we could look into surrogacy or something like that?"

As the men talked it over with me, I knew I would always have their respect and support. And, of course, I'd love them forever.

I fell asleep between Ed and Leo, with Grant on Leo's other side, soon after that. And I knew that with all our found family members, that our life would be very busy and happy, and full of surprises.

You can enjoy more Hopeton stories, including Voting for Love, the story of Mayor Ted, all on Amazon.

About Layla Rogue

Layla Rogue is the alter ego of a mom who works full-time and writes fun sexy erotic romance.

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