



9 SOLDIERS'
Obsession

A REVERSE HAREM ROMANCE
NICOLE CASEY

Nine Soldiers' Obsession

**A Reverse Harem
Romance**

Love by Numbers 2

Book 8

Nicole Casey



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About the Author

About this book

One curvy woman. Nine sinfully seductive soldiers. A panty-melting journey that will leave you gasping for breath.

Living in the shadow of my military husband, David, I felt a gnawing void, a yearning for his touch, his gaze, his mere presence.

But when a treacherous mission in a war-torn land offered a chance to reignite our flame, I found myself captivated not just by him, but by the rugged men of his unit.

Each of them was a tantalizing enigma - **Mo**, with his heart-melting kindness; **Bowie**, a hot-as-sin intellect; **the Rogue triplets** - Aziel, Amir, and Andre, an irresistible mix of brain and brawn; and **the Atkins triplets** - Eli, Rick, and Em, who were every shade of tempting, their dedication and focus igniting a fire within me I'd never felt before.

The more time I spent with them, the more I craved their touch, their affection, their commanding presence. Each one of them sparked a new facet of desire in me, a new flavor of love I hadn't known of.

When David confessed his fantasy to see me shared among them—I was thrown into a whirlpool of lust, love, and uncharted territories.

But as we drew nearer to our goal, tensions escalated, and our unconventional bond was put to the test. As our return to normalcy looms, I'm left with a burning question: **Where do we go from here?**

Prologue: David

Sweat brimmed my forehead as I pressed my back against the cement wall of the staircase, dust fluttering in the air as I looked down at the door that separated me and my unit of eight other brave soldiers from a helpless, kidnapped diplomat and who knew how many enemies. But this was part of the job.

This was part of being a soldier.

I held my hand out, silently ordering the other eight men to press their backs flat against the wall in a disciplined line.

We'd trained for moments like these so that there wouldn't be any mistakes. When we made mistakes, people died, and Paul Harper wasn't dying today.

Paul was a United States diplomat who got caught in the crossfire of a local conflict in the Middle East. He was captured and held hostage, dropping another rescue mission in our lap to complete with precision and expertise. This was what we did.

And we were damn good at it.

As their unit leader and captain, it was my job to take all of their skills and direct them to our unit's advantage, and we

were all highly trained in different ways. I turned my head to look at my unit's mission coordinator, Erick Atkins. His brothers, Elijah and Emmett, who bore most of the same features as him, lingered further down the line.

"I think I hear three or four different voices in there, Rick," I reported, the smell of stale air and heat filling my nose. My military fatigues stuck to my body, making my chest feel that much tighter as danger loomed ahead. There was always a possibility that me or one of my brothers wouldn't make it out of a mission alive.

Erick gave me a curt nod, his lips resting in a straight line as they usually did. If he was ever captured and interrogated, they wouldn't even be able to make him grimace. He was strong in his resolve, and he probably barely flinched when he got that scar above his left eyebrow.

"We hit hard and fast. No hesitation," he said before turning to Aziel next to him, who was our close protection specialist. Aziel made sure to provide protection to high-value targets, so he had to step up once we reached Paul. "Your brothers will cover you."

Aziel turned to Amir and Andre, who all made up another triplet bunch in our unit, and nudged Amir.

"Don't let me die in there," he said, still looking composed despite the light sheen of sweat that covered his deep brown skin.

Amir, who was precisely nicknamed Sniper, smirked at his brother and held up his scoped rifle. Typically, he was hiding on a rooftop or specifically placed out of sight so that he could do recon or long-range assault, but he could be just as lethal in close range too, especially with Andre, who was our firearms expert.

"You worry about the hostage. Me and Andre have your back," he replied.

Andre nodded in agreement, determination glinting in his hazel eyes that differed from his brothers' darker brown eyes. He had softer features and a gentler demeanor than his

brothers, but when he had a weapon in his hands, he was one of the most dangerous guys in the room.

Bowen, our tech and communications expert, leaned forward to look at me, a strand of his reddish-brown hair falling against his forehead.

“We’re ready back here. Mo and I will take up the rear to make sure no one sneaks up on us,” he said, referring to Mohammed, our reconnaissance specialist, who was also a second-generation Pakistani immigrant.

I nodded, preparing to go for the door, but I felt my phone vibrate in my back pocket. I quickly checked the screen to make sure it wasn’t my superior, but the name “Brianna” appeared instead. A guilty ache struck me in the chest as I ended the call before the vibrating gave us away.

A man never wanted to hang up on his wife. She was my world after fourteen years of marriage, but there were times when I had to put work before her. I hated that, especially the thought of making her feel neglected, but what could I do?

My brothers needed me to lead them, and there was a man on the brink of death in the next room. Once again, I had to make that tough decision and hope that it didn’t break us even more than we already were. But that was a problem to discuss when I made it home.

Right now, it was go time.

I placed my hand over the doorknob, quietly testing it to make sure that it wasn’t locked. Thanks to Mo’s recon and Bowen’s handy tech toys, we managed to sneak into the three-story, abandoned building without being seen. Our presence was about to be well-known.

Erick put his hand on my shoulder, motioning to me that everyone else was ready to go.

My breathing quickened as my body tensed in preparation, adrenaline pumping through my body like blood. The air around me felt hot like the desert, still and suffocating. I was ready to get Paul and get the hell out of here.

After a three-count, I threw the door open and stormed inside with my M4 Carbine lifted. Four men in tan uniforms and black face coverings surrounded a beat-up but alive Paul Harper, who was tied to a chair in the middle of a dusty, dimly lit basement. As soon as one of the militants raised his rifle at me, I shot at him, side-stepping to let the others pour into the room.

Three bullets pierced the first militant, nailing his right shoulder, left chest, and the middle of his throat. He stumbled back, grasping at his throat before collapsing.

Paul's eyes widened, crying out into a piece of white cloth that gagged him. Blood and cuts littered his shaved face and head, and his business clothes were torn and blood-stained. After being struck and cut so many times, there was finally a gleam of hope in his eyes.

Aziel kept low as he ran toward Paul, holding his rifle close as Amir and Andre shot over him at one of the militants who stood closest to Paul.

"Get down!" Emmett shouted from behind me.

I ducked just as a bullet zipped over my head, hitting the wall behind me. My jaw clenched as gunfire rang throughout the basement, sand being kicked up from the concrete floor. It was suffocating in that room, but my breathing wasn't on my mind.

Stopping the militants' breathing was, though.

Elijah and Emmett both fired at the militant who almost ended my long career, sending him crumbling to the ground next to the two other bodies.

I whipped around to see Mo bury a bullet in the last militant's knee, sending him down to the ground with a grunt before Bowen finished him off.

"Check the staircase. We have to move in case there are others in the area," I told them, motioning with my gloved hand for everyone to move. We couldn't celebrate just yet.

"I'll make sure a bird is waiting for us," Bowen said before taking out his handheld tactical radio to call in a Blackhawk to pick us all up nearby.

Aziel, Amir, and Andre quickly untied and ungagged Paul, who released a sigh of pure relief.

“Are you injured? Can you walk?” Aziel asked him as he cut off the last rope binding Paul to the wooden chair.

Paul nodded as they grabbed him from under his arms and pulled him up to his feet. He stumbled at first, but once he put his arms over Aziel’s and Andre’s shoulders, he found his balance.

“I can walk. Just get me the hell out of here,” he said.

I couldn’t blame his urgency. This was dangerous territory for all of us.

“Update on the bird!” I called out to Bowen.

“En route. Let’s go,” Bowen replied.

I turned and led my unit out of the basement, carefully checking around every corner as we ascended to the first floor. The building used to be a busy office, but it was gutted and full of sand and dust that blew in from outside. Militants used it for storage and hostages, and it would definitely be reported to my superior.

“There it is!” Elijah said as we peered out of the gap where the front doors used to be.

A Blackhawk slowly descended toward the ground about a quarter of a mile out in a clear area of land away from the other buildings nearby.

“Andre and Amir, watch our flanks. On me!” I shouted before we all gathered together and made a run for the Blackhawk, keeping low and being watchful as we crossed the deserted area all the way to the helicopter waiting for us.

The moment Paul climbed aboard, the tension in my shoulders melted away as I got into the helicopter and took a seat between Elijah and Mo.

“Get us out of here,” I sighed as the helicopter started to ascend.

Mo knocked his shoulder against mine.

“Another for the books, captain!” Mo told me with a grin on his lightly stubbled face. “We can finally go home!”

Home. It had been a while since I was back on American soil. Since I had my beautiful wife in my arms.

“What are you doing first? I’m sleeping for twelve hours straight and catching up on every movie I missed,” Elijah asked from the other side of me. It was time for that smart brain of his to take a break after all the intelligence work he did for us.

“I’m going to have dinner with my wife,” I replied as I leaned back in my seat with a small smile on my face. I had a lot to catch up on when I got back home.

“Tell her we said hey,” Mo said before leaning his head back and closing his eyes as the gust of the helicopter wings surrounded us.

They hadn’t ever met Brianna before, but they had seen pictures of her. Hell, I even heard a few of them comment on how beautiful she was, which I couldn’t blame them for. They were right. She was stunning, and I was the only one in my unit who was in a relationship. Again, I couldn’t blame them for that either.

We were all busy and devoted to our work, but there was someone waiting for me at home. Someone who needed me and wanted me, while I was always halfway across the world and thinking of her.

I just hoped that she would always be there for me to come home to.

Chapter 1

Brianna

A soft breeze blew through my quiet hometown, ruffling my hair as I wandered around the local outlet mall. I had already been to all of these clothing, jewelry, and shoe stores a million times, but it was better than staying home all day. I had to get out of the house.

Out of my own head.

“Brianna! Good to see you again!” Ann, one of the young, friendly cashiers at Bella Boutique, greeted me.

Again. I probably came here last week to get out of the house after finishing up with work. As a freelance translator, most projects were similar. I only worked on out of the box tasks every once in a while, but I still enjoyed the work I did. I also rented out a few apartment units on the side to keep busy and make more money.

I wouldn't mind something different or challenging every once in a while, though.

“Hello,” I told her with a polite smile before doing a loop around the store, noticing a few new items among all the things I saw last week and the month before.

My eyes darted to the right at the sound of laughter, my gaze resting on a young couple as they looked at a frilly, pretty dress together. A date night type of dress. I couldn't help the ache that gripped my chest as I tried to think about the last time I went on a date.

The sad part was that I was married.

“A new shirt for David? I bet he’ll love wearing it when he gets back from deployment.” Ann said once I made my way to the counter with a light blue button-down shirt.

“I think so too. He loves any shade of blue,” I replied with a small smile.

I knew my husband through and through, but he had two loves in his life: me and his work. The troublesome thing was that his work stole him away from me for weeks to months at a time, and I fell into the same routines to cope with the loneliness until he finally made it back home.

Every day felt the same. A constant stream of work, household duties, and missing my husband, who was always thousands of miles away. Honestly, he was away from home more than he was here, and that wore me down more and more with each passing day.

With a nod goodbye, I left the store with a bag in my hand. It was probably time to go home and cook dinner like usual, but the thought of that made my feet drag. I was weighed down by my heavy heart. By how much I missed my husband.

I understood that he loved his job, but I wasn’t sure anymore if he loved our marriage more. I blinked my eyes a few times as they stung at the thought, not wanting to sink so deep into such a dark mindset. David loved me. I just wished he showed it more whenever he was around.

The days were lonely, but the nights... oh, the nights were the worst. Our queen bed felt so much bigger when I was tucked under the sheets all alone, wishing that his arms were wrapped around me. His lips against mine or anywhere else.

I slowed down as I approached a lingerie shop on the far end of the strip of stores, my eyes falling on a mannequin in the front window with a lace teddy on. Would he like to see me in a number like that? Did he care anymore?

I chewed on my bottom lip in thought, trying to remember the last time we’d even had sex. It was probably the last night before he was sent off on this mission that he was finally about

to finish up. No sex for weeks to months was torturous, but I wouldn't ever cheat on him.

I just wished there was something to scratch the itch without the guilt that came with it.

Wanting to kill some more time, I dared to go inside, the smell of artificial cherries and leather hitting my nose. My heart started racing as my eyes glanced over racks and tables full of neatly organized lingerie. What was at the front of the store was no match for what I came across at the back of the store, though.

A variety of sex toys caught my eye from vibrators to handcuffs to paddles. My face warmed up in embarrassment, even if some of them made that same warmth burn lower. But I couldn't bring myself to even pick anything up.

It wasn't wrong to indulge in such things. But all I could think about was all the lectures I had been given when growing up by my parents, teachers, and other older figures in my community. I was raised on the premise of intimacy being contained to sex with your married partner and so on and so forth. Fooling around with a sex toy while my husband was deployed went against such conservative teachings, even if I was old enough to know that they didn't need to stand. I was an adult. My own person!

But some habits and mindsets were harder to break out of than others, so I bottled up my desires and focused my energy on doing translation projects, maintaining the units I rented out, and looking after the household as I had also been taught growing up. It was hard to stick to such traditional roles when my husband was always gone, though.

With a deflated sigh, I abandoned the shop, knowing that I didn't have the courage to buy anything. I headed straight home, following hundreds of footsteps that I had already taken from the front door to the bedroom. I dropped the shopping bag on the bed before collapsing next to it and covering my face.

There was so much that I wanted to change and take better control of, but it was so difficult flipping things around on my

own. We shared a life. One that I felt like I lived all alone.

I lowered my hands and sat up, my gaze sweeping over my nightstand and settling on a framed picture of David and me when we were dating in our twenties. His now salt and pepper hair was light brown, and his blue eyes shined as we leaned against each other with smiles on our faces. We fell in love so quickly and naturally, and it felt like those warm, fuzzy honeymoon days would last forever.

They didn't, but we were still happy as we got into our thirties and started figuring out our lives more. Now, as I hit thirty-six and he reached forty-one, we weren't as carefree and starry-eyed. We changed as people usually did, and that wouldn't be a problem if we changed together more than apart.

Truly, could we sustain a marriage when he was gone so much? Would the distance eventually break our marriage of fourteen years apart?

The younger version of me would scream and cry at the thought of that, but I had grown up a lot since then. I was the one who went through days of being all alone, hoping that my husband came back from his missions and still wanted to be with me. Given that I was a curvier woman, I always worried that I wouldn't be attractive to him anymore, even if he hadn't given me any notion of that.

My fingertip traced the top edge of the picture frame, my heart aching as I reflected back on our younger days when our problems were so small. It was tough seeing younger women in their honeymoon or dating days, like one of my old tenants, Aisling, who ended up dating multiple men!

With my figure, I felt lucky enough to catch the eyes of my husband. I doubted I would pique any other guys' interest on top of that. Not that I cared to anyway, but I was sure that Aisling never felt lonely or neglected with all of those men so in love with her.

I felt terrible just thinking about that. I appreciated my husband so much, especially after all we had been through together, but a strong marriage required communication and affection. We didn't get to experience or share much of that

since we weren't even on the same continent, and I just didn't see David retiring any time soon.

Not when he loved his job and respected the men in his unit so much. That would be like breaking up a family for him, but what about our family that we hadn't even gotten a chance to start yet?

My conflicting thoughts went up in smoke at the sound of my phone ringing, my heart lurching as I quickly swiped it off the bed. With large, hopeful eyes, I brought the screen into view, hoping to see my husband's name on the screen, but it was Ryder, my brother, instead. My shoulders sank a little.

I loved Ryder, but I was dying to talk to David. I wanted to know about his day and hear about how brave he was. I wanted to make sure that he was okay and safe because I worried about him every single day. Despite how down I felt, I was also so incredibly proud of him and the work he did to help other people.

With a light tap of my forefinger, I answered the video call and held up my phone so that my face was centered on the screen. I painted on a smile as Ryder and Delilah popped up with joyful looks on their faces.

"Hey, guys!" I greeted them, swallowing down my emotions.

"Hey, how are you doing? It's been a while!" Ryder asked as Delilah lifted her hand in a friendly wave.

"I'm doing good. David is coming home soon," I told them with a genuinely excited smile. Just the thought made my heart flutter and my stomach twist with yearning. The house would be filled with noise again! His deep voice. His favorite old rock music. Our laughter.

"That's great! I know you miss him," Delilah said with a sympathetic look.

More and more with each passing day.

"But how are you guys doing? Delilah, are you doing okay?" I asked. She had to be quite a way into her pregnancy at this point, and I couldn't be happier that Delilah, Ryder, and the other guys were going to be parents.

It was crazy for me to find out that my brother and his bandmates were in a relationship with one woman, but Delilah was such a gift and a wonderful addition to the family. I hadn't ever seen Ryder so happy before, and Delilah was swarmed with so much love that she deserved. She would need every bit of support when the baby arrived.

"I'm so tired and hungry all the time," Delilah laughed as she shared an amused smile with Ryder. "Thank goodness I always have someone around to get me all of my weird cravings. I was dying for a salted caramel milkshake last night."

"By the way, that's really hard to find around here," Ryder said with a chuckle. He then pecked Delilah on the cheek. "But I would've gone over to the next town for it."

I watched them exchange a loving look with each other, and nothing could stop the tidal wave of loneliness that crashed down on me at that moment. It was so strong that it sucked the air right out of my lungs, making my throat tighten like a crushed can. My sadness and longing were quickly followed by a strike of guilt because I should've just been focused on being happy for my brother and his growing family.

But I couldn't completely ignore the fact that I was jealous and wished that David was as attentive as Ryder. Maybe that wasn't fair since David was working, but that didn't change the fact that he was always gone.

"I'm having a baby shower in a few months, and I'd love for you to be there!" Delilah told me, snapping me out of my downward spiral.

"Of course," I said as I smiled at her. I was over the moon for them, and maybe things between me and David would be better by then. Maybe he would even be home then so that he could visit as well, but I had learned at this point not to get my hopes up.

David's work was unpredictable, and he couldn't say no when his superior gave him orders. Even if he wanted to stay with me, he couldn't. I was so happy that he was coming back home soon, but it was only a matter of time before he was sent away for another few months.

I just didn't know how many more missions our marriage could sustain before falling apart.

Chapter 2

David

Home sweet home.

As I walked down the boarding bridge off the plane, an odd feeling stirred in my stomach. I was so used to being in the thick of combat or surrounded by my unit in a foreign country that it felt weird being back home. Not in a bad way. I had just been gone *that* long.

With my duffel bag hanging on my shoulder, I ventured to the entrance and exit area of the airport, passing by reuniting families and long-distance lovers and friends. My heart jolted at the sight of my beautiful wife as she lifted her hand to catch my attention.

We had been together forever, but she looked more and more beautiful every single time I came back home to her. She wore a light blue maxi dress with long sleeves and white ankle boots, bringing out her perfect curves and complimenting the wavy strands of her light brown hair. She looked perfect.

But she also looked... sad.

"I missed you," I told her once I reached her, setting my duffel bag down so that I could wrap my arms around her.

Brianna leaned against my chest, but she felt stiff. She didn't bury her face into my shirt or grip it in handfuls like she used to when I returned home.

"I missed you too," she said, giving me a light squeeze before we broke apart. She looked up at me, seeming deflated. "I think this was the longest you've been gone."

Three months. It was a long time, but it was a complex mission with multiple parts. Wasn't she just glad that I was home?

"I can't control how long I'm sent off for. Trust me, I don't want to be gone so long," I assured her.

Brianna sighed softly as she nodded.

"It's just hard being away from you for so long," she said.

Maybe I was used to the time and distance away more. I came from a long line of military officers, so I was used to family members, including my own father, being gone for weeks to months at a time. I knew that their work was important, and I hoped that Brianna still remembered that about my own work too.

I didn't stay away from home because I wanted to. I stayed away to perform my assigned duties to serve my country as I had signed up to do so many years ago after I graduated high school. I enjoyed my work and my company, but that didn't mean I didn't love her too.

It was just hard showing her that. It was hard to make her look past the time and distance.

"I'm here now. Let me take you out to dinner, okay? Just you and me," I suggested with a hopeful look on my face. I didn't want to argue right when I got home.

Brianna held my gaze for a few seconds, her soft eyes looking conflicted. She then smiled and nodded before wrapping her hands around my arm and huddling close to my side.

"That sounds nice. Thank you," she said.

I could hear an apology in her words, but I didn't want her to feel bad for being upset. I wouldn't ever make her feel bad for missing me. It just showed me that she loved me and wanted our marriage to flourish like I wanted as well.

I planned to be married to her for the rest of my life. When we started dating, it wasn't some casual arrangement. I was in it for the end goal of being with the love of my life forever, and

that hadn't changed for me. Even if many other things had changed over the course of fourteen years.

"Come on. Let's go home," I told her before leading her out of the busy airport.

When we got home, the first thing I did was take a shower, standing under the warm spray with closed eyes. It was nice taking a shower in my own bathroom, and it would be great sleeping in the bed that I shared with my wife. She probably didn't believe it at times, but I was glad to be home.

By the time I got out, she was standing in front of the bathroom mirror with her curling iron, carefully wrapping her hair around it. I wrapped a towel around my waist and leaned close to kiss her on the cheek, feeling it shift beneath my lips as she smiled. She had no idea how much I missed that smile.

"I'll be ready in thirty minutes," Brianna said.

I nodded and wandered into the bedroom to get ready, my eyes sweeping over our light gray sheets, two wooden nightstands on either side, and our old dresser with a flatscreen mounted on top. All of the picture frames and little decorative assets were the same, and I wondered if she kept everything the same for a reason.

My clothes in our walk-in closet were recently washed and hung up like she had prepared the entire house for my arrival. Those little things warmed me, and she deserved more than a nice dinner to thank her for holding down the fort here. I just wished I could think of a bigger, better gesture.

Once we got dressed, we went to one of the nicer Italian restaurants in town, choosing a small table outside under the stars and string lights. The night was warm but not unbearably so. It was much better than the scalding heat out in the desert with sand blowing in my eyes and my skin being constantly sunburned where my uniform didn't cover.

At least I came back with a tan.

"I know you can't give me details, but how did your mission go?" Brianna asked once the waiter brought each of us a glass of red wine.

“It went well. A bit dangerous at times, but we got the job done,” I said with a satisfied nod. We were an effective unit, which was why we were one of the first ones called to handle high-risk situations.

Brianna threaded her fingers together and rested her chin on top of them, peering across the table with an intrigued look on her face.

“You always do. They should reward you guys with a break,” she told me with a hopeful smile.

It would be nice to have some time off before being shipped off yet again. I was getting older, so moving around so much for extended periods of time was definitely weighing on my body more and more. Plus, the thought of being able to lounge on the couch with her and just watch a movie sounded great right about now.

“That’d be nice, but you know how it is,” I replied with a faint chuckle. There was always something happening.

Brianna’s smile wilted, and I knew that I said the wrong thing. Why did I do that?

“Trust me, I don’t want to be the nagging, clingy wife, but... spending all of this time apart isn’t good for our marriage,” she explained, her voice sounding stressed and strained.

I sighed, my shoulders sagging under my white button-down shirt. She was right, but my job gave us good pay and benefits that would be hard to find elsewhere. If I waited a little bit longer, I could retire with a better retirement package so that both of us could enjoy the rest of our lives without the fear of going broke and struggling.

“I know, but if we can deal with this for a few more years...”

“Years? David, I don’t know if I can handle a few more years of this. I’m lucky to have you around for even a few months a year!” Brianna told me as she shook her head, her eyes blinking rapidly to keep her tears at bay.

“I know it’s not ideal, but we have to think about our future, Bri,” I said as I sat up more, trying to get through to her. I dealt with the loneliness too, and it sucked, but I looked ahead

to how great our lives could be after I retired. That kept me going.

“How can I even picture our future when we’re never together?” Brianna blurted out.

Tense silence lingered between us as we stared at each other, processing her words. I refused to let our marriage fail, but we were facing a huge problem that I didn’t know how to solve. I didn’t even have the chance to respond because my phone rang, making me sigh as I pulled it out of my pocket.

Damn it.

“It’s Major Beckett. I have to answer,” I told her, seeing her bottom lip briefly tremble. Whenever he called, it usually wasn’t news that we wanted to hear. I hit the answer button and pressed my phone against my ear, drawing my eyes away from my wife, who was on the verge of tears. “Sir?”

“Captain, I have an urgent mission for you and your unit.”

White noise mingled with Major Beckett’s voice as he reeled off the mission, but I also couldn’t stop thinking about the fact that this call might lead to the end of my marriage. When I hung up, I looked up at Brianna.

“I’m being deployed in two days,” I said, knowing those were the last words she wanted to hear.

“You only just got back! How is this fair, David? I say goodbye to you more than I love you at this point because you’re always leaving!” Brianna cried, her shaky hand covering her mouth as she tried to pull herself together.

Pain gripped my chest, and all I wanted to do was hold her in my arms. She would’ve pushed me away, though.

“I can’t deny orders, Bri. Maybe this mission won’t last as long,” I told her, not knowing what to say to make her feel better.

“You always say that! But you’ll be gone for months, and I’ll be alone for months. I barely feel married anymore,” Brianna said as a few tears streaked down her cheeks.

Those words hurt more than any bullet I had ever taken. I released a sharp exhale and rubbed my temples, attempting to clear the noise out of my head. It was hard to think straight.

“I’m sorry,” I said. “I didn’t expect this to happen.”

Brianna sniffled and hastily wiped her tears away.

“Where are they sending you now?” she asked.

“Some place called Vlasica. I think it’s somewhere in Eastern Europe. They’re in the midst of a civil war, and we’re being sent to help the rebels overthrow their dictator,” I explained, at least wanting her to know that I was leaving to do some good.

To my surprise, an intrigued look breaks across her face.

“Really? Vlasica?” Brianna asked. “They mainly speak Vlasic. English is rare in most parts.”

“Yeah. They are urgently looking for someone who can speak Vlasic to come with us for the mission, but that’s quite rare. And that’ll make our job that much more complicated,” I sighed. She still had a spark in her eye, though. “What?”

“I know Vlasic,” Brianna told me. “It’s one of the Slavic languages that I know.”

It soon dawned on me what she was insinuating.

“Brianna, I can’t take you to Vlasica with me. They’re in a civil war! There’s violence and destruction all over,” I said with a firm shake of my head. I refused to risk her safety.

Brianna crossed her arms over her chest in a defiant manner. The way she usually did when I knew not to argue with her.

“David, our marriage has been suffering for a while now. All I want to do is be with my husband more, and this is a great opportunity for both of us. We’ll be together, and I can help! I can be your translator,” Brianna argued. Her face then softened. “I know I’ll be safe with you.”

Damn it, she was right. I would keep her safe, and the guys would help me without question. Having a translator would help us a lot too, especially when talking to the rebels about battle strategy.

“Are you sure? There’s no turning back once I get clearance from my superior,” I asked her.

Brianna smiled and nodded.

“I’m sure. This is what I want,” she assured me.

The thought of her coming into battle with me scared the hell out of me, but we would finally get to be together. She wouldn’t feel neglected, and we could fix our marriage. Because if I didn’t let her come along, I feared that would be the end for us.

“Pack your bags. We’re going to Vlasica.”

Chapter 3

Brianna

“**R**aise your right hand and repeat after me.”

With a deep inhale, I lifted my right hand as I faced the commissioned officer, my nerves and excitement ringing through me. I felt David’s eyes on me as he watched me take my oath from the back of the room. It was the last step that I had to take before officially being taken on as a military translator.

As the uniformed officer spoke the oath, I listened closely and repeated his words.

“I, Brianna Grady, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies,” I repeated, speaking with my chin raised and my voice projected. My words mirrored his, detailing my promise of service and loyalty as I entered this unexpected, crazy chapter of my life.

Once my last word rang throughout the small ceremony room, the commissioned officer nodded in approval, prompting me to smile and shake his hand. I heard David clapping from me from the back, and as soon as I was cleared to go, I threw myself in his arms.

“Look at you. The United States’ newest military translator,” David said with a chuckle before kissing the top of my head. “I’m proud of you.”

“Your superior wouldn’t have cleared me without your influence,” I pointed out.

David shrugged.

“Maybe. But he wouldn’t have approved of you if you weren’t damn good at your job, which you are,” he replied as he rubbed my upper arms. A serious look filled his face. “But I need you to remember that we’re going into dangerous territory. You have to be careful and listen to me.”

I nodded in understanding, my heart thumping heavily as images of war and bloodshed flashed through my mind. What if things turned out to be ten times worse than how I was imagining them to be?

“I’ll be careful and listen to you,” I assured him.

David’s expression softened.

“Let’s help these rebels take back their home then,” he replied, his eyebrows drawing down in determination.

If I wasn’t motivated to join him before, I was inspired now. I was already beyond the moon that we wouldn’t be apart again for another few months. But I also knew the possible consequences of my decision.

David’s work was dangerous, and he dealt with threatening individuals and risky situations that I might find myself in now too. However, my biggest fear was losing the love of my life, whether that was because he went down in battle or our marriage failed. I didn’t want to lose David in any way, and I didn’t see myself surviving another few years of us hardly seeing each other.

Desperate times certainly called for desperate measures. Besides, I could use the work since I recently finished up a freelance project, and I loved anything that had to do with languages. I already knew Spanish and Italian by the time I graduated high school. More followed, including Vlasic. I never thought I’d actually get the chance to use it.

But as life had proven a thousand times over, it was utterly unpredictable.

* * *

“Vlasica, here we come,” David said as our Uber approached the drop-off area of the airport.

I reached out and took his hand, drawing his blue eyes to mine. There were more defined lines on his face now, but I loved every single part of him. I enjoyed growing older with him, and I still saw the bright-eyed, adoring man that I met in my twenties.

“It’ll be okay,” I promised him. I put him under a lot of pressure by making this decision, but I could tell he knew that we needed to do this.

The side of David’s mouth turned up a little as he nodded. He leaned forward and pressed a lingering kiss against my forehead before the car rolled to a stop by the sidewalk. We thanked the driver and got our luggage out of the trunk before heading into the baggage area of the airport.

Usually, I took over when we took trips, planning everything out and taking the lead at the airport or at the hotel, but I let him lead the way this time. It was his rodeo, and I was the one who needed to adapt.

“The guys will be waiting at our gate,” David told me as he guided me through the busy airport, veering through groups of people and making his way with confident steps.

I trailed him, holding his hand and feeling my stomach twist at the thought of meeting the guys in his unit. I hadn’t ever met them before, and if I was honest, I never really felt the desire to because when I thought about them, all I thought about was them stealing my husband away from me. Maybe that wasn’t fair because they were just doing their jobs too, but it was hard to associate them with anything else.

“Do they know I’m coming?” I asked him.

“Not yet,” David replied, making my eyes widen. He glanced at me and laughed a little, giving my hand a squeeze once we stepped onto the express train that would take us to the right terminal. “It was such short notice that I didn’t get a chance to tell them.”

I couldn’t blame him for that, but they were going to be jarred. What if they didn’t want me to come?

Oh, well. I was coming whether they liked it or not because none of them knew Vlasic. How could they help the rebels to the best of their ability if there was a language barrier?

David led me off the train and to our gate at the far end of the terminal where a group of guys in military fatigues stood.

“Look at this sorry group of jokers,” David said, making them turn around with grins on their faces. He chuckled and greeted all of them with a brief embrace and a clap on the back.

It didn’t take long for them to notice me standing there, interest and confusion ringing across their faces. Handsome faces, admittedly. And there were... *two* sets of triplets. What were the odds?

My slightly wide eyes swept over all of them as they peered at me, my face warming up from all the attention. I needed to say something, right?

“Hello,” I greeted them, immediately shaking my head at myself in my mind.

David went back over to me, his hand resting on my back.

“Guys, this is my wife, Brianna. She’ll be our translator for this mission,” he said.

One of the guys who wasn’t a triplet and had slightly unruly hair that still somehow looked good narrowed his eyes in confusion.

“Wait, your wife is coming with us to Vlasica?” he asked.

David nodded.

“I cleared it with Major Beckett. She’ll be able to help us talk to the locals, which will be vital in helping them overthrow Dimitrik,” he explained.

One of the triplets with deep brown skin, a shaved head, and a faint scar on his left cheek approached me with a friendly smile. He held his hand out to me.

“Welcome to the club. I’m Aziel,” he introduced himself.

Relief flooded through me as at least one of them took control of the conversation. I gladly shook his hand with a polite

smile, hoping that some of the tension could be smoothed out before we endured a long flight together.

“Nice to meet you,” I said.

Aziel motioned to his brothers, pointing to one with tattoos all over his arms first and then the other with a leaner build than the others and a neatly trimmed beard.

“That’s Amir and Andre. As you can probably tell, we’re brothers,” he told me with a light chuckle.

I smiled at both of them. Amir grinned and lifted his hand in a casual wave in response, while Andre nodded in a polite manner. He had the most beautiful hazel eyes.

“We’re the better set of triplets in the unit,” Amir told me, shooting a sly look at the other triplets, who all had dark brown hair.

One of them with wavy hair that stopped above his shoulders and a small birthmark on the side of his neck chuckled a little. He stepped closer to me, seeming a bit timider than the rest.

“I’m Elijah,” he introduced himself, offering his hand.

I looked up into his piercing blue eyes, feeling something faint stir deep inside of me as the rest of them watched our interaction. They were all so united but so different at the same time.

“Nice to meet you,” I said as I shook his hand.

“That’s Erick,” Elijah told me as he pointed to his brother with brown eyes, neatly styled hair, and a small scar above his left eyebrow. He then motioned to his other brother, who had a more rugged looking demeanor with the shortest hair of the three, a scruffy beard, and a tattoo of a dagger on his forearm. “And Emmett.”

The three of us shared a polite greeting, and I could tell that this set of triplets were more guarded than the other set. Nothing wrong with that, though. I just hoped that we could all get along, especially for David’s sake.

David stepped up next to me and nodded to the guy with unruly hair, who looked to be closer in age to David than

anyone else.

“That’s Bowen,” he said before motioning to another guy with friendly features, light brown skin, and dark hair. “And that’s Mo. I think that’s everyone. Sheesh, we’re a circus, right, boys?”

The other men grinned or chuckled in agreement. However, Emmett turned to David with a raised eyebrow.

“Is this her first time in the field? Have you warned her about what might be out there? Because it isn’t going to be pretty,” Emmett said, his eyes finding mine.

My heart raced as I tore my eyes away to look at my husband, gravitating closer to him.

“It’s her first time, but she can handle herself. She’ll stick close, and we’ll look out for her like we look out for each other. Understand?” David replied with a firm voice.

They all nodded, any other questions or concerns being withheld. The thought of how much control he had made a warm feeling stir low in my stomach, clashing with the cold nervousness that I felt about trying to keep up with all of them without embarrassing myself or David. He vouched for me, so I couldn’t let him down.

“Gate B40 is now boarding.”

“That’s us,” Mo said as he clasped his hands together. “Let’s get this show on the road.”

My eyes then widened. With all of the craziness, I forgot to tell Ryder and Delilah that I was going off for who knew how long. I took out my phone and quickly typed out a message to send before I boarded.

I know this is short notice but I’m going with David on one of his missions. I don’t know exactly when I’ll be back, but I might not make it to the baby shower. I’m so sorry but I promise to make it up to you guys!

By the time I got on the plane and took a seat between David and Bowen, Ryder had texted me back.

You're going on a mission? Like a military mission? Isn't that dangerous? Please tell me that you won't be in the middle of battle or something...

I smiled a little, not wanting to worry him. I would probably be close to battle, but I didn't see myself wielding a weapon or running into gunfire.

Don't worry. I'm just translating!

Ryder texted back a minute later while everyone else boarded and got situated in their seats.

Delilah told me to stop worrying and that you can take care of yourself. Can't blame your brother for worrying!

If he was in my position, I would've worried too.

Thank her for the vote of confidence. I'll be fine! Love you!

After sending my last message, I put my phone on airplane mode and settled back in my seat, sharing a small smile with David and immediately feeling warmth wash over me. Even if it was unexpected and unconventional, it was nice to be spending time with him again.

Who knew what this adventure had in store for us?

Chapter 4

Brianna

A sigh of relief broke from me the moment I stepped out of the vehicle that transported us from the airport to our safe house on the edge of Moranta, the capital city of Vlasica.

Like in many of the other surrounding countries in the Eastern Europe area, brutalist architecture took hold of Moranta with its predominantly concrete, geometrically shaped structures and monochromatic color scheme. It was a mixture of daunting and beautiful.

Our safe house was a two-story cottage tucked in a small, wooded area. As we approached the front porch with our bags, it actually looked fairly cozy and quaint, but I could see smoke in the distance beyond the trees. I could only imagine what chaos was raging on in the busier parts of the capital and beyond.

“I’ll get that for you.”

I almost jumped out of my skin when Amir took my bag from me with a bold grin on his face.

“Oh, thank you,” I said as I followed him inside.

The furniture and decor looked to be decades old, but the place was still clean and tidy. I didn’t need modern appliances to be happy, and I was already enjoying the change in scenery.

“Pick any of the bedrooms on the top floor,” David told me as he lingered a few people behind me.

I nodded and followed Amir up the wooden staircase to the top floor. We squeezed down the small hallway before Amir suddenly stopped in the middle, making me bump against his

well-built body. My face immediately flushed from embarrassment as I looked up into his brown eyes.

“Which bedroom?” Amir asked as he gestured to the three bedroom doors around us.

“That one,” I said, pointing to the one at the end of the hallway. It would give me and David a little more privacy.

Amir nodded and opened the bedroom door before striding inside and placing my bag at the end of the queen-sized bed. He glanced around with a small chuckle.

“Much better than our last arrangement. I was inhaling sand in my sleep,” he told me.

I cracked an amused smile as I walked deeper into the bedroom, my eyes sweeping over the window covered by white curtains, the striped bed covers, and the wooden dresser in the small space.

“Definitely can’t complain. I’m surprised we’ll all fit in here,” I said.

Amir seemed to gravitate closer to me, towering over me. He wasn’t intimidating in a bad way, but his presence was naturally strong.

“We’ll all just have to get really close,” he replied as that casual grin of his crossed his face.

Was he... flirting? No, he wouldn’t flirt with the wife of his captain. That would be downright disrespectful.

“You guys don’t get tired of being around each other all the time?” I asked as I sat down on the edge of the bed.

To my surprise, Amir sat down next to me. He shook his head.

“We’re all brothers. We have each other’s back,” he replied before tilting his head at me. “Don’t worry. I’ll keep a close eye on you too.”

My heart automatically started beating faster as our eyes met. He really shouldn’t have been flirting with me like that. It wasn’t right!

But... a twisted part of me couldn't help but drink in the attention, especially after being so lonely for months while David was gone. It was wrong of me to think like that, but I was human after all.

However, I wasn't going to do anything about it no matter how much he smiled at me or how many flirty things he said. Not only was I here to strengthen my marriage, but I was also here to work and contribute to the mission. I refused to cheat or do anything to make David jealous when all I wanted to do was make things better between us.

"Speaking of brothers and all that, why are there two sets of triplets?" I asked, moving the conversation along in a more innocent direction.

"Me and my brothers came after the Atkins triplets. Our old unit disbanded due to restructuring, so we were kind of lost in the wind. But everyone knew about David Grady's unit and the work they got done. If we wanted to make a difference, that was the man to go to," Amir replied with a determined glint in his eyes. "And we proved ourselves and how our skills could help the unit. Next thing we knew, we were the second set of triplets in the unit. Things work out in a funny way sometimes."

A fluttering sensation erupted in my chest as I listened to how inspired he and his brothers were by my husband. He truly was an incredible man, which was one of a thousand reasons why I wanted to make our marriage work. I wouldn't ever find someone else like him.

"What skills do you and your brothers have?" I asked, unable to help my curiosity. I didn't know many details about much of anything because David couldn't say all that much. However, I was in the thick of it now, so it helped for me to know what all was going on and who I was sharing this little cottage with.

"I'm the sniper and marksman. Aziel is the close protection specialist, so he looks after any people we rescue or any important person we're transporting or who's in our company. Andre is the firearms expert, so if you have any weapon

questions, that's who to go to," Amir explained as he rested a hand on the mattress between us.

I could feel the heat radiating off his muscular body, my eyes threatening to stray and admire his strong upper arms. Instead, I looked down at the wooden floor, watching the gleam of the sunlight that came in through the curtains.

"I don't know what to expect from this mission. What's our next move?" I replied, my forehead creasing from concern. I wanted to be ready.

"We're waiting to hear word from the rebel group. If they need our help, we'll go to the city and assist, whether that's taking out enemies or getting rebels to safety," Amir said. "We'll have to decide on the spot whether or not we'll need you to come along."

I nodded. It seemed like reacting in the moment made up a lot of the plans, which I was sort of used to since David's career was so unpredictable.

"Thank you. This is all new, but I won't slow you guys down," I promised him. The last thing I wanted was for everyone to think that I was deadweight.

Amir nudged my knee as he rose to his feet.

"You don't have to worry, sweetheart. We're happy to have a woman here. A real woman," he said as his eyes briefly swept over me. He grinned and strode out of the room, leaving me there with wide eyes that I soon rolled.

He sure was a charmer. He probably flirted with any girl he laid his eyes on, so I didn't need to feel special or anything. With a huff, I started unpacking my bag, getting everything squared away until David finally came into the room for the night. After a long day of traveling, we were both just ready to get in bed.

"I can't believe I'm really here with you," I told David once we changed clothes and lay in bed together.

David turned on his side to face me, his hand moving up and down my arm as he sighed.

“I’m worried about you. About your safety,” he admitted as his brow furrowed. “All I want to do is protect you, but we have a mission too.”

I reached out and placed my hand on his cheek, drawing his eyes to mine.

“I can look after myself,” I assured him. It was sweet that he cared so much, but I wasn’t here to distract him when he was working. We both had things to do, but in moments like these, we could just be the married couple that I loved and missed so dearly. “You didn’t marry a damsel in distress.”

David cracked a grin and nodded as his hand settled on my hip, his thumb rubbing small circles under my white tank top.

“Oh, I know. You’re tough as nails,” he said before his eyes strayed to the door. “Seemed like you were getting along just fine with Amir too. There’s no need for me to worry about you so much when there are eight other guys around to keep an eye on you.”

My cheeks automatically flushed. His tone was... interesting. Teasing? He was probably glad to see me and his buddies getting along fine.

“I’m sure there are better things for them to do than keep an eye on me,” I assured him.

David shook his head.

“There’s nothing more captivating than you. They’ll see that,” he replied.

I tilted my head at him with a curious glint in my eyes. He seemed so sure that they were going to take a strong liking to me, but I wasn’t sure about that yet. We’d only just met! But it was nice to see him happy like this, and I was just glad to be here with him.

“Well, I’m all yours right now,” I told him as I playfully tapped his chest with my forefinger.

David hummed under his breath in a teasing manner as his eyes slipped down to my lips.

“Good,” he replied.

As crazy as it sounded after being married so long, I swore it felt like I was leaning in for my first kiss. When my lips pressed against his, my heart thumped so heavily that I thought it would break its way out of my chest.

David settled his fingers on the small of my back, encouraging me to scoot closer as our lips brushed and moved.

It felt *so* good to be kissed by him again. *Touched* by him again. There would be nights when I literally dreamed about moments like these, and I couldn't begin to describe how good it felt to finally be experiencing them in real life again. Because when we were together and not apart for so long, we were perfect. We were meant for forever.

It didn't take long for my eyes to burn with happy tears, making me break the kiss to rest my forehead against his.

"Sorry, I just really missed you," I said as I sniffled.

David stroked my cheek, pecking my nose to make me smile and wrinkle it. He always knew what to do to make me brighten up.

"I missed you, baby," he murmured before rolling on his back and pulling me closer to rest my cheek on his chest. He rubbed my back, holding me close.

I hoped he wouldn't let me go any time soon.

Chapter 5

Elijah

“We’ve got a message!”

The moment my voice rang throughout the cottage, I heard boots on the floor as everyone rushed over to the bedroom that I had to share with Bowie.

Our bedroom had a desk where we could set up the military laptop and other equipment that we used for tech and communication purposes, and after two days of being here, we’d finally established communication with the rebel group.

David reached me first, the others piling in after him. He looked over my shoulder, perching his hand on the back of my wooden chair.

“What did they say?” he asked.

I gestured to the message, which was a jumble of numbers. It was code, which was in my department.

“I’ll need to work on it. It shouldn’t be too hard, but the message might be written in their language if I manage to decipher what the numbers translate to,” I replied.

David turned to Erick.

“Get my wife,” he said.

Erick gave him a curt nod before walking out of the bedroom.

I never expected to work with David’s wife of all people. It was still crazy to me that she was even here out in this battleground. But we needed all the help we could get to overthrow Dimitrik with the rebels.

Emmett leaned against the edge of the desk next to me.

“Any thoughts?” he asked.

I looked closer at the numbers, which were grouped in pairs to longer strings. There were some singular numbers too.

“The numbers probably translate to letters, but I’m pretty sure their alphabet is different from ours. I’ll have to ask Brianna,” I replied. The rebels wouldn’t make their code too difficult, but they had to make their messages not the easiest to decipher if any enemies intercepted them.

After a minute, Brianna hurried into the room with a lined notebook in her hand, which I assumed were her notes. I had met plenty of translators in my life, but she was certainly the most attractive one I had ever worked with. Not that I should see her like that because she was David’s wife, but she looked good in her jeans and fitted white t-shirt.

“Sorry, I’m here,” she said as she moved to my other side, her fingers hastily pushing her hair away from her slightly flushed face.

“We got a message from the rebel group, but it’s written in code. I believe it’s a basic code, but it may be written in Vlastic,” I explained to her as I gestured to the jumble of numbers. “How many letters are in the Vlastic alphabet?”

Brianna flipped open her notebook and pressed her forefinger against one of the lines.

“Thirty,” she said. “Their sentence structure is different from ours too, so we’ll have to keep that in mind.”

“We’ll leave you to it,” David said, flashing his wife a proud, encouraging smile. He kissed her on the cheek before motioning for the others to leave me, Emmett, and Brianna behind. “Everyone else, equipment check.”

“Emmett, grab Brianna a chair,” I told my brother, not wanting to be rude.

Emmett nodded and left for a minute before coming back with two wooden chairs. He put them to my right, inviting Brianna to sit down between us.

“Thank you,” Brianna said before sitting up straight with her pen poised over a blank notebook page. “Can you read the numbers? I’ll match them up with the letter position in the alphabet. I might have to guess with numbers over nine, but we’ll roll with it.”

Emmett and I pitched her a surprised look.

Brianna shrugged.

“I didn’t only take language classes in college. I took a few cybersecurity and math classes,” she replied.

Well, I couldn’t argue with that. She was a bundle of surprises. I slowly read the numbers aloud, telling her when there were breaks so that she could make note of them. When I was finished, my eyes shifted over to my brother, who was watching Brianna work with an intrigued look on his face.

Emmett must’ve felt my eyes on him because he pitched a quick look my way, the corner of his mouth threatening to turn up. After his rocky divorce a little while ago, he hadn’t shown any interest in getting close to any woman, but he certainly had his eyes on her.

I couldn’t blame him. Even from sitting half a foot away from her, I could smell the sweet scent of her shampoo, and it was hard to ignore the definite curves of her figure. Our work made it hard for us to meet people and get into relationships, so David was a lucky guy to even be married.

Especially to her.

Brianna subtly bit her bottom lip as she narrowed her eyes in thought. She started drawing lines between the letters she wrote down, separating clusters that should’ve been words. She then looked up at me, my heart stirring for a second. Damn, I needed to go out if I ever got the chance to not work for more than two days.

“So, I know the sequences are separated like they’re words, but none of them made words. They’re just separated that way to throw you off, but you were right about the numbers translating to letters as they’re ordered in the alphabet,” she explained, waving her pen around as she spoke.

My eyebrows lifted.

Brianna smiled a little.

“Don’t look so surprised,” she said with a faint laugh. She turned to Emmett, who had the same expression as me. “You know, code is its own language.”

Emmett put his hands up innocently.

“Not surprised. Impressed,” he said.

A light pink color warmed Brianna’s cheeks as a grateful look filled her face.

“You have no idea how happy I am to hear that,” she replied as she wrote down a few more notes, translating some of the Vlastic words that she picked out into English so that we could read them. She did a little more ungrouping and grouping of letters until she figured out the entire message, pretty much doing my job for me since she knew the language and I didn’t.

I’d been shown up today, but I wasn’t mad at all. It wasn’t every day that a beautiful woman swept in with her language skills and sharp intelligence and stole the show.

“Black bird marks the cage. Save the helpless from the snakes,” Emmett read the message with a confused look on his face. He then huffed and leaned back in his chair with his arms crossed. “Great. Now, we get a riddle.”

“It’s an important message. Seems like a cry for help, and I doubt they want their enemies knowing they’re asking for help,” I pointed out before lightly bumping my shoulder against Brianna before I could even register the motion. “But if anyone can help us figure out what it means, it’s you.”

What was I doing? Obviously, I wasn’t the most confident or smooth guy in our unit, but I wished I could have a normal interaction with a woman like her without overthinking every little move. It wasn’t like I was trying to impress her.

Well, I didn’t need to be trying to impress her, but I liked the feeling of her eyes on me as I did a write-up on the rebel group’s code use for future reference. It made me feel a little

better to know that I wasn't the only one intrigued by her sudden but captivating presence.

When Brianna started fidgeting with her shirt and shifting around in her seat, I pitched her a concerned look.

"Everything okay?" I asked.

A sheepish expression crossed her face.

"Yeah, I just should've worn a bigger shirt. It's a bit too... exposing," she replied, folding her arms in her lap like she was trying to cover her stomach.

"Not to overstep, but that's the worst thing you could do with curves like those. They're supposed to be shown off," Emmett assured her with a small grin.

His confidence boosted the little amount that I had, throwing fuel on an already burning fire.

"Yeah, you shouldn't try to hide them," I added, feeling pure desire burn within me. It mingled with some guilt because I could only imagine David getting pissed if he found out that Emmett and I were checking out his wife.

Brianna stiffened a little, winding her arms around herself tighter as she shook her head.

"Most guys nowadays prefer younger, slender women. I can't tell you the humiliating comments guys have made about me... telling me that I couldn't pull off a certain outfit or that I needed to watch the calories," Brianna replied, swallowing hard afterward. "It's awful."

What assholes. I grinded my teeth, unable to fight off the aggravation that I felt over the fact that some dickheads would tell someone as kind and beautiful as her that she was anything less than gorgeous.

"Well, you won't hear any of that bullshit around here. The more we get to look at, the crazier we're driven," I told her with a light chuckle afterward to soothe away the tension.

"David is a lucky guy," Emmett added, sharing an agreeing look with me.

We had all seen pictures of Brianna over the years, but pictures never did anyone justice. Seeing all of her beauty in person really put it in perspective of why David got so antsy toward the end of our missions. He was dying to get home to his smart, sexy wife.

Yeah, he was a lucky bastard indeed.

Brianna looked down at the ground for a moment with a shy smile, seeming to not even know how to reply. She then brushed her hair out of her face and straightened up, adopting a serious look.

“We should get back to work,” she said.

She was right, but dealing with a riddle was the last thing that my entranced mind wanted to focus on right now.

Chapter 6

Aziel

We finally had our first big lead thanks to the efforts of Elijah, Emmett, and Brianna. Amir and Erick scoped out the city from a safe distance with binoculars and spotted a building with what looked like a messy depiction of a bird in black spray paint on the back wall.

After more recon, we noticed that members of the dictator's forces were going in and out of the building, dragging captured rebels inside whom we didn't see again. It was a hostage situation.

"Let's head out!" David called to Aziel and Amir.

"You're not going to take more men?" Brianna asked him as they stood in the foyer, a worried look plaguing her face.

Everyone was impressed with her efforts on the decoding process, and the atmosphere had a different kind of energy with her around. She brought some sort of warmth to this place, and it was nice having someone more innocent and light-hearted around because it could get a bit rough and moody around here.

We had all seen things that we never wanted to lay eyes on before. Death. Destruction. Doom. Some days, we were able to joke around and lift each other's moods, but other days, we were too upset to even muster a smile or eat that night.

But Brianna could even make the grumps of the group, Erick, and Emmett, smile.

It didn't hurt that she was undeniably gorgeous too, but that might work against me more than for me. I nodded to her

when she looked at me, doing my best not to stare like some of the other guys openly did. They were lucky David hadn't punched them in the throat by now.

"The same few enemies go into that building. They'll be easy to take out. Besides, if we bring any more people, it'll draw more attention to us," David explained to her before cupping her face and kissing her forehead. "We'll be right back."

Brianna breathed in deeply and nodded, giving him a small smile as she steadied herself. She looked back over at me and Amir.

"Be safe," she said.

"Always," I assured her, not wanting to worry. Seeing us come and go would be a learning curve for her, but she would get used to it. She would realize what all we could do.

"Don't miss us too much," Amir chuckled, shooting her a grin that made me pitch a wary look toward David.

David didn't even seem fazed as he turned and led us out through the thin strip of woods that separated us from the capital. The closer we got, the slower and lower we got, wanting to keep out of sight. He jogged quietly over to what looked like an abandoned bakery, carefully stepping over glass from the broken front window.

I followed close behind him, while Amir took the rear to watch our backs. We rounded the building and stuck to the alleyways, eerie quietness ringing throughout the city. The aftermath of battle lingered in the streets in the form of burnt cars, shattered glass, and stray bullets. Civilians had either evacuated or were in hiding, while rebels snuck around to keep their base hidden from the dictator's forces, who did rounds every so often.

The sight of a tattered teddy bear on the street made my heart ache, forcing me to tear my eyes away as we continued toward the building that had been turned into a makeshift prison. I had seen a lot in my days of being a soldier, but that didn't stop certain sights from aching. All the rebels wanted was a fair,

peaceful life under a good, caring leader. It wasn't fair that they had to spill blood for that.

David paused at the end of the alleyway, holding his hand up to signal for us to stop. He then motioned ahead.

"There it is. Aziel and I will hit the door in the back. Amir, take care of any incoming company," David said.

Amir rested his sniper rifle against his shoulder with a grin.

"With pleasure," he replied before heading over to a nearby ladder to climb up to the rooftop of the building to our left.

I turned to David and nodded.

"Ready," I said as I held my rifle closer to my chest.

David crouched before hurrying across the street toward the gray concrete building. There were no signs of any enemies in the nearby area, but that didn't mean there weren't any waiting for us inside. We rounded the corner to reach the back area, our boots lightly thudding against the concrete.

"I'll draw their attention. You find the hostages," he told me.

I nodded and dug my heels in, preparing to run in the moment he opened the door.

David counted under his breath before throwing open the door and storming inside into a small hallway. There was one opening ahead, and the moment an enemy in black tactical gear came running around the corner, David pulled the trigger, sending him to the ground.

"Let's go," David said as he hurried ahead to clear the way, stepping through the entrance for us to come across what looked like a lounge area with a small kitchenette to the right. One enemy was on the couch, and two were in the kitchen. "Go!"

I ran through another door to the left as shots rang out, ducking my head as one bullet struck the wall right above my helmet. I checked every door down the new hallway, only finding storage rooms and bathrooms until a flight of stairs finally greeted me. A basement.

I hurried down the stairs with my gun raised, turning its tactical light to make a beam sweep over the stairs as I made my way down them. When I reached the halfway point, shots rang out, splintering the wood beneath my feet. With a curse, I jumped, landing on the concrete at the bottom of the stairs to dodge the fire. I looked up just as a man in tactical gear lunged at me, slamming me back against the wall behind me.

“Stupid soldier,” the man hissed as he started to raise his pistol.

With a grunt, I slammed my hand against the inside of his wrist, knocking the gun out of his hands before headbutting him with my helmet. It wasn't the most graceful move and made me a bit dizzy, but at least I didn't have a gun in my face. I shot him down before he could get up and attack me again, silence ringing throughout the basement until I heard muffled cries.

I lifted my gun to fill the small basement with light, seeing five men chained to the back wall with cloth wrapped around their mouths. Hell, one of them looked like he was only in his twenties. Dimitrik was a cruel bastard, and I couldn't wait to help the rebels bring him down.

“I got you. Calm down,” I said as I heard sharp breaths and saw them shrinking back against the wall. My unit and the rebels hadn't officially met until now. What a hell of an introduction. I patted down the man who had done a poor job guarding them and found a key in his pocket.

Bingo.

I hurried over to the first guy and unlocked the two cuffs that bound each of his wrists before moving to the next. When I reached the younger man, I heard footsteps descending down the stairs, making me whip around only to see David.

“Oh, good. I thought I was going to have to shoot you,” I said as I turned back around to finish unlocking the rest of the cuffs to free everyone.

“Hopefully, you never do,” David replied with a faint smirk before approaching one of the men. “English?”

An unsure look filled the man's face as he shrugged.

"Some," he said in an uncertain voice.

"Good enough for me. Not much time to chit-chat either," David said before motioning for everyone to follow him. He grabbed his radio and lifted it to his mouth. "How are we looking, Amir?"

"Crystal clear, captain."

"Perfect," David replied before leading everyone out of the building.

"We won't... forget this," the rebel told us. "We go now. Talk later."

Before David and I could tell them to wait, the rebels hurried off to where I suspected was their base. I looked at David, who shook his head.

"We should go anyway. They'll send more people, and I don't want to be caught in that firefight," David replied before we hurried into the alleyway where Amir was waiting for us.

"Lucky bastards. You got all the excitement," Amir muttered.

I chuckled and slung my arm around my brother's shoulders.

"Maybe next time," I told him before the three of us broke out into a jog to make it out of the city. When the last building lingered behind us, and the trees loomed ahead, we slowed down to a walk, able to relax more now. "We'll have to get Brianna to talk to that guy."

David walked ahead of us.

"I'm sure she'll be happy to help," he said.

"I wonder what sexy is in Vlastic," Amir murmured to me.

I smirked and rolled my eyes at him. He was definitely the more outspoken brother out of the three of us.

"Is that the pick-up line you're going to use?" I asked him.

"What would you say?" Amir replied as we kept our voices low.

“Maybe just ‘You’re beautiful’ in English,” I told him with a faint laugh.

“Yeah, she is beautiful. Gorgeous, really,” David suddenly said, making Amir and me stop in our tracks with sheepish looks on our faces. He might’ve been older than all of us, but I supposed his hearing didn’t reflect that.

“Sorry. We were just... playing,” I told him as I lowered my eyes, not wanting to get my ass kicked for commenting on the attractiveness of his wife. It was hard to ignore, though.

David didn’t even narrow his eyes. His face remained still and calm as he looked between us.

“She’s gotten even more beautiful as the years have gone on,” he said. “She doesn’t think so, but it sure is torture being away from her for so long.”

“Oh, I can imagine,” Amir commented. “I’d damn near be in tears if I had to be dragged out of bed with someone who looked as good as her.”

“I’m sure it’s been nice having her around,” I told David. Either they were really quiet, or they hadn’t been... getting busy since arriving here. I wondered why that was, because if I was him, I would’ve been all over her.

Respectfully.

“Of course. It’s nice finally being in the same bed as her,” David replied with a satisfied look on his face.

“I’m surprised I haven’t heard more noise coming from your bedroom,” Amir chuckled, nudging David in a playful manner that we were all used to. But we’d never played around before about this. Amir was the one who pushed boundaries, though.

I shot Amir a silencing look, but David’s response caught me off guard.

“I can’t promise you it’ll be quiet every night,” David said with a light laugh. “We haven’t... been together in a minute now, but it’s just *that* much better when we finally can.”

“I think that’s called edging,” Amir laughed. “Now, that’s a method too many guys don’t use with their women. Such a

waste.”

I smirked, shaking my head at the playboy of my family.

A thoughtful look crossed David’s face.

“I haven’t tried that yet,” he admitted as he rubbed the back of his neck.

Not wanting to be wallpaper in this conversation, I decided to throw in my two cents.

“Asking her what she wants is a good place to start too,” I told him, getting a nod of agreement from Amir.

David thought for a few seconds before lowering his hand from his nape.

“Those are good tips. You should try them out on her and see how she likes them,” he said as he looked between us.

Amir and I shared a wide-eyed look, not expecting him to say *anything* like that. We had all known each other for a while, but this was coming out of left field.

“Sir?” Amir asked, making sure we heard him right.

David shrugged.

“Brianna deserves the world. I’ve let her down so many times by leaving her all alone. Making her feel neglected because I’m not there to love her. Emotionally and physically,” he explained. “I want her to be happy. Pleased. Even if it takes more than just me to show her just how beautiful she truly is.”

“This isn’t a trick, right? You’re telling us you’re fine with us sleeping with your wife?” I asked, making sure I wasn’t making up a fantasy in my head.

David glanced away for a second, letting the idea stir in his mind for a moment longer before nodding.

“I’m fine with it. Hell, I’d want to watch,” he admitted as he rested his rifle against his shoulder.

I had to be dreaming or something. There was no way that he was telling us he wanted to watch us fuck his wife. Was that what he was really into?

“We don’t want to disrespect you or your marriage,” I said as I put my hands up, not wanting to overstep.

David shook his head.

“You wouldn’t be because I would allow it,” he replied. “Unless it’s something you guys don’t want to do.”

“Pretty sure we’d be idiots to turn that down,” Amir said with a light laugh. “I mean, Brianna is... she’s a firecracker. Sir.”

That was putting it lightly. We hadn’t been around each other for long, but seeing Brianna walk around in her lounge shorts or a tank top made me rush for a cold shower half the time. Other times, I had to bite my knuckle and focus on anything else. Maybe we were all sex-deprived hellions, but she was temptation itself.

“I’ll ask her and let you guys know,” David replied before turning and heading toward the cottage, leaving me and Amir with stunned looks on our faces. It was like he invited us to bowling and not fucking his wife in front of him.

“There’s something in the air here,” Amir muttered before grinning. “I’m loving it.”

It didn’t have anything to do with the air. It had everything to do with the beautiful woman in our cottage and all the dirty things we wanted to do to her.

Chapter 7

David

“I found tequila and whiskey. Come pick your poison!”

I cracked a grin as Amir stepped out of the kitchen with two bottles of liquor held up high. It didn't take him long to be swarmed by the others as we all relaxed and celebrated our first successful rescue mission. With Brianna's help, I could see us continuing to be successful. What was one night off?

“Shot for you. Shot for me. Can you keep up, princess?” Emmett asked Brianna as most of us moved to lounge in the living room.

Brianna rolled her eyes at him playfully as they each held a shot glass of tequila in their hands as they faced each other.

“We'll see,” she replied before they threw back their shots. Her face twisted from the punch of the alcohol, but she downed it like a champ, inciting cheers and applause from the other guys, who poured their own drinks from the liquor bottles that Amir found in a cabinet in the kitchen.

Emmett turned to his brothers, who watched from the couch with amused looks on their faces.

“Pull the sticks out of your asses and have a drink!” he told them before grabbing two glasses off the coffee table and pouring them more than a shot of tequila for each of them.

“Are you trying to give us alcohol poisoning?” Elijah laughed before taking a cautious sip. “Fuck, Em. Tastes like gasoline.”

Brianna laughed and swiped a lime slice off a plate of lemon slices, lime slices, and little salt piles that were fixed for the night. I didn't see a single one of us going to bed sober

tonight. She approached Elijah and held the lime slice out to him, her cheeks already flushed from being buzzed.

Damn it, she looked so beautiful with a flushed face. She looked like that whenever she was under me, her legs wrapped around my waist, her lips parted in ecstasy.

I clenched my jaw and breathed in to control myself. Having her around worked me up to the point where it was painful, and something about seeing the guys swarm her to check her out and flirt with her turned me on even more. I had no idea where those thoughts were coming from, but the thought of watching her be touched and pleased threatened to make me hard on the spot.

“Try this,” Brianna said, encouraging Elijah to suck on the lime piece before taking another sip of his tequila.

Elijah still winced, but he swept his tongue over his top lip and nodded.

“Okay, that was better,” he said.

Brianna laughed, her fingers trailing down his arm in a casual, flirty manner. It should’ve bothered me, right? But it didn’t. I wanted her to touch him again. To get closer and invite him in.

“You okay, boss man?” Mo asked as he approached me with a glass of whiskey in his hand, drawing me out of my heated thoughts.

I forced myself to relax as I nodded, taking a deep sip of my own whiskey. I was barely on the brink of a buzz, which I needed to remedy.

“Yeah, just glad that things are going well,” I replied as I smiled in Brianna’s direction.

Mo followed my eyes.

“I’m glad she’s loosening up and having fun. I’m sure we’re not the friendliest looking bunch.” He chuckled, his gaze lingering on my wife.

“She’ll do just fine once she gets to know everyone. Why don’t you take her another drink?” I encouraged him.

Mo looked surprised, but he didn't argue. He poured her a glass of whiskey that he was sipping on and approached her.

"You're handling the clear liquor fine, but can you handle it dark?" he asked as he waved the glass in front of her teasingly.

"I can handle anything," Brianna assured him as they smiled at each other. She was getting more and more flirty with each drink she had, and I could tell that she was thoroughly enjoying herself and all the attention. She deserved every ounce of it.

Many other guys wouldn't have encouraged someone else to take their partner a drink. Hell, they would've broken up this little flirt fest, but I couldn't help but feel intrigued by it. Excited. I was rooting for her and wanting the others to see how incredible she was. *My wife.*

The best part of my life.

"I bet she'll take it like a champ," Amir said, his hand resting on her back as some of the guys moved closer to her.

"That does not sound innocent," Brianna laughed, her cheeks reddening before she downed the whiskey in one go. It was glorious.

"It's more fun that way," Mo assured her, his fingertips brushing the back of her arm.

I couldn't count how many lingering touches were left on her. How many she left on them. It was a damn relief when some of the guys gave up and retired to their rooms to sleep because it finally gave me the opportunity to whisk Brianna away to our bedroom, unable to fight against the desire raging through me.

"Are you having a good night?" I asked as I backed her up against the bedroom door, my head feeling a little hazy from the alcohol. I still knew exactly what I was doing and saying, though.

Brianna smiled and nodded as she wrapped her arms around my neck, her body leaning against mine. She started wearing tank tops more often, and I couldn't help but wonder if she noticed all the eyes on her when she did.

“A very good night now,” she said.

Heat radiated between us, and I let it take hold of me as I crashed my lips against hers, tasting the alcohol on her tongue. My hand slid up her nape, my fingers diving into her hair as our kiss deepened by the second.

Brianna moaned softly into my mouth before brushing her tongue against mine, her hands moving to glide down my chest.

I couldn't take it anymore. I wanted her so badly that my entire body ached, prompting me to pick her up and carry her over to the queen bed that we shared. I dropped her down onto the mattress before stripping off my fitted, army-green t-shirt, my dog tags hitting my bare chest.

Brianna's breath hitched as she leaned back on her elbows, her eyes darkening as I moved closer to her.

I crawled over her, tugging her tank top up her figure until I could toss it to the side. Her bra was next, exposing the swell of her breasts and her hard nipples. My mouth enveloped one of them, sucking firmly and making her push her chest up. I slid one hand down her stomach, enjoying its curve as I slipped my fingers under the waist of her linen shorts.

Brianna gasped when my fingertips grazed her clit through the thin material of her panties.

“David...” she breathed out. She sounded so sweet, so desperate. I missed the sound of my name on her lips.

I moved to the other nipple, my tongue tracing a steady circle as my hand dipped under her panties. I audibly groaned at how wet she already felt as my fingers slid through her delicate folds. She was so reactive to every touch, arching her back and bucking her hips for more.

“I missed this,” I told her as I hovered over her, feeling myself throb as I watched the arch of her body.

Brianna nodded breathlessly as she reached out for me, placing her hand on the back of my head to draw me in for a heated kiss.

“I want you,” she whispered against my lips between sultry, open-mouthed kisses. “Now.”

My fingertips drifted over her clit in steady circles, working her up even more before I pushed a finger inside of her. I clenched my jaw so hard that I briefly worried about breaking it. Oh, fuck. She was so wet that sliding in another finger was smooth and easy, working them in until they were buried to the knuckle.

“I know why you’re so wet,” I murmured near her ear as I rocked my fingers in and out of her. “You liked flirting with the others. And when they flirted with you.”

I swore she fluttered around my fingers, but Brianna stiffened afterward, her eyes widening.

I shook my head as I peered down at her.

“I liked it too. Watching you get all flushed and fawned over,” I admitted as I continued thrusting my fingers into her slowly. “They’d enjoy seeing you like this. Dripping wet and desperate for more.”

Brianna let out a shaky exhale before she swallowed hard and nodded.

“I’d like that too,” she said.

I grinned, feeling my cock pulse at the thought. She had no idea how hot that would be to me. I needed to show her.

“They’d worship you. Every perfect inch of you,” I told her as I drew back to pull off her shorts and panties, leaving her bare and beautiful beneath me. My clothes came off next, my fingers wrapping around my erection as I nudged her thighs apart to slip between them.

Brianna whimpered as I rocked myself through her folds, grazing the head of my cock against her clit. She ran her hand up my arm as I planted my palm next to her head.

“I’d want you there. Watching me,” she said.

I dragged my cock down to her entrance, slowly pushing inside to make her head drop back in bliss. My eyes shut as I lowered my head, reveling in how good she felt.

“I wouldn’t be able to tear my eyes away from you,” I told her as I fully sheathed myself, my head feeling even hazier than before.

Brianna dragged me down for a heated kiss, digging her nails into my back as I started to thrust into her.

I caressed her breasts with my free hand, teasing her nipples and squeezing her soft flesh that I couldn’t get enough of. My thrusts became harder and faster, my sense of control slipping. Her nails in my back burned so blissfully, driving me on as I drew more and more pleased sounds from her.

“Go on. Let them know how good it feels,” I said as I slammed into her over and over, knowing that she liked it hard. Passionately rough. I was more than happy to give it to her however she liked it, especially when the guys could probably hear down the hallway.

Brianna didn’t restrain herself, unable to do so in the first place as I pounded her into the mattress. Her nails scraped at the back of my shoulders, her thighs tightening around my waist. She suddenly tensed and cried out, my name ringing from her as she succumbed to the pleasure.

I buried my face in the crook of her neck as I followed her right off the edge, burying myself deep as I came with a groan. My back stung from the scratch marks, but the sensation mingled with the pleasure throbbing through my entire body. I collapsed next to her, wrapping my arm around her to pull her close.

“Incredible,” I breathed out. It had been so long since we last did that.

Brianna smiled as she cuddled up close to my side.

“Hope we can do it again soon,” she said, purring the words with pink cheeks.

“I’ll call in Aziel and Amir next time,” I chuckled, watching her eyes widen. That was a conversation for when my head wasn’t spinning, though. After pressing a kiss on her forehead, I dropped my head back and closed my eyes, letting sleep take me.

Chapter 8

Brianna

I was going to throw up.

No, false alarm, but part of me wanted to. What was I thinking last night? My memories were a bit of a haze, but I did remember fantasizing about being with the other guys in front of my husband. My husband!

I ran my fingers through my hair as I sat up in bed, grimacing as my head ached and my stomach churned. I'd drunk way too much. That was all.

But it wasn't that. Because a part of me did yearn for the other guys. I couldn't help the dirty fantasies that popped up in my mind whenever they grinned at me or stood so close that I could smell their aftershave or body wash.

I refused to be a cheater. When I was growing up, infidelity was taught to me as one of the worst acts a person could commit. Anything sexual outside of marriage was looked down upon and marked as sinful. Wrong. Dirty.

Just the thought of my attraction toward the other guys made my stomach twist in guilt. It was an automatic response. Years of being told that strict monogamy after marriage was the only right thing, even if other arrangements were agreed upon, had a chokehold on my mind. That anything else would hurt the one I loved.

And I loved David with everything I had. I wouldn't ever want to betray him like that when he cared about me so dearly. Maybe we had a few issues because of his job, but he did his best to be there for me when he could. Besides, it would be a

huge slap in the face to sleep with the men in his unit. The men he trusted with his life.

We were just drunk last night, and I was going to bury my fantasies and focus on my marriage, which was the main point of coming all the way out here in the first place.

“Woah, my head,” David groaned as he stirred beside me. He blinked hard a few times, squinting against the sunlight peeking through the curtains. With a wince, he placed his hand on his head, slowly sitting up.

I turned to him with a worried gleam in my eyes.

“I’m sorry about last night. I was just drunk,” I told him, not wanting him to be upset or think that I was going to cheat on him the second he turned his back.

David frowned in confusion at first before a look of realization filled his face.

“Are you talking about you being with the other guys?” he asked, seeming surprisingly calm.

Unsure of what else to say, I nodded, my heart racing.

David’s frown morphed into a comforting smile.

“I told you I was fine with it. Honestly, I think it’d be hot to watch you with them,” he said.

My jaw nearly dropped. Was this really my husband saying these words? We were both fairly traditional people, so this was coming out of left field for him. Well, for me too.

“Really? You’re not just saying that to please me, right? Because I have no intention of cheating on you or betraying your trust. Fantasies are just... fantasies,” I assured him.

David moved closer to me, reaching out to brush my hair away from my face.

“I think we should live out our fantasies. I think it’d be good for us,” he replied. “And I trust you, Bri. I love you. So, if you want to have some fun with the other guys, I’m all for it.”

I stared at him for a few more seconds, trying to read his face and make sure that he wasn’t lying to me. He wasn’t

manipulative, so if he wasn't lying to please me, he truly meant his words.

"I didn't expect this. I mean, I didn't even expect it from myself either," I admitted.

David nodded.

"I think it's perfectly fine to explore new things. Maybe it's what our marriage needs, you know? A fresh spark," he suggested.

Gradually, I smiled and took his hand. He was right. As long as we were both on board, what was the harm?

"Are you sure the other guys would even be interested in me?" I asked him.

From what I remembered, we were all being a bit touchy and flirty last night, but I chalked that up to all the drinks we'd had. If I engaged in anything with them, I wanted us all to be sober. I thought they were all attractive when I was sober, so I hoped they thought the same too.

But I highly doubted it. They were model status handsome in their own ways, and I was just... me. I wasn't a size two, and I didn't think that I could pull off sexy clothes as good as skinnier women. I wouldn't be surprised if they weren't interested in such an arrangement.

David chuckled, taking me by surprise.

"Oh, yeah. They're interested. You're driving my poor guys insane," he said as his fingertips brushed down my upper arm. "You got your pick of the litter."

My eyes widened as my heart raced from excitement and nervousness. I couldn't believe he was serious. There was no way that all of those ridiculously hot soldiers wanted to be with me of all people.

"I didn't expect that," I replied. I didn't think that I was terribly ugly or anything extreme like that, but I didn't believe I had the looks to attract so many handsome men. It didn't feel real.

David's face softened.

“You don’t see yourself how other people see you,” he assured me as his hand slid down to mine. “I wish you did.”

I lowered my eyes. My own self-image was something that I had struggled with for years, and I didn’t see that changing any time soon. It was nice to know that my husband of so many years was still so attracted to me, though. I worried about that at times when he was gone for so long.

“I just don’t want to do anything that’ll hurt our marriage, especially since we’re trying to strengthen it,” I said, switching gears to not focus on my looks any longer.

“Just think about it. We don’t have to do anything you’re not comfortable with,” David said before pressing his lips against my cheek. His lips then curled in a smile before moving closer to my ear. “Just remember that I love you no matter what. Even if you’re pressed between a couple of my guys.”

The hair on the back of my arms and neck stood up, my breathing pausing at the thought. I couldn’t believe we were talking about such things, but... I liked it. Based on everything that I was taught, I shouldn’t even tolerate it, but nothing was black or white. My life was in a different place than I ever expected it to be.

Sometimes, I had to go with the flow, even if it was taking me in a direction that I didn’t expect.

“I’ll... think about it,” I agreed once I caught my breath.

David smiled and placed his forefinger against my jaw, turning my head so that he could press his lips against mine in a sweet kiss. When we broke apart, he gave me a warm, encouraging look before getting out of bed and grabbing a fresh white t-shirt to wear for the day.

“Good. Just rest today, okay? We can’t do anything until we hear back from the rebel group, so we’ll just be doing a little recon,” he told me.

I supposed it wouldn’t hurt to lie in bed for a little while longer until my headache went away.

“Okay, I’ll be up in a little while,” I replied, sharing a small smile with him as he finished getting dressed.

David walked over to me and cupped the back of my head, leaning down to press a lingering kiss against my lips.

“Love you,” he murmured.

“Love you,” I said, my heart fluttering. Things already felt so much better between us, and I hoped that this new arrangement we might have didn’t mess it all up.

When David walked out and shut the door behind him, I sank back down into my pillow, staring up at the ceiling as my mind quickly wandered. What if we really did move forward with this arrangement, and I slept with the other guys?

Warmth steadily burned beneath my skin and low in my stomach as I tried to imagine what sex with multiple men would be like. Overwhelming, right? But maybe in a good way. It went against my upbringing and the notion of sex only with my husband, but... it still uncontrollably turned me on, especially since David wanted to watch and was so on board with it.

I closed my eyes and slowly slid my hand under the covers, trailing down my still bare body. My fingers slipped between my thighs, encouraging them to part as my mind wandered to a scenario of being with two guys. Aziel and Amir. Was David really serious about that pairing?

Arousal thrummed through me at the thought as I slid my fingertips through my folds, already feeling myself grow wet. I circled my fingertips against my clit as I imagined their hands roaming over me. Their mouths following suit.

It wasn’t my fingers. It was Aziel burying his face between my thighs, his lips caressing me. I pictured Amir hovering over me, his hands squeezing my breasts. A shaky exhale drifted from me as my fingertips moved faster, a familiar twisting sensation tightening in my lower stomach as the pleasure ramped up.

What if Andre joined his brothers? I pressed my teeth into my bottom lip, quieting the moan that tried to break from me. My free hand glided up my body to grasp my breast, my back arching in response. I imagined Andre burying his fingers in

my hair, drawing me forward as he pushed his erection past my lips. He rocked back and forth, pushing deeper and deeper as Aziel and Amir continued pleasing me.

Working me closer and closer. Making me hotter and hotter.

A weak moan rumbled in my throat as I took myself over the edge at the same time as the fantasy version of me, warm tingles erupting throughout my entire body as I writhed under the sheets. When I settled back down, I exhaled slowly, trying to calm my racing heart.

But what if I made the fantasy version of myself not a fantasy?
What if I made her real?

Blissfully real.

Chapter 9

Mo

When we got word from the rebel group, our unit immediately went into the city where their hidden base was located.

I stayed close to Brianna's side, flanking her left, while Bowen flanked her right. I could tell that she was nervous to actually be in the city. Her eyes kept rapidly flickering around as she took in all of the destruction and aftermath of the civil war raging on. We could hear gunfire from the cottage sometimes, and it always seemed to disturb her. Now that she was where the shots were fired, her face looked paler than usual, her fingers nervously digging into the sleeves of her dark green jacket as she seemed to shrink into herself.

I couldn't blame her, though. She was a civilian. She wasn't used to living in a warzone, and it made me wary to bring her into the capital. However, if we were going to talk to the rebels and figure out how to help them, we needed to be able to understand them.

"Doing okay?" I asked her as we stopped behind a building that had a collapsed roof. "We're almost there."

Brianna nodded as she gripped the back of my shirt sleeve.

"I'm okay," she said, her eyes darting everywhere.

I patted her hand before leading her forward with the others, sneaking into an abandoned parking garage. There was one floor underground, and I could already make out guards and cement barricades at the entrance.

David raised his hands to show that we meant no harm, slowing his pace down as a small group of rebels approached us with guns in their hands.

“We rescued your men the other day,” he told the rebels.

When the rebels pitched him confused looks, Brianna moved to stand by her husband’s side, repeating his words in Vlastic.

The rebels immediately perked up when they realized that she spoke their language, immediately speaking to her with their words overlapping.

Brianna smiled in a friendly manner as she looked between them, nodding as she listened. She said a few things to them before turning to us.

“Their leader has been expecting us,” she said. “They’d like us to follow them inside.”

David nodded, motioning for the rebels to go ahead.

I moved back to Brianna’s side, keeping a close eye on her and our surroundings as we went deeper into the underground floor where there were tents and tables set up to accommodate the rebels. It looked like they were using solar powered lanterns and lights to illuminate the dark space, shadows being casted along the cement walls and floor. Man, the dust was terrible too. I couldn’t imagine how bad their allergies were.

“I hope they have some Zyrtec,” I murmured to Brianna, making her crack an amused smile. The sight warmed me, and I would’ve been lying if I said all I wanted to do was make her laugh. I wanted to do a lot more, but I kept those twisted thoughts to myself.

We were led into a closed-off white tent where there were three men standing around a table with a map stretched across it. They looked up at us, and I suspected that they were the rebels’ leaders.

Brianna stepped forward with a look of determination on her face. I knew that she was nervous from the slight shake of her balled-up hands, but she didn’t show it to them. She greeted them in Vlastic and introduced us. After they replied, she looked at us.

“This is Jovan, Andric, and Wojtek,” she said, gesturing to a man with a shaved head and defined cheekbones, then another with dark, slightly longer hair and matching facial hair, and then a younger man with very short, light brown hair and a shaved face. “They’re the acting commanders of the rebel group. They’re grateful for your help saving their men.”

David exchanged a nod with the three men.

“Tell them we need to know everything they do about the Dimitrik’s forces,” he told her. “The more we know, the more we can help them.”

Brianna turned back to the men, the light from the solar lantern illuminating one side of her face. She spoke to them again before letting them speak for a little while.

I frowned when I saw Brianna’s eyes widen before she visibly swallowed hard. She didn’t like whatever she was hearing from them, but we knew that the picture they were going to paint wasn’t going to be pretty. The men’s faces were distorted with pain, eyes filling with horror as they spoke.

Brianna breathed in deeply, her eyes growing distant as she looked back at us.

“Dimitrik is probably holed up in the main government building. It’s heavily guarded at all times. He’s ordered his men to kidnap as many people as they can to use them as pawns to put pressure on the rebels. Their lives are threatened to make the rebels back down or turn themselves in,” she explained as she slowly and mindlessly wrung her hands. “They keep hostages alive for no longer than a week. The bodies are left out on the street as warnings.”

I shook my head, sharing disgusted looks with the others. I couldn’t begin to wrap my mind around how people could be so cruel to others, especially innocents.

Brianna placed her hands on the table, leaning closer to the three men. She said something to them that I couldn’t translate, but it had to be something motivating because the men’s faces hardened as they gave her firm nods. She whipped back around.

“They’re going to show you on the map where they believe some of Dimitrik’s men have been hiding out. There are small camps around the city. They also have some ideas of where other hostages can be, but their numbers have been dwindling. They’ll need help,” Brianna said. “Andric knows enough English to point out the locations. I just... I need some air for a moment. I’m sorry.”

David looked over at me, jerking his head in Brianna’s direction.

I nodded and placed my hand on Brianna’s back, leading her out of the tent and closer to the exit so that she could feel at least a little bit of a breeze from outside.

“Are you okay?” I asked.

Brianna breathed in deeply before sighing.

“What they told me... it’s awful. I just gave you guys an overview,” she said, her eyes looking haunted. “Sometimes, they’re sent pictures of their captured loved ones chained up and hurt. Or their houses will be burned down. Everything is being ripped away from them.”

I rubbed her back gently to comfort her, feeling her lean closer to me.

“We’re going to help them. We’ll get them out of this hell, and the city will be theirs,” I promised her.

Brianna nodded.

“Good. They deserve it. All they want is a safe, peaceful place to raise their families,” she said as she looked up at me. “What all people want.”

“My parents emigrated from Pakistan to the United States for a better life and more opportunities,” I told her, seeing her eyebrows subtly raise in interest. My past and upbringing was complicated, but I doubted that I would get any judgement from her as I had gotten from others because of my ethnicity.

Some people were cruel toward cultures that they just didn’t understand.

“Now you’re a brave soldier,” Brianna said with a warm expression. “I’m sure they’re really proud of you.”

“They’d be prouder if I was married with children. They always wanted that traditional life for me,” I replied with a faint chuckle. My laugh was a bit forced, though. I faced a lot of pressure on that front to abide by the beliefs and expectations of my family.

“My parents are the same way,” Brianna said, her shoulder brushing mine as we stood close to each other. “But our lives are only our own. We just have to do our best to be happy.”

I smiled at her thoughtful words and nodded in agreement, enjoying her way of thinking. I knew that she was nervous about a lot of things regarding this mission, but when it was showtime, she was remarkably collected and professional. I admired that.

“You and David seem happy,” I commented. They sounded *very* happy the other night, which kept me awake for another hour because I was so restless. I couldn’t help but feel jealous of David too, as wrong as that was.

“We are. Things are changing, but I think it’ll be a good thing,” Brianna replied, sounding hopeful.

I was happy to hear that. She was a good person, and I respected David through and through. He provided all of us with a non-judgemental, loyal family that we wouldn’t find anywhere else.

“Well, in the meantime, I’ll keep you safe,” I assured her.

Brianna’s face softened.

“Thank you,” she said before straightening up. “We should go back. I want to help them as much as I can.”

She was a hell of a woman. I was indifferent to her coming along in the beginning, but like the others, I was incredibly glad that she came along now. Not only was she helpful, but she was also great company. All I had to do was behave myself, but that was easier said than done.

Chapter 10

Erick

Boots were on the ground early this morning. Right after the sun's ascension in the orange-streaked, light-blue sky, a noise sounded from the laptop in Bowie's and Elijah's room. We all knew what that sound meant.

"Was that a new message? Or was I dreaming that?" Emmett asked as we hurriedly got dressed, already hearing some of the other guys rushing past our room to get to the laptop.

"You weren't dreaming," I said, tugging on a black t-shirt before heading out of our room. I heard Emmett's heavy footsteps behind me, voices spilling from our brother's shared room down the hallway.

"What does it say, Brianna?" Mo's voice drifted from the room.

"Hold on. Let me grab my notebook from my room and make sure I'm reading this right," Brianna replied.

I barely stopped in time when she hurried out of the room, almost crashing right into my chest. I still put my hands out, catching her by her upper arms and making her wide eyes dart up to mine.

"I'm sorry, Erick. I wasn't paying attention," Brianna said with a sheepish smile.

It should've been as easy as me telling her it was fine and letting her go, but it wasn't. My gaze became locked on her instead. Her hair was pulled up in a bun today with a few loose strands framing her face, bringing even more attention to her naturally flushed cheeks and full lips.

Damn, she was gorgeous, and it was hard to rip my eyes away and release her arms.

Maybe I was lonely. It wasn't like me and the others outside of David had the time or energy to date around and find the love of our lives. We swore ourselves to this line of work, which we didn't regret, but it definitely forced us to put other aspects of our lives on hold.

I didn't need to be staring at my captain's hot wife, though. It wasn't right. But I also wasn't the only one checking her out on a daily basis. I didn't miss the intrigued looks that the others pitched at her or the comments they would make about how good she looked or how smart she was.

Did David even realize that the soldiers on his unit were lusting after his wife?

All of this sudden attraction to our captain's wife of all people was jarring and nerve wracking, but... part of it was also thrilling in a twisted manner. She was so out of reach, but she was so close too. But I also couldn't forget the guilt that churned in my stomach when I thought of actually getting close to her.

"It's no problem," I assured her before stepping out of the way.

Brianna smiled, her fingers brushing my arm as she passed me.

"Hey, Emmett," she said, doing the same to my brother before hurrying into her room.

Emmett and I glanced at each other for a moment, but the silence was loud. This woman had single-handedly sent a tremor through our unit, and I wondered how long any of us could all behave for until David straightened us out.

I led Emmett into the room where everyone else was gathered, and when Brianna returned with her notebook, she slipped between David and Elijah to look at the laptop screen again.

"They've confirmed that Dimitrik has moved to a stately home on the other side of the city from us. It's across the street from that large park we saw on the aerial map we were looking at yesterday," Brianna replied as she straightened up, her black,

V-neck t-shirt hugging her bust and curves. She glanced over in my direction, her eyes briefly catching mine. When she realized that I was staring at her, the corner of her mouth turned up before she quickly looked away.

I had to be way more subtle than this. Damn.

David turned to me, making me straighten up so fast that my back ached for a second.

“We need to come up with a plan. We know where the dictator is, and he’s the catalyst for this war,” he told me.

I nodded as all eyes shifted to me, prompting me to lift my chin and cross my arms. Mission coordination was my rodeo. Probably because I could be a stickler about details, but good plans relied on specific details.

“We need to go after him and capture him,” I replied. Of course, killing him was an option, but I feared that one of his crazy supporters might try to avenge him and take his place. The war still wouldn’t be over. “Then, we need to force him to give up his control over the country and leave with his supporters.”

“Jovan, Andric, and Wojtek said they plan to jointly run the country until the people choose a leader,” Brianna told us. “Vlasica will be in good hands once Dimitrik leaves.”

“This place will be safe again,” David replied as he looked over at her, smiling a little. I couldn’t count how many times I had seen him flash her a proud look as she worked so diligently alongside us.

If I didn’t know how much this job took up our time, I would’ve been surprised that they didn’t have kids yet. Brianna was warm and maternal, and David was patient and encouraging. They would’ve made great parents, but David was away too much.

Not that I didn’t think Brianna could handle raising a child or multiple children alone, but it still would be tough on her. Me and my brothers were raised by a single mom, and she was a damn rockstar. She encouraged us to watch out for each other and take school seriously, and my brothers and I pitched in as

much as we could to help around the house and with looking out for each other.

Because things did get hard. Money was tight for a while, and my mom only had her sister around to help watch us from time to time. Three kids for one young woman was tough, but she was ten times tougher than our dad who ran out on us only a few months after we were born.

I supposed we were too much work for him, but we were never too much for our mom.

I could see Brianna being that way as a mom. Resilient and loving. She had that determined spark in her eyes that couldn't be extinguished, and she and David were a good team because they supported each other. It made me wonder if there was a Brianna out there for me too.

I wanted a big family, but I needed the woman who was right for me by my side for that to happen. She was part of that pretty picture too.

“We'll have to be smart about our attack. He'll most likely be highly guarded, and we haven't come across a large concentration of enemies yet. There are only so many of us, so we need to be quiet and patient instead of just kicking down the front door and spraying and praying,” I said once I dragged myself out of my own head.

“And you'll help us negotiate,” Aziel told Brianna.

Brianna's firm expression wavered a little, and I could tell that she was wary about coming face to face with someone as cruel and evil as Dimitrik. However, she breathed in and nodded.

“Of course. I'll be sure to remember the word ‘surrender’ in Vlastic,” she replied with a small smirk, coaxing chuckles from me and the guys. Alright, this woman had some fire in her.

“That's our girl,” Amir said as he flashed her a grin.

I immediately looked over at David, expecting an annoyed or pissed off expression to be on his face, but he merely smiled. Weird. I thought David would be pretty possessive of Brianna since she was stuck in a cottage with all of us, but he was pretty... chill.

“Well, we have our course of action. If we can find a picture or even a building plan of where he’s being held, I can determine the best approach for us to take to get inside,” I said.

“I’m pretty sure the rebel leaders have some maps that can help us,” Brianna told me. “I’d be happy to draft up a message to send to them.”

I had to admit that I wasn’t sure how she would handle being here in Vlasica with us. She was a civilian, who was used to safety and comfort within the walls of her home. Being out here so close to a warzone was far different, and I thought the pressure would get to her and make her crumble.

But she surprised me. I underestimated her, but I wouldn’t do that any longer.

“Let’s do it,” I replied with a nod before walking over to the laptop to stand beside her.

“I’ll leave you guys to it,” David told us, giving me a nod before leading the others out of the room so that Brianna and I could come up with a message to send to the rebels.

Brianna turned to me.

“What would you like to say?” she asked as she held her notebook against her chest.

Our eyes locked, and I felt something stir inside of me. Hot and intense. Was it pathetic to say it had been a while since I was alone in a room with a woman? A beautiful one at that.

“I’d like to thank them for the information they sent to us, and I’d like to request any maps, blueprints, or photos of the area so that we can properly plan an attack to capture Dimitrik and eliminate his forces,” I stated, our eyes not breaking for a second.

Brianna then smiled and nodded.

“I’ll type that up,” she said before putting her notebook down and leaning over to type up the message in Vlasic in the secure messenger that we used to communicate with the rebel group.

My eyes trailed over her figure, admiring the way her jeans hugged her hips and thighs. If I didn’t watch it, David was

going to kick me to the curb, which I couldn't risk. My work and my family, including the one I made in this unit, were my entire life.

I didn't know who I would be without either of them.

"Thank you," I told her. "You've been a big help to us."

"I'm glad. I know you all took a chance on me, which I really appreciate," Brianna said as her fingers flew over the keys. She had to use the trackpad a few times to access a Vlastic language plugin so that she could use the letters in their alphabet that we didn't have in ours.

It was hard to wrap my mind around knowing so many languages, but I quickly learned that she was wicked smart. Intelligent and sexy. If I was David, I would've been all torn up inside having to leave her behind all the time for work. Now, he got the best of both worlds for this mission since she got to be here with us.

David just probably didn't know how big of a treat she was for the rest of us too.

One that we couldn't touch.

"Our pleasure," I replied, catching her eyes again. I didn't miss the small smile on her enticing lips, though.

Was she... interested in us? I doubted she would express any interest in front of her husband. They had been in love for years! But there was some sort of weird energy in this cottage that I couldn't exactly put my finger on.

Something was stirring, and I had a feeling it wouldn't take me long to figure out what it was.

Chapter 11

Brianna

My eyes skimmed over the words of my fantasy romance book, my bare feet rubbing together beneath the sheets. It was nice to relax after a long day of translating and planning, and I could only guess that the others were resting too since it was so quiet in the cottage. I had no idea what David was doing, though.

I hoped that we could spend some time together tonight. Working so closely with the guys just further deepened my attraction toward them, and I did my best to strictly act professional and behave. When the nights came, I wanted to blow off steam, but how could I do that when my husband was off doing something else?

All I had was my fantasy book, which reminded me of the real-life fantasy that I could have. The same one my husband assured me that he was incredibly supportive of. Pressing my teeth into my bottom lip, I dug my feet into the mattress, still battling between my desires and my guilt.

Which one would win?

Before I could delve too deep into my conflicting thoughts, the door opened, and David walked inside. Instead of closing the door like he usually did, he left it cracked before kicking off his shoes and crawling onto the bed.

“Hey,” he said with a smile on his face.

I lifted an eyebrow as I closed my book.

“What have you been doing?” I asked.

David didn't answer. He merely took my book and set it off to the side before capturing my lips in a deep kiss.

A surprised moan broke from me, being muffled by his lips. My eyes fluttered shut as I leaned up more, heat generating low in my stomach with every intimate brush of our lips. This was what I had been waiting for all day long.

David brushed his fingers through my hair, caressing my nape as his teeth teasingly grazed my bottom lip.

"About that decision I told you to make... what's your answer?" he whispered to me.

A heated haze filled my mind, subduing some of my usual guilt. If the one I loved was fine with it, was it truly wrong? It was *our* marriage, and every relationship thrived in different ways.

"Yes," I breathed out with a nod. "I want to bring another person into the bedroom with us."

David leaned back so that our gaze could properly meet. Desire glinted in his eyes, but there was seriousness in them too.

"Are you sure? No matter what you choose, I support your decision. A hundred percent," he assured me.

Awe glowed in my chest as I heard the care in his voice.

"I'm sure. I've had some time to think about it, and I think it can be fun. Something new," I replied. "I think it'd be good for us. If you think so too."

"I agree. If I'm going to try anything new, I'd want to do it with you and you only," David said.

That meant more to me than he knew. We were a team, and this was *our* decision.

"Whenever you want to do it, I'm ready too," I said.

David smiled and pressed one more kiss against my lips before drawing away from me. He got off the bed and stood at the end of it, peering down at me with an eager look on his face.

“What about now?” he asked, chuckling as my eyes widened before he turned to the door. “Alright, guys. You can come in.”

My jaw dropped as I watched the cracked door swing open wider, allowing Aziel and Amir to step inside. My eyes darted over to David, my heart rate speeding so fast that I could barely take in a breath.

“David...” I murmured, my mouth going dry from nervousness before I could muster out another word.

Aziel and Amir stopped on either side of David, their eyes sweeping over me.

“Hey, Brianna,” Amir greeted me with a pleased grin.

Aziel tilted his head, the side of his mouth curling up.

“Mind if we join you?” he asked as he nodded to the bed.

Dizziness struck me as my head spun, trying to process what in the world was going on. I knew that I agreed to this, but I didn’t know it was going to happen *right now*. But I didn’t think I had any willpower to send Amir and Aziel away. Not when they looked so damn good just in their black sleep shorts. They were both well-built, having an impressive amount of muscle in their arms, chests, and abdomens.

I couldn’t help but want to see their strength in action.

I wordlessly nodded, unable to utter a word because I was so shocked. This was crazier than anything I’d read in my romance book.

David nodded to Aziel and Amir before taking a seat in a beige accent chair in the corner of the room. He leaned back and shot me an encouraging look, letting me know that everything was fine. Control was in my hands.

“I need you to use your words, beautiful,” Aziel replied as he crossed his arms over his bare chest. The scar on his left cheek didn’t do anything to take away from how good he looked. Truthfully, it gave him a dangerous edge that was admittedly sexy.

Amir smirked, shifting on the spot impatiently. He was ready to start, which worked me up even more. It still blew my mind

that these insanely hot soldiers were so eager to get in bed with me. And they were okay with David watching.

I had to be dreaming.

“I want you to join me. Both of you,” I said once I found my words.

“Good girl.” Amir chuckled before giving his brother a nudge to the left. He then crawled up the bed toward me. Black tattoos swirled up the dark brown skin of his arms and across his chest, enticing my eyes even more. “Andre sure is missing out, but we have to make sure you can handle two of us before all three.”

All three. Excitement thrummed through me as my eyes swept back and forth between them. I felt trapped in the best way possible as they both approached me, my thighs pressing together beneath the sheets. I couldn’t hide anything for long, though.

Aziel pulled the sheets off, exposing how I was just wearing panties and a tank top. He clicked his tongue at me, his dark, intense eyes boring into mine. That faint scar on his left cheek made a sense of danger seep into the sexiness that he was already exerting.

“You shouldn’t be wearing anything,” he told me.

“We can fix that,” Amir assured me before suddenly grabbing my legs and tugging me to the edge of the mattress at the bottom of the bed.

A surprised squeak rang from me as he easily maneuvered me around. As Amir knelt in front of me, Aziel crawled onto the bed and knelt behind me, his hands drifting down my upper arms. I couldn’t help but lean against his strong chest, my heart skipping when Amir placed his hands on my thighs.

“Let’s take this off,” Aziel said before helping me pull off my tank top, leaving me bare between them besides my light pink panties.

Amir glanced over at David, who watched the scene intently. He then looked up at me as his thumbs rubbed teasing circles on the inside of my thighs.

“Your husband is a lucky man,” he told me.

“And we’re feeling especially lucky tonight too,” Aziel murmured near my ear as he moved his hands up my figure to caress my breasts. He gripped and squeezed, his thumbs brushing over my hardening nipples.

A shaky exhale drifted from me as my eyes fluttered over to my husband, who rested his hand on the front of his army pants where I could already see a visible ridge. This really did turn him on, which fired me up even more. I relaxed more, letting my eyes shut as I focused on their pleasurable touches.

Amir kissed my lower stomach, his lips drifting over the curves of my waist. Places that I was ashamed of the most. When he felt me tense and try to shrink back, he grabbed my hips with firm hands, keeping me still.

“Don’t you dare try to hide that beautiful body of yours,” he told me.

Aziel placed his hand on the underside of my chin, tilting my head back so that I had to look up at him.

“Understand?” he asked, playing off his brother’s order.

A sudden throbbing sensation intensified between my thighs as I gazed up into his dark eyes. They were so intent on enjoying every inch of me, gradually putting my embarrassment at ease.

“I understand,” I said.

Aziel released my chin, but he turned my head to the side and leaned forward, capturing my lips in a heated kiss. His hands continued to move over my breasts, caressing every curve and rolling my hard nipples between his fingertips.

Amir slipped his fingers under the waist of my panties, working the material down my legs until I was fully bare. He held the back of my calf, kissing his way up my leg and running his fingers all over my skin like he couldn’t help but touch me.

I moaned softly into Aziel’s mouth, my skin burning hot.

“We’re only just getting started,” Aziel murmured before drawing away so that he could lean down and take one of my nipples into his mouth. He sucked firmly before circling the peak with his tongue.

Amir wasn’t going to be outdone. He kissed the inside of my thighs before gently pushing me back to lean back on my elbows. His tongue swiped over my center, glancing off my clit to make me gasp. With a pleased smile, he dove back in, lapping at me with the flat of his tongue.

“Oh...” I sighed in bliss as I tilted my head back. My eyes automatically roamed over to David, who gripped the arm of the chair with his free hand. At first, a jolt of nervousness hit me, making me wonder if I should really be doing this. If I was doing the right thing for my marriage.

But the satisfied look on David’s face told me all that I needed to know. He was seeing exactly what he wanted to see, and we were *both* enjoying this.

“So good,” Amir murmured after flicking his tongue over my clit. “I knew you were a sweet thing.”

I reached down and rested my hand on the back of his shaved head, enjoying every lash of his tongue. When I felt him sink a finger inside of me, I almost fell apart right then and there. Aziel’s lips on my other nipple shuttled me even closer to a quick but powerful orgasm.

“I’m so close,” I breathed out as Amir moved his tongue just right against my clit, having easily figured out the rhythm and pressure that pleased me the most. I had to remember these guys were smart and strategic, and that didn’t only apply to the battlefield.

Aziel dragged his teeth over my nipple to elicit a pleased gasp from me before tilting my head back again to make me look at him.

“So quick? Does his tongue feel that good?” he asked.

My entire body tensed as I neared the edge mind-blowingly fast.

“Yes,” I said, whimpering when Amir pushed in another finger. He worked both in deep, thrusting them beneath his tongue as it brushed over my clit again and again.

Aziel flashed me a pointed look. No, a chastising look. It turned me on even more because I knew that he wanted more.

“You can do better than that, beautiful,” he told me. “How good?”

“So good,” I gasped, my cheeks flushing as the heat burned hotter and hotter. I was *so* close, hanging on by a thread. “Please, I want... I need...”

I couldn't even finish my sentence because Aziel curled his fingers just right, the pressure and friction of his tongue on my clit clashing. The thread snapped, and I plummeted into the depths of bliss, shuddering through each wave of my intense orgasm.

Amir rose to his feet with a grin on his face, looking absolutely satisfied. He then gripped his erection through his shorts.

“You're driving me wild, Brianna,” he told me as he drank in the sight of me worn out and flushed.

“Think you can handle more?” Aziel asked as he peered down at me. He took my hand and pulled it over my head, pressing my palm against the sizable ridge in his shorts. “Can you handle this?”

My stomach twisted in need, my libido getting a new wave.

“Please,” I said, not even caring about how desperate I sounded.

Aziel and Amir moved immediately afterward, both of them grabbing me and maneuvering me onto my hands and knees near the edge of the bed. They lifted and spun me like it was nothing, putting their muscles to use for my viewing pleasure.

Aziel stood behind me at the end of the bed and removed his clothes to free his fully hard cock. His fingers wrapped around the base, giving himself a few pumps as he admired the view from his perspective.

Amir stood in front of me, bare and perfect. My eyes roamed over his smooth, dark skin, admiring every groove of muscle and the thickness of his erection.

“Stick your tongue out,” Amir told me as he slowly stroked himself.

I had no interest in defying any of their orders. I held my tongue out, a moan rumbling in my throat as he slid the head of his cock across it. When he pushed past my lips, I opened my mouth more to accommodate his size, my eyes fluttering shut.

“Oh, no. Open your eyes and look up at me,” Amir said as he brushed a few strands of hair back from my face. When I did as he said, he grinned down at me. “That’s right.”

Aziel started to slide his cock between my folds, grating against my clit and making me hum around Amir’s cock in bliss.

“I’d love to hear all your beautiful sounds, but I’ll share,” Aziel said, rocking through my folds a few more times before pushing inside of me until he fully bottomed out. He leaned his head back, listening to my muffled, choked moans. “Fuck, you feel amazing.”

“Yeah, she does,” Amir murmured, resting one hand behind his shaved head and using his other to grip my hair in a firm handful.

I could only imagine David’s view as I was pinned between two of his fellow soldiers, his friends that he had been close with for years. The fact that this turned him on only made the situation that much hotter.

Steadily, Aziel started to move, dragging his cock out and then pushing back inside. Every slow thrust made me wetter, and he groaned at the sight of his glistening length. He rocked into me harder and faster, the sound of skin against skin and muffled moans filling the bedroom.

Could the others hear? That should’ve made me shy, but it made me throb instead. I kept my eyes on Amir’s as he shallowly thrust his cock into my mouth, sliding past my

lips over and over to push deeper. I relaxed my jaw and let him go at it, enjoying the dominant grip on my hair.

Aziel dug his fingertips into my hips, holding me steady as he pounded into me. His breaths came out heavier, his eyes sweeping up my back and down to where he entered me over and over.

I could feel the inside of my thighs growing slick, my composure weakening with every thrust from both of them. It all felt so deliciously wrong, and I never wanted it to end. There wasn't any way that I could last much longer, though.

Their strength and endurance were striking, but I could hear their heavy breaths and groans. They wouldn't last much longer either. We had all been worked up, waiting for this release.

"Fuck," Amir gritted out, burying his cock one more time before spilling.

I swallowed him down with a weak moan, my composure starting to splinter apart. When he drew away from me, I didn't even get a chance to catch my breath before Aziel grabbed my arms and pulled me up on my knees.

Aziel gripped my wrists with one hand, holding me up close to his chest. He didn't stop thrusting, letting his free hand roam over my breasts before splaying his fingers out on the base of my throat.

"Not done with you yet," he grunted as he drove into me, going even deeper than before.

I parted my lips, but only a broken moan poured out. Words didn't even come to my mind. Just waves of pleasure that didn't relent.

Aziel pressed his forehead against the back of my head, his breath tickling the back of my neck. He tightened his grip on my wrists, pulling down to make my back arch more. He gritted his teeth, muffling his groans.

My thighs started to tremble, my body threatening to double over if he didn't have such a tight grip on me. Nothing could stop me from falling apart, though. One final, large wave

struck me with so much intensity that stars glittered in my vision.

“Fuck, yes,” Aziel gritted out before slamming home one more time. He came with a groan, his hand falling to my breast as he stilled.

All I could do was slump back against him, catching my breath as the heat and pressure gradually ebbed away. Somehow, my head felt heavy and light at the same time, making me sway a little.

“I got you,” Amir said as he took hold of me and laid me down on my back, while Aziel sat on the edge of the bed to steady himself. Amir chuckled as he looked down at me, brushing his fingers through my hair. “Are you okay?”

A tired smile crossed my lips as I nodded. My head turned to the side, my eyes falling on David, who gave me a smile. Everything was okay. More than okay.

But tomorrow was a new day, and who knew what feelings the sun would bring?

Chapter 12

Brianna

Plates clattered and glasses clinked as Bowen and I set up the dining table for dinner the next day. We passed by each other as we moved back and forth between the dining area and the kitchen, flashing each other subtle smiles. I did my best to keep myself busy today because my mind refused to quiet down after what happened last night.

I had a *threesome*. Something that I never thought that I would ever do in my entire life! And David watched the entire thing play out with a pleased look on his face.

My life felt like some sort of strange fever dream at this point, and there was no turning back. I opened some twisted version of Pandora's box, and all sorts of kinky things came pouring out. Things that I wanted to do to David and the guys. Things that I wanted all of them to do to me.

"You okay?" Bowen asked.

I blinked, drawing myself out of my head before looking up at him as I stood by the dining table.

"Oh, yeah. I just... didn't get much sleep last night," I replied as I put down one last plate on the table.

Bowen nodded.

"Well, there are lots of ways to help you fall asleep. Hot tea. Stretching. Sex," Bowen said, acting like he just said the most casual thing in the world.

My cheeks burned as I looked away from him, busying myself with adjusting the position of one of the glasses.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” I replied, catching sight of his smile before he headed back into the kitchen. Did he know? Did any of them know outside of Aziel, Amir, and David? I quickly fanned my face, hoping that I didn’t have a visible blush on my cheeks. “Alright, let’s eat!”

It didn’t take long for the others to come pouring into the dining area. Tonight, dinner was pan-seared chicken and warm bread rolls. We didn’t have a huge variety of food to work with, but enough to keep us fed was transported to us on a weekly basis.

David kissed my cheek before pulling my chair out for me so that I could sit between him and Elijah.

“Love you,” he spoke near my ear.

I smiled at him and leaned my head against his for a moment.

“Love you too,” I replied before taking a seat as Mo and Andre set the food out in the middle of the table. Per usual, the guys nodded at me, motioning for me to take my portion first. I took one small piece of chicken breast and a bread roll before the others nearly fought over the rest of the food. They all had big appetites, but they were all so cut and lean.

I bet that was nice.

My appetite took a hit from that thought, and I picked at the corners of my chicken, even if it tasted really good. I mostly spent dinner glancing between Aziel, Amir, and David while the others chatted about sports and things about their hometowns. It was nice hearing them talk about things outside of work.

It kind of felt like a true family dinner.

When my eyes caught Andre’s, my heart skipped when I noticed the smirk on his face. His brothers most likely told him about what happened last night. I certainly wouldn’t mind it at all if he joined next time. Because something told me that there would definitely be a next time.

Too much heated energy and tension fizzled in the air as all of us glanced at each other, sharing small smiles and smirks because we all knew what each other was thinking.

“You’re not eating,” Mo commented as he pitched me a concerned look. “Are you feeling okay?”

All eyes shifted to me, and embarrassment struck me when I realized that I hadn’t been as subtle as I thought.

“Oh, no. I’m just trying to lose a few pounds,” I replied in a casual manner.

I should’ve known that wouldn’t work because I was greeted with a flood of disapproval that I hadn’t ever received before.

“You don’t need to lose anything,” Emmett assured me from across the table.

“You’re perfect just as you are,” Amir added, prompting nods from the others.

David placed his hand on mine, giving it a comforting squeeze.

“They’re right. You don’t have to change a thing about yourself,” he said, his words making my heart skip. All of their words meant more to me than I could ever begin to explain.

We hadn’t all been together long, but it didn’t take me long to figure out that this was a great group of guys. They were smart, loyal, and talented in their own ways. Not only was I attracted to them physically, but I also yearned to know them more emotionally because they were so different from other men I had met, who told me that I needed to lose weight and look a certain way to be considered attractive.

“And I worked pretty hard on the chicken,” Elijah commented, putting on a sly smile that was a new look on him. He could be so reserved and shy at times. To my surprise, he cut into a piece of his own and offered it to me on his fork. “Nothing makes a chef happier than seeing people enjoy his food.”

I couldn’t help smirk and shake my head. He’d conned me, but I appreciated his kindness. I graciously took a bite, enjoying the juicy, well-seasoned flavor.

“It’s delicious,” I told him before going back to eating my own dinner.

Conversation picked up again, and none of us were ready to turn in right after eating, so drinks started to be poured. We fanned out throughout the cottage, occupying the kitchen, dining area, and living room. I found myself in the living room with Aziel, Amir, Erick, and Emmett, while David and Elijah lingered in the kitchen, and the rest stayed at the dining table.

“This is to you,” Amir told me as he sat to my left on the couch, lifting his glass of whiskey.

“You’re toasting to me?” I asked with a laugh.

“Of course. To how amazing you were last night,” Amir murmured near my ear before clinking his glass against mine.

Erick sat on my right, while Aziel and Emmett sat on the floor in front of the couch. He leaned closer to Amir and me.

“So, what exactly happened last night? Heard some interesting noises,” he commented as he glanced between us.

“You probably won’t believe it,” Aziel spoke up, earning a perplexed look from Emmett.

I smiled to myself, pitching a look over my shoulder to briefly meet David’s eyes as he watched the scene. He didn’t even have to say anything. I could see the desire in his eyes, which spurred me a little until I hit the usual wall of doubt.

Should I really be boasting that I slept with someone other than my husband? What if they saw me in a bad light?

Amir gave my thigh a squeeze, drawing me out of my troubling thoughts.

“I barely believe it myself, and it happened to me,” he chuckled. “Want to make them jealous, sweetheart?”

I could feel everyone’s eyes on me, and I could feel the tension and curiosity radiating off them. I couldn’t deny them any longer, prompting me to rest my hand on the back of Amir’s neck.

“David brought me a present last night. Two presents,” I said as I smiled at Aziel, my doubt melting from a flare of confidence that only David and these men could get out of me.

“You’re fucking with us,” Erick replied, his tone laced with disbelief.

Aziel shook his head.

“We were getting ready for bed one minute, and the next minute, David was telling us to wait outside his bedroom,” he said. “Then, we were invited inside.”

“The rest is history,” Amir finished with a chuckle.

“You can’t leave it off there. What happened next?” Emmett asked before taking a sip of his tequila.

I felt Amir’s arm wind around my waist, drawing me closer to him as we shared an amused look. It was fun teasing the others, especially while David was watching and yearning for a show.

“A lot happened,” I replied.

Erick suddenly placed his hand on my thigh, his touch seeming to burn right through my black leggings.

“I’m sure you can give us more than that,” he said, raising his eyebrows a little.

At this point, I was getting greedy. I had such a great time with Aziel and Amir, but the thought of being with another set of triplets made my heart race. They all were alluring to me in their own ways, spinning me deeper and deeper into their web.

But I still couldn’t believe what already happened. How could I live out more than one fantasy?

My eyes flickered between Aziel and Amir as I became lost for words, my cheeks starting to burn. Living out a fantasy was one thing, but describing it to two other men I also had fantasies about was a whole other nerve-wracking thing.

What if they became uninterested? What if I wasn’t as good as they thought I would be? The tidal wave of self-doubt that continuously tried to drown me couldn’t be fully stopped yet.

“We’re not spilling our trade secrets,” Amir chuckled, the sound of his laughter starting to soothe the tension that I felt.

“All you need to know is that we had a hell of a good time, and you missed out.”

“Maybe not for long,” Emmett replied as he raised an eyebrow in a determined manner.

Erick smirked and nodded in agreement.

“You should know that the Atkins triplets are competitive as hell,” Aziel said with a light laugh as he nudged Emmett.

“No one needs to compete,” I assured them all. The last thing I wanted was to create a rift between all of them when they were such great friends. Besides, flirting and messing around was different from actually acting on words. Even if the other triplets were flirting, that didn’t mean they were actually going to show up at our bedroom door.

I couldn’t help but want them to, but I was far too nervous to say that out loud to their faces. I also still felt a small spike of guilt for wanting other men to come into my bedroom. I didn’t want to become a cheater, even if David was totally fine with all of this. I just didn’t want things to fall apart and for our marriage to suffer because of my desire for these men.

“Good luck telling them that,” Amir replied.

Erick and Emmett got to their feet, peering down at me in a manner that made my heart flutter.

“We’re always up for a little competition,” Erick told me, reaching down to give my knee a squeeze before walking off with Emmett.

Were they really?

My eyes trailed over to David out of instinct, wondering if he saw our flirty interaction. Telling from the subtle smile on his face, he did, which made my chest tighten. I didn’t have the courage to put things in motion, but he did.

The question was... would he?

Chapter 13

David

Soon after the others went to their rooms for the night, I tracked down the Atkins triplets. When I spotted Emmett and Erick getting close to Brianna earlier, I could tell that she was getting flushed in a good way. Pink cheeks. Nervous yet eager smile.

When she looked at me like she was trying to gauge my reaction, I knew that it was down to me to make her fantasy happen. All it took was one conversation, and I could tell that the Atkins triplets already knew what I wanted to talk to them about just by the tension that I felt radiating off them.

“Did Brianna say something? I hope we didn’t cross a line,” Erick asked me, sounding a bit cautious. “Aziel and Amir mentioned... something happened with the four of you the other night.”

“We might’ve expressed interest,” Emmett added, while Elijah remained quiet.

“She didn’t have to say anything,” I replied as we all stood in the hallway a few feet away from the bedroom door. “I could tell she was interested too.”

None of them had to worry about making me upset unless they did anything to upset Brianna, but it still meant a lot that they respected me enough to approach this topic carefully. It was an important one, but I trusted these guys with my life every single day.

I trusted them with my wife too, and that said a lot. She was my most treasured part of my life, and our love deepened my confidence and trust in our relationship enough for me to let

others close to her. Because I knew that she was mine first and forever.

“If you’re both fine with it, totally fine with it, we’d like to show her just how interested we are,” Elijah added before lowering his eyes. His nervous energy always outdid his brothers’, who were barely ever anxious.

“If she’s fine with it, so am I,” I replied before glancing at the door. She had no idea that another set of triplets was aching to be with her. The thought made heat stir within me, making me impatient to break the surprise to her. “You guys can run the show, but she always has final say. If he wants to stop, everything halts immediately.”

“Yes, sir,” the three of them said with firm nods like I had given them a work order. This was far more important than work. My wife’s safety and comfort came before anything else. Always.

With a small grin, I pushed open the bedroom door and stepped inside, seeing Brianna pulling on a pair of sleep shorts. My heart hammered in my chest with excitement as I heard the guys’ footsteps behind me. Brianna was going to be over the moon, and even the thought of that made my adrenaline race.

“You might as well not even bother,” I told her.

Brianna started to pitch me a confused expression, but she froze in place when the triplets filed inside after me.

“We couldn’t help ourselves,” Erick said, making her blush and smile.

I headed over to the accent chair and sank down into its cushion, getting myself comfortable as I watched the triplets lead Brianna over to the bed. I didn’t expect to feel so turned on by watching other men please my wife, but she was so beautiful when she was suspended in ecstasy. I was only one person, but if there were multiple others, the pleasure would be boundless for her.

Brianna lay down on her back, being surrounded on both sides and between her legs by the three of them. She accepted

passionate kisses from each, her fingers winding through their dark hair and fisting their t-shirts.

I wished she understood how much of a work of art she was to the rest of us. Her body moved and arched so beautifully, and pleasure adorned her face in so many different ways. Flushed cheeks. Dark eyes. Parted lips.

I couldn't help myself. I reached under the waist of my shorts and gripped my hardening cock, releasing a slow exhale as I watched the guys maneuver Brianna to where her head hung off the bed.

Emmett knelt in front of Brianna, turning her head so that she looked at me.

“Are you going to put on a good show for your husband? He's been so gracious to let us all have some fun tonight,” he said.

Brianna's teeth briefly caught her bottom lip in a soft bite.

“Yes,” she breathed out.

Feeling far too restricted, I freed my erection from my briefs, slowly stroking myself as I watched Brianna's lips part to take Emmett's cock in her mouth. She moaned around him as Elijah lay between her thighs, letting his tongue roam, while Erick hovered over her to take one of her nipples into his mouth. They touched her all over, making her beautiful, bare figure writhe and arch in pleasure.

I clenched my jaw, forcing myself to slow down and match their pace as they took their time with her. Her moans filled the room as Elijah sucked on her clit, nudging her closer and closer to the edge.

“Fuck, that's it,” Emmett murmured as he lightly thrust into her mouth, edging himself farther down her throat.

Brianna fisted the material of Erick's shorts in one hand, a few tears breaking from her eyes as Emmett pushed her limits, but I could still hear the sounds of pleasure rumbling from her. She tried to press her thighs together as her body tensed, but Erick and Elijah pried her legs open.

Elijah dragged his tongue over her clit one more time before she shook her way through her first orgasm.

Emmett pulled his cock out of her mouth so that we could all revel in her shaky cry of pleasure, a grin playing out on his face.

“Can you handle another one?” he asked her as he stroked one of her pink cheeks.

Brianna nodded eagerly.

“I want more,” she said.

“I actually brought a few things you guys could try on her if you wanted. They’re in a bag in the bottom drawer of the dresser,” I spoke up, figuring now was as good a time as any to have them be used. I expected only me to use them on her, but my heart raced at the thought of watching others use them on her. I could already picture how sexy the scene would look, and there was no way that I could rein in my desire for that fantasy to come true.

Erick hopped off the bed and pulled out a black bag. He dug around inside, grinning to himself. When he pulled out silk, white rope and a small vibrator, he turned to his brothers.

“Oh, yeah. We’re going to have a lot of fun tonight,” he said before tossing the rope to Emmett.

Brianna’s eyes widened as she turned to me.

“I didn’t know you got those things,” she told me.

“I wanted it to be a surprise,” I replied. I snuck off while she was wrapping up things with her tenants to pick up a few things that would spice up our nights together. I didn’t expect to use them in this manner, but I wasn’t upset about that at all.

Brianna smiled as she was directed to sit on her knees in the middle of the bed.

“You’ve surprised me with a lot while we’ve been here,” she said. “I’ve loved it all.”

Warmth spread throughout my chest as I shot her an affectionate wink. All I wanted was for her to be happy and

satisfied, and I felt like I was finally making good on that. I hated being away from her.

“You’ll love this,” Elijah told her as he knelt in front of her. He cupped her face and drew her into a passionate kiss for a few seconds before moving out of the way so that Emmett could take his place and expertly wrap the rope around her wrists to bind them.

Erick knelt beside her and turned on the vibrator, slipping it between her thighs to press against her clit.

“How does that feel?” he asked.

Brianna let out a shuddery exhale as she nodded fervently.

“How is David supposed to know we’re taking care of you if you won’t say so?” Erick asked as he drew the vibrator away.

“No! It feels good. Really good,” Brianna said in a panic, sounding desperate and needy. I loved it.

Erick grinned and placed the vibrator against her clit again, watching her writhe a little on the spot.

“There we go,” he murmured.

Once Emmett was finished tying her wrists together, Elijah placed his hand on the back of her neck and on the curve of her ass, helping her lie down on her back. He moved her hair out of her face before offering his cock to her as he knelt beside her.

Brianna parted her lips, taking him in. She moved her head, sliding her lips down his length an inch at a time.

“Oh, that’s good,” Elijah breathed out as he pushed his fingers through his hair.

Erick kept the vibrator on Brianna’s clit, while Emmett sank a finger inside of her. The two worked in tandem, making her wet and ready for them. Emmett added another finger and thrust them deep, drawing muffled moans from her.

I stroked myself faster, knowing that she was about to finish again. They were definitely putting on a show, and I was eating up every second of it. Watching her be in so much

constant bliss worked me up more and more, and I had to squeeze the base of my cock to keep myself from finishing too quickly. They weren't done with her yet.

Brianna pulled away from Elijah as she came once more, shaking as much as the vibrator with Emmett's fingers inside of her. She cried out in bliss, her breathing becoming faint and quick. She shuddered from the sensitivity until Erick and Emmett took mercy on her and pulled away.

"You guys are killing me," she breathed out with a blissful smile. "I can't stop shaking."

"We're not done yet," Erick assured her before moving to the other side of her head. He grabbed her bound wrists and pinned them above her head. "Far from it."

Emmett pulled her legs around his waist after freeing his erection from his briefs. He stroked himself a few times before lining himself up with her entrance and pushing inside. His breath hitched as he reveled in how good she felt, his eyes shutting for a moment once he was fully sheathed inside.

"There's no other place I want to be right now besides inside of you," he said as he gave her thigh an appreciative squeeze. "We're killing you? Oh, no, sweetheart, you're killing us."

Erick tilted her head toward him so that he could slide his cock past her lips. He immediately groaned as she took him in with eagerness, his head lowering as he watched her.

"So good. There you go," he praised her, encouraging her to bob her head more.

Elijah squeezed her breasts, twisting her nipples to make her writhe a little in pleasure. He stroked his cock, enjoying the show as much as I was.

Emmett rocked in and out slowly, taking his time with her. His eyes roamed over her figure, drinking her beauty in as I wanted all of them to do. She was meant to be admired.

"You're going to make it impossible to last. Look at you," he said.

I leaned back in my seat, my skin burning with need. My chest rose and fell quicker as my adrenaline raced. Part of me wanted to join in, but I also wanted to watch the show. They moved her and worked her so well, and I couldn't help but admire how she reacted. I would join another time.

"Switch," Erick told her as he gently patted her cheek, motioning for her to turn her head so that she could wrap her lips around Elijah's cock.

"Fuck," Elijah breathed out, his fingertips brushing her cheek as it bulged from his length. "I think I want to come on your face."

Erick cracked a grin.

"Let's paint her pretty face," he agreed.

Emmett pounded into Brianna harder, pushing her down into the mattress with his larger body. He reached over and grabbed the vibrator off the bed before nodding to her bound hands.

"Give me your hands, sexy," he told her.

Brianna offered her tied up hands, gasping when he placed the vibrator between her fingers and pressed it to her clit.

"Don't move your hands," Emmett ordered her as he continued thrusting into her.

Brianna whimpered, her hips trying to lift and buck as the vibrator worked on her clit. When Elijah pulled his cock away, her moans couldn't be contained.

"I won't last... I... oh..." she gasped before throwing her head back, a cry ripping from her.

I couldn't last a second longer. Her orgasm sparked my own, and I came over the top of my hand with a grunt, my forehead nearly hot enough to break a sweat. Holy shit. I slumped back in the chair, breathing in deeply.

Erick and Elijah stroked themselves over her face, their heads falling back or forward as they worked themselves over the edge. They came right after each other, spilling onto her lips and on her cheeks.

Brianna swiped her tongue over her lips, licking up a few dabs of their release.

Emmett pinned her hands over her head again as he leaned over her, making her legs wrap around his waist as he drove into her. It only took a few more thrusts for him to spill inside of her with a curse. He stilled, the sound of everyone's heavy breathing filling the room.

"You're something else," Emmett said as he peered down at her.

Brianna smiled up at him, looking as beautiful as ever with white lines adorning her flushed face.

I breathed in deeply, reeling from the heat and intensity. I wished I had realized that this was what our marriage needed a while ago, but maybe things happened when they needed to. But the big questions were what happened next and what would happen when we were all sent home?

Chapter 14

Emmett

Sunrise fell over the land with bright light and a colorful sky, my eyes shifting upward as I walked out of the cottage. I placed my hands on the back of my head, tension forming between my palms. I couldn't sleep much last night after leaving David's and Brianna's room.

I had a hell of a lot of fun in the moment, but I couldn't shake the uneasiness and guilt that I felt afterward. It was safe to say I had a lot of baggage when it came to intimacy and women. There was something about heartbreak that made falling in love again or just getting close to someone seem like the hardest thing in the world to do. I tried to distance myself from Brianna, but that was damn hard to do when we were all stuck in a little cottage together.

"You're up early."

I turned and saw David walking out of the cottage with his gear on. In a few hours, we were going after the dictator with some of the rebels. They couldn't offer too many of their men because there were only so many of them, but a little help could make all the difference.

"Had trouble sleeping," I replied before turning back toward the city.

David moved to stand beside me, silence lingering between us for a few seconds before he spoke.

"Are you fine? About last night and everything?" he asked me.

I lowered my eyes, my thoughts conflicting. Nothing about this was simple to me.

“I don’t know,” I admitted as I rubbed the back of my neck with a sigh. “I hooked up with my friend’s wife. How am I supposed to feel?”

David placed his hands on his waist and nodded.

“Well, like I said before, I’m totally fine with it. I enjoyed last night, and I know Brianna did too,” he said.

I knew that he was just trying to comfort me, but my stomach twisted at the thought of last night. It was great being with Brianna, but I had a brief moment of weakness after we had sex. I looked down at her, and my heart stopped. There was this tiny spark of a connection, and it scared the hell out of me.

I told myself that I wouldn’t get attached to another woman. At least not for a long time.

“Dragging myself through my divorce with Anna almost killed me, David. This was the first time I slept with another woman after filing those damn papers,” I gritted out, my jaw tensing. I hated even thinking about that part of my past.

I was a dumbass kid that joined the military and got married right out of high school. I didn’t regret enlisting because I liked what I did and loved my brothers in arms, but I could’ve done without the marriage and the selfish wife who cheated on me while I was gone during my first deployment. After that, the thought of love made me sick to my stomach because I could be betrayed and stabbed in the back all over again.

David’s face softened.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “You don’t have to do anything you’re not cool with.”

I breathed in deeply and looked away from him, my chest feeling weighed down.

“I respect you a lot. I don’t want your marriage to be ruined too,” I told him.

“I know, but this won’t ruin my marriage. I liked what happened last night,” David assured me. “Don’t let a worry like that stop you from being with Brianna if you want to be with her.”

Part of me wanted to be with her again because it felt incredible. She was sexy and sweet, and I was entranced like the others. But I had a lot of past shit to get over too.

After I nodded, David patted my back before heading back inside to make sure the others were getting up.

I stayed outside until it was time to grab my gear so that we could head to the house where Dimitrik was hiding. Of course, Brianna emerged from the bedroom at that time, our eyes meeting. When she smiled at me, my chest ached. I should've been able to smile back or even say something to her, but I was scared like hell to get attached and get hurt again. So, I turned away and grabbed my things before leaving the cottage.

The others followed, and we fell behind David and Erick as they led everyone around the outskirts of the city toward the other side. I focused on the mission at hand, clearing my mind of all personal troubles as best as I could.

"You alright? You need to be focused," Bowen asked me as he nudged me.

I nodded with a tense jaw and kept my eyes forward, lingering in the back of the group once we met up with a few of the rebels. Once we saw the two-story estate with its vast green yard that was gated all the way around, we split into two groups.

Two rebels, Amir, Andre, Elijah, and Mo were on the distraction team and went toward the front of the property. The infiltration group was me, two other rebels, David, Bowen, Aziel, and Erick, and we headed toward the back.

"Let's go," David said before hopping the gate.

I reached up and grabbed the top of the metal gate, sucking in a breath before I hauled myself over the top. My boots thumped against the wispy grass before I took off running, lowering myself into a crouch as I heard shots fired from the front of the property. The distraction team were doing their part, giving us more cover to hit the house from the back.

I lifted my gun as we approached the back door, my heart thudding heavily. We had no idea who all was waiting for us

inside of this nice, white house, but we were about to find out. When the others were lined up and ready to storm inside, I slammed my foot against the wooden door, making it splinter near the handle as it flew open.

David stormed inside, the others falling in line as I took up the rear. We entered a small kitchen and started fanning out throughout the house, which was obviously just a temporary shelter since it was nearly bare and dusty. I went to the right with Bowen and Erick, climbing up the stairs only to see two enemies pointing their guns at us from the railing on the second floor.

“Down!” I shouted as they shot. I ducked my head, a bullet piercing the wall behind me.

Bowen straightened up and shot at one of the men, making him topple over the railing and hit the bottom floor with a sickening thud.

I lifted my gun and shot the other guy in the leg, making him buckle and hit the ground with a pained shot. While Erick finished him off for me, I started kicking down doors on the upper floor, searching for wherever Dimitrik was hiding. I could hear David and the others searching and clearing out the bottom floor.

He was here somewhere! He was so agonizingly close that it felt like my blood was boiling. My senses were razor sharp, taking in every little thump and shadow around me. All I wanted was to end this mission here and now and help some innocent people feel safe again.

But that meant killing the bad guy first.

When I reached the door on the right at the end of the hallway, I kicked it open, only for a bullet to pierce the top of my shoulder. I stumbled back and hit the wall behind me, pain ringing through my arm and my head as it struck the wall.

“Emmett!” Erick shouted, fear ringing in his voice.

Bowen shoved me aside before I could get shot again by the three enemies camping out in the room.

I managed to catch a glimpse of Dimitrik crouched in a corner inside of the room.

“Dimitrik is in there!” I yelled before grimacing in pain. Blood spilled from my shoulder, staining my shirt as I planted my palm over the wound. Sweat glistened on my forehead as I watched Bowen and Erick try to take a few shots into the room without getting hit themselves.

I sucked in a deep breath as my head throbbed, my pain and adrenaline clashing. Shots struck the wall out in the hallway, making dust and wood fly everywhere. My lungs stung and ached from the debris.

Bowen landed a shot on one of the enemies.

“Down! Two more!” he shouted.

Erick tried to take another shot, but the doorframe splintered, making him recoil with a grimace as wood dug into his cheek.

“Fuck! He went out of the window!” Erick growled before storming into the room and shooting one of the men who didn’t climb down the trellis attached to the side of the house. “He’s running for the damn woods! We lost him!”

I dropped my head back against the wall with a curse, grinding my teeth. This was supposed to be a win. We were supposed to catch this bastard and end the war so that the rebels could live in peace. How did we fuck up so fast?

Bowen leaned down and threw my good arm over his shoulder, helping me up to my feet.

“Easy,” he told me as I grimaced in pain.

“That son of a bitch,” I gritted out, wishing I could return the favor to the bastard who shot me.

“Unfortunately, he’s not stupid. He’s determined to live,” Bowen grunted as he guided me down the hallway.

Erick left the bullet-ridden room and hurried over to my side, keeping an eye out for Bowen and me as we headed down the stairs to the bottom floor.

David and his group rushed over to the foyer, looking up at us.

“What the hell happened?” he asked, blood splatters and smudges covering their faces and fatigues. They endured a hell of a fight down here too, and I could see bodies down the hallway behind them and a few by the front door.

“Dimitrik went out the second-floor window and ran for the woods. Emmett got shot in the shoulder,” Bowen reported.

“I saw the son of a bitch cowered in a corner! I should’ve had him,” I bit out as I shook my head in disappointment.

David glanced around before motioning for us to follow him.

“His forces are down. Let’s get out of here in case he calls in more to wipe us out,” he said. “We’ll get him next time.”

Hopefully, we’d get another chance.

I increased my pace as we all left the house and met up with the distraction group, who were disappointed by the results but glad that no one on our team was killed in battle. We all lived to fight another day, and we had to do ten times better next time.

I had to do ten times better next time! How many times was I going to disappoint myself within the span of twenty-four hours? I could only take so much before all that was left was to shut down, and that point was approaching fast.

Chapter 15

Brianna

I expected to see victorious grins and a pissed-off dictator when the guys returned from their mission, but all I saw were disappointed frowns and bloody clothes. My heart hammered as fear gripped me, prompting me to hurry over to them as they shuffled into the cottage.

“What happened? Is everyone okay?” I asked as my wide eyes swept over all of them. That was when I saw Bowen guiding Emmett inside, who had his hand clamped down on his bleeding shoulder.

“It’s just a flesh wound, but it still hurts,” Bowen told me.

Emmett didn’t even look at me. He kept his eyes trained on the ground by his boots, his jaw clenching as his nose flared. He was upset. Even more upset than all the rest of them as they shuffled toward their rooms or the kitchen to either undress or get something to drink.

“Dimitrik escaped,” David explained as he walked over to me. He kissed me on the head before nodding to Emmett. “Could you patch up his shoulder? There’s a first aid kit in the main bathroom.”

“I don’t need any help,” Emmett muttered.

David narrowed his eyes at Emmett.

“You will let her patch you up,” he said in a firm voice that made my heart skip. I’d only heard such a dominant tone from him every once in a while, and the fact that he was saying it out of care really made my heart flutter.

“Yeah, come on, man. Just let her,” Elijah said in a quiet voice.

Emmett shot his brother a sharp look, but his expression simmered down a little when Erick stepped closer to Elijah. They were a united front, pushing their other brother to stand down.

Today was a failure, which was easy to tell by all of their frowns and heavy shoulders, but they didn't need to fight among themselves. Tense silence rang throughout the room as everyone waited for Emmett to either relent or fight back.

Finally, Emmett gave David a curt nod, but he definitely didn't seem happy about it. Was he... mad at me or something? He barely acknowledged me earlier, and it seemed like he didn't even want to be near me right now.

I passed the others a small smile, hoping that they didn't beat themselves up over this too much. They would get another chance to catch Dimitrik. I believed in them with everything I had, so I needed to fix whatever this random divide that was between Emmett and me.

Once Emmett and I walked into the bathroom, I shut the door behind us and dug around in the cabinet for the first aid kit. It was more complex than standard first aid kits, so I had plenty of medical supplies to choose from to patch up his shoulder.

"You were shot?" I asked in a quiet voice as I watched him strip off his shirt. Seeing his bare chest made me think about last night and all the fun we had together. I thought he enjoyed it too, but that might not be the case since he could hardly look me in the eyes right now.

"Yeah, it's fine," Emmett replied as he leaned his back against the bathroom counter.

I sighed and met his eyes.

"What's wrong?" I asked him.

Emmett held my gaze for a moment before shaking his head and looking away.

"Nothing. Just frustrated that the mission failed," he said.

"No, you were upset before you even left," I told him before gently placing my hand on his cheek, directing his eyes back

to mine. “Did I do something wrong?”

Emmett let out a dry laugh.

“No, you didn’t do anything wrong,” he muttered.

I frowned as I carefully cleaned his wound with a sanitary wipe. It wasn’t bleeding much any longer, but I still kept it clean until I could press a layer of gauze against the wound. Luckily, it was a flesh wound that would heal fairly quickly if it was taken care of.

“But you regret last night,” I said, taking a guess.

“I don’t know. I don’t regret it, but it’s just hard... being intimate with a woman again,” Emmett admitted in a quiet voice.

“Who broke your heart?” I asked, able to hear the pain lingering in his voice. He was a scarred man, and those scars were opened up because of last night.

Emmett sighed and shook his head in disappointment.

“This girl named Anna. We got married right out of high school and after I enlisted,” he told me. “She cheated on me during my first deployment, and we went through a terrible divorce. Just awful.”

“I’m sorry, Emmett,” I said sincerely. Heartbreak was hard for everyone, including tough guys like him. No one was immune to the pain of love. “You didn’t deserve that.”

“I thought she was the one. I just felt so stupid afterward when I found out she was banging another dude while I was risking my life so that we could have a good, secure future,” Emmett replied, his shoulders slumping. “I just don’t want to go through that again. Getting close to anyone, even if it’s just intimacy, scares the hell out of me.”

I finished bandaging his shoulder up before putting the first aid kit away.

“I’m scared too,” I admitted as I stood in front of him, my hands fidgeting a little before I forced them to be still.

Emmett frowned and tilted his head.

“About what?” he asked.

“Intimacy,” I replied as our eyes met. “I grew up in a pretty conservative family. So, the guidelines of sex and marriage were very strict. Obviously, what I’ve been doing with you guys doesn’t fall in those guidelines.”

Now, Emmett looked intrigued.

“Why do you do it if it scares you?” he asked.

It was a valid question, but the answer was simple.

“Because my enjoyment outweighs my fear. Of course, I have my worries and doubts because it’s a crazy, sudden situation that me and David have decided on, but I’ve loved every moment that I’ve spent being with you guys,” I told him, feeling my heart flutter as a half-smile appeared on his face. “Maybe I’ve become a risk taker.”

“It’s definitely a rush,” Emmett agreed.

“I’m doing what I was taught not to do, but... this whole experience has brought me and David closer. I care about my marriage more than all the strict rules that I was taught,” I said with a warm expression, starting to feel a little surer about things. At the end of the day, my marriage was the most important thing in my life. “And what can I say? I’m helplessly attracted to you guys.”

Emmett’s smile broadened as he crossed his arms over his chest.

“Well, we’re all into you too,” he replied before pushing off the bathroom counter to step closer to me. “I’m into you... I guess I just need a moment. It’s a lot.”

My face softened as I nodded. I was glad that he was so aware of his emotions because if he moved too fast, he might just make himself miserable in the end. I didn’t want that for him, especially since I could tell that he was a good guy with a broken heart.

“Take all the time you need. I’ll happily wait for someone like you if you ever want to be with me again,” I told him, sharing

a soft laugh with him before pecking him on the cheek. “You’re all patched up. I should go talk to David.”

Emmett nodded, giving my arm a gentle squeeze before leaving the bathroom.

My eyes trailed him until he was out of sight, my heart restarting with rapid beats. He actually let me get to know him more, which was what I had been wanting. But would the others open up to me too?

Chapter 16

Brianna

I found David sitting on the bed in our bedroom with his head lowered. The atmosphere in the cottage was certainly low and heavy after their carefully planned mission didn't pan out.

It was unfortunate, but some things just didn't work out. We were up against a tough enemy, but that didn't mean we weren't going to come out on top.

Dimitrik was going down one way or another. Just not today.

I sat down next to him and placed my hand on his back.

"Hey, it's okay," I told him as I gently rubbed his back. "You guys will have another chance."

David sighed and lifted his head to look at me.

"I know, but it would've been really great if we got him today. With each passing day, Dimitrik is killing more and more innocent people," David said through gritted teeth, his eyes narrowing.

I slid my hand up the back of his neck so that I could stroke his hair, feeling the tension in his shoulders. As much as I didn't want him to be stressed, I knew that he wouldn't be at ease until Dimitrik was taken down.

"You guys will work with the rebel leaders and come up with another plan. You aren't alone in this. You have help from people who know Dimitrik and who know the area," I pointed out.

"I hate putting even more pressure on them. They're watching their home burn. Their friends and families die," David replied

as he peered at me, looking lost.

My heart ached at the sight. He was such a good, strong leader, but he had his weak moments too. There were times when he needed to be encouraged and pointed in the right direction, and if I could help him, I was going to do that.

“They want to fight,” I reminded him. “Fight with them.”

David’s face eventually hardened.

“Tomorrow, I’ll have you send a message to them. We need a different plan. I’m sure Dimitrik will be hiding somewhere completely different now,” he said.

I gave his arm a squeeze as I nodded in encouragement. They needed another plan, and they needed to gather themselves again, even if the defeat stung.

“You guys will figure out where and pin him down,” I assured him. “You all tried your best today. You’ll have another chance.”

David breathed in deeply before giving me a grateful smile.

“Thank you,” he told me. “It’s just... frustrating. I really want to help these people.”

“Even being here is helping them,” I said as I leaned against his side. “I believe in all of you. Really, it’s great seeing you in action.”

David lifted an eyebrow at me, starting to relax as we sat close together in the privacy of our room. It was great spending time with the others, but I still enjoyed some alone time with my husband.

“Oh, yeah?” he asked, seeming genuinely curious.

I nodded. I only heard about the things he did, but getting to see him in action was a whole other thing. I got to see how strong and smart he was right in front of my eyes, and I loved seeing how good of a leader he was to the others.

“You’re amazing at what you do. I’ve always known that, but... I’m even prouder of you now than I was before,” I replied. He worked so damn hard every single day.

David leaned closer and rested his head against mine, his hand squeezing my knee.

“That means a lot. More than you know. I’ve hated having to choose work over us when I’m called on,” he told me, guilt lingering in his voice. “I enjoy what I do, but I love you more.”

I closed the space between us and pressed my lips against his in a passionate kiss, my hand resting on his stubbled cheek. It meant a lot that he said that, and I knew that he was being truthful. Things were just hard at times when we were apart for so long.

“About what we’ve been doing with the others... how have you been feeling about it?” I asked once we parted from each other.

David smiled with a hopeful glint in his eyes.

“Good. I’ve really enjoyed it,” he said before his expression became more serious. “What about you? Have you been liking it? And I don’t want you acting like you do just because I do.”

My thoughts on it all were still complicated, which I hoped would simplify in the coming days, but I wasn’t sure. What was going to happen after the whole mission ended?

“I’ve really enjoyed it,” I assured him.

David raised an eyebrow.

“But what?” he asked. He knew me well enough to hear a “but” in my words.

I sighed and turned to face him more, letting him pull my legs over his knees.

“You know how I grew up. This is a big leap from the strict monogamy that I was taught,” I replied. I sounded like a broken record at this point, but the issue still lingered in the back of my mind. Would I ever shake it?

David nodded in understanding.

“I know. I’m proud of you for even trying to explore your desires. I know it’s a lot,” he said as he rubbed the front of my

leg. “Besides the guilt from your past, does everything else about this feel okay?”

I thought for a moment and nodded.

“Yeah, it feels great. I get along with the guys great, but... I don’t know how to picture the future. What’s going to happen when the mission ends?” I asked.

David sighed softly and shrugged.

“Honestly, I’m not exactly sure. I want us to be stronger when we go back, though,” he told me. “Regarding the guys, I have no clue.”

“I guess we can just enjoy this while we’re out here,” I said, figuring that was the best course of action for right now. We could enjoy our time together with the guys while on the mission, and when David and I got home, we could fully focus on each other and our marriage.

Admittedly, the thought of things ending did make my heart ache a little, but maybe that was for the best.

David offered me a comforting smile.

“Hey, I trust you. And I trust my guys. If you ever wanted to see them after this mission, I’d be fine with that,” he said.

My eyes widened in surprise.

“Really?” I asked.

David nodded.

“Of course. Something to think about. I just want you to be happy and satisfied,” he said.

I frowned and cupped his face, drawing his eyes to mine. The last thing that I wanted was for him to think that he wasn’t enough for me. He was plenty for me.

“You do make me happy and satisfied,” I told him.

David chuckled as he fully pulled me onto his lap.

“I know, but we can always have even more fun,” he pointed out. “Even if that calls for more people.”

All I could do was sigh as I wrapped my arms around his neck, my heart fluttering as I took him in. I had loved this man for years and years, but my love for him still deepened to this day. Over and over, he proved that he cared for me in all sorts of different ways.

“I love you so much,” I said with awe in my eyes.

David smiled and rubbed my back.

“I love you,” he told me. “Whatever you want to do, I’m right there with you.”

I stroked his hair and glanced at the bed behind us.

“I’d love to take a nap with you right now,” I replied as I lifted my eyebrows at him.

David followed my gaze before playfully tossing me onto the mattress. He crawled over me, pecking at my neck and cheeks to draw soft laughter from me.

“Then, a nap we will take,” he said before lying down next to me. He pulled me into his arms, his strong chest pressing against my back. He kissed the back of my head, breathing in the flowery scent of my hair. “Thank you.”

“For what?” I asked as we cuddled close.

“Everything. For being my wife,” David replied, holding me as close as he could like he was afraid that I would slip from his grasp.

He never had to worry about that.

“I always want to be a good wife to you like you’re a good husband to me,” I said before pausing. A sigh then broke from me. “I really like this new thing that we’re trying, but the guilt swallows me whole sometimes. I feel like I’m betraying you.”

“I know you’ve been taught that what you’re doing is betrayal, but most things aren’t black and white like that,” David pointed out. “To me, betrayal is going behind my back to hurt me. Are you doing that?”

I shook my head.

“Never. I’d never do that,” I promised him, my heart aching at the thought of crushing him like that.

David held me tighter.

“Then, everything is perfectly fine. Trust me. It’s *good*,” he said in a sultry manner.

I laughed softly and placed my hands over his, drifting off into the comfort and warmth of his embrace. There was nowhere else that I wanted to be right now.

“Better than good,” I said, feeling his smile against the back of my neck.

Comfortable silence fell over the bedroom, and we slipped into a deep sleep, resting and preparing for what decided to come next for us.

Chapter 17

Bowen

The night air wasn't as comforting as it should've been.

With a frustrated sigh, I rolled my neck as I leaned my forearms on the railing of the cottage's front porch, looking down into the still darkness. My head lowered, feeling heavy from all the disappointment weighing down on me from earlier.

We almost had the dictator! We were so close, and we were so organized. Yet... we'd failed.

How could I sleep knowing that the dictator was probably laughing at us right about now?

"Bowen?"

I straightened up and spun around, facing Brianna as she peeked out of the front door. The moment our eyes locked, she froze for a second, staring up at me with wide eyes before stepping out onto the porch.

"You should be asleep," I told her as she came closer. She should've been safe and warm in bed with David. Or the other guys I had seen slip into their bedroom.

I couldn't believe that David was letting some of the other guys get hot and heavy with his wife or that a shy woman like Brianna would be into that sort of thing. The fact that she was so secretly naughty underneath those gentle eyes stirred something deep within me.

Maybe I had thought about wanting to be in that bedroom a time or two.

“I couldn’t sleep. I guess you couldn’t either,” Brianna replied before stopping a foot away from me. She crossed her arms over her chest with a little sheepish smile, but I could still tell that she wasn’t wearing a bra underneath her large t-shirt that almost covered her sleep shorts.

I exhaled slowly and shook my head before turning away from her, shame making my forehead burn hot. We should’ve come home victorious earlier.

“We don’t fail like this. Not often,” I murmured as I leaned against the railing again.

Brianna moved to my side.

“Everyone fails,” she replied. “You guys shouldn’t hold it against yourselves so much.”

I shook my head, my chest tightening.

“We can’t fail,” I told her. “I can’t fail. There’s too much riding on this mission. On anything that we do!”

Brianna tensed a little as I abruptly turned away from her. At first, I thought I’d scared her away until I felt her hands on my back.

“Why does it scare you so much? Failure,” she asked. “I mean, no one likes to fail, but sometimes things just... happen. There are some things that we can’t control. No matter how hard we try.”

Her words sounded weighted. They had a specific meaning that she hadn’t brought to light, but she had already shined a spotlight on the darkest part of my mind.

“I joined the military for my dad. He was this incredible tech specialist who won all these awards and did all these great things. He was so proud when I enlisted,” I told her, keeping my eyes forward and away from hers as my throat threatened to grow tight. “When he died... I got hooked on this job more than ever. It’s my last tie to him.”

Brianna ran her hands up my back to my shoulders, making my body stiffen at first. I didn’t expect her to stay out here with me. Or to touch me like this. She shouldn’t, right?

But David was obviously fine with her getting close to the others. I didn't think that I could bring myself to stop if she sidled even closer. Watching her be as determined as us and catching a glimpse of her curves through thin tank tops and short shorts kept me up in the late hours of the night.

In a good way.

"He'd be really proud of you," Brianna said as she coaxed me to turn around. She gave me a kind smile, one that made my heart forget how to beat for a second. I hadn't been looked at like that in a long time. "But do you love what you do enough to do it for yourself?"

I nodded without a second thought.

"Of course. These guys are my brothers, and I like helping people. You know, my family was full of engineers and inventors before my dad decided to switch it up and go into the military," I told her.

Brianna lifted her eyebrows in interest.

"Really? Why the military?" she asked.

"Because we learned how to protect the ones we love," I replied, remembering the comforting grin of my dad and the way he always put me and my mom first. "I almost failed that today when Emmett got shot."

Brianna frowned as she shook her head.

"You have to let go of that. You can't control everything," she said before sighing. "Trust me. If I could control everything I felt, my life would probably be a lot simpler."

I tilted my head a little, able to hear the stress in her voice. I didn't expect her to seem so... conflicted.

"Is this about you and the others?" I asked. "And David?"

"Kind of. Well, yes, but it's mostly about me," Brianna admitted before looking away. "If I followed in the footsteps of my parents, I'd be at home caring for kids without a single dirty thought about another man besides my husband."

But that wasn't the case at all. She was here with all of us, and I couldn't help but want to know what those dirty thoughts consisted of.

"Desire is the hardest thing to control," I pointed out as I moved a half-step closer to her.

Brianna's breathing went silent, her cheeks flushing that usual bashful hue that made her look even more beautiful. Her eyes swept up my tall figure, taking me in with a glint of awe and desire in her gaze. He liked when I loomed over her. A lot.

"I just don't think I'll ever be that content housewife my parents thought I'd be," she said. "I want more than that. David wants more than that for me."

She deserved more than what her parents saw for her. She deserved everything she wanted because she was a kind, supportive person. I saw that when she was with David. With the other guys. With the rebels. Right now with me.

"You should take what you want," I told her. "I'm scared of letting things go, but you're scared of reaching for them."

Brianna's eyes widened. At first, I thought I crossed a line and accidentally dealt a low blow, but her face hardened a little in determination.

"No, you're right. I just wish I didn't question every move I made. Every feeling I have," she said.

"It's okay to be cautious as long as it doesn't stop you from getting what you want," I told her. I probably shouldn't apply those words to my own life, tough. If I did, she would've already been in my arms with our lips pressed together.

"You went after what you wanted. Did you have any doubts?" she asked.

"Many. They faded along the way, but I knew I couldn't stop what I felt was meant to be," I replied as my fingertips brushed her upper arm. Was it meant for her to find me all alone out here? For us to have this deep conversation?

"Meant to be," Brianna murmured, thoughtfulness gracing her face. She then smiled up at me. "I'm glad I found you out

here. I've been wanting to talk to you. Get to know you."

"What do you think so far?" I asked with a light chuckle, my fingers sliding lower toward her hand.

Brianna glanced away in a shy manner before righting herself and meeting my eyes.

"I like who I've gotten to know. A lot," she admitted. "I'm always nervous to wonder what you guys think about me."

I hummed under my breath as I took her hand, pulling her an inch closer to me out of instinct. I wanted her closer.

"I'll tell you what I think. I think you're sharp as a whip. I think you're beautiful and sweet. And I also think that you let too many voices cloud your mind and distract you from what you want."

Brianna's eyes widened. She then breathed in deeply and swallowed hard.

"They're quieter tonight," she said.

I tilted my head at her, tension crackling in the air between us.

"Then, you know what you want," I told her.

Brianna didn't nod or verbally agree. She didn't have to in order to show me just how right I was. She lifted up on her toes and crashed her lips against mine, her hands gripping my biceps.

I returned the hunger of her kiss, our lips melding and moving. My body pressed against hers, pushing her back against the railing. She felt warm and soft against me, making heat spark inside of me.

"I've been dying to be pressed up against you," I murmured as my hands roamed up her sides, caressing her hips and curves. "This perfect body."

Brianna tensed a little as she looked down at herself, but I tilted her chin up with my forefinger.

"You're gorgeous," I assured her, seeing a glint of doubt in her soft eyes. The thumb of my other hand caressed the curve beneath her breast, making her chest rise and fall with a shaky

breath. “It’s been torture waiting to see if I could be let in on all the fun.”

Brianna twisted her fingers in my unruly hair, a pleading look forming on her face.

“I want you,” she told me. “I just didn’t know if you wanted me.”

“I’ll show you how much I want you,” I replied before grabbing her hips and spinning her around. My chest pressed against her back as my hands caressed her breasts, squeezing and teasing her hard nipples through her shirt. I felt myself throb as she pushed her ass back against me, arching into my hands.

My right hand ventured downward, my fingertips slipping beneath the waist of her shorts before pausing.

“You’re not wearing panties,” I said when I felt nothing but skin.

“Why bother?” Brianna breathed out.

A smirk crossed my face before I slipped my fingers through her folds, feeling how wet she already was. She rocked against my hand as my fingertips glided over her clit, my heart rate quickening. Just feeling her writhe drove me crazy, but I forced myself to be patient. I wanted to hear how badly she wanted this.

“Eager, aren’t we?” I murmured near her ear. “Tell me how badly you want me to touch you.”

“So bad. I’m aching for you,” Brianna told me as she reached back to hold the back of my head.

A pleased groan broke from me as I circled her clit with my fingertips a few times before drifting them through her folds. Back and forth. Teasing and tormenting. When I slid my hand down the back of her shorts and sank a finger inside of her, a moan droned from her that I didn’t bother to silence.

“So ready for me. You’re dying to be filled,” I said, my entire body burning hot. I pushed in another finger and curled them both, feeling her stiffen with bliss.

“Please. More...” Brianna gasped as she pushed back against my fingers.

I thrust my fingers in and out of her, working them deeper into her. Over and over. I could feel her tightening as she got closer and closer to the edge.

“Too soon,” I told her before pulling my fingers out of her. I drifted them back over her clit, feeling her hips jerk in response to the sensitivity.

“Bowen,” Brianna begged.

I pushed my fingers back inside of her, rocking them deep as her knees threatened to buckle. My free hand rested on her stomach, holding her up against me as I continued my motions. I could hear how wet she was at that point, my fingers becoming slick with her arousal.

“You feel so fucking good,” I said, stretching her with three fingers now.

Brianna could barely string a word together, a shaky breath leaving her. She gripped my other hand, digging her nails in as she got close again.

I drew my fingers out, drifting them through her folds a few times to make her whimper.

“I’ll let you come if you tell me how good it feels,” I whispered near her ear before thrusting my fingers back into her.

“It feels amazing! So good... please let me come,” Brianna cried out, her voice coming out uneven. She was desperate at this point, which filled me with satisfaction.

I wanted to hear her come apart. My other hand slipped into the front of her shorts, my fingertips pressing against her clit as my other fingers continued thrusting inside of her. I worked her from both sides, making her legs shake as her orgasm finally tore through her.

A broken moan shattered from her before her legs gave out.

I pulled her against me, not letting her fall as she trembled through the pleasure with weak breaths.

“There you go,” I praised her, my adrenaline spiking just from the satisfaction of watching her.

Brianna sank back against me, breathing in deeply to steady herself.

“I’ve never been fingered like that before,” she admitted.

“Trying things with other guys you trust can open up a whole world of possibilities,” I replied as I turned her around to face me. “David loves you a lot, you know. Don’t ever think he’s pushing you away from him when he’s nudging you toward us. You’re still going back to the same bed every night.”

Brianna’s face softened as she flashed me a grateful look.

“Goodnight, Bowen,” she told me as she squeezed my hand.

Part of me didn’t want to let her go, but tomorrow was another long day. We all needed to rest to get through it.

“Goodnight, Brianna.”

Chapter 18

David

The savory smell of fresh-cooked breakfast drifted throughout the cottage as I wandered from the bedroom toward the kitchen. Brianna wasn't in bed when I woke up a few minutes ago, but I also didn't see her in bed around midnight either when I woke up thirsty. Heat built in my stomach as I remembered quietly walking through the dark cottage last night, following the sound of my wife's moans until I saw Bowen fingering her to completion on the front porch.

Did I expect such a sight? No. But that didn't mean I didn't enjoy it. I stayed and watched the show until she was weak in the knees before returning to bed. I could've said something about it when she came back to bed, but I didn't want her to feel bad about doing something with one of the guys without me there.

It was a surprise to me, but it was a happy surprise. The woman I loved had always been so timid and unsure about trying new things and taking risks. I never minded stepping up for her or having her back, but she did this on her own. She went after what she wanted.

And I was happy for her. Watching the person you loved bloom into a more confident, happier version of themselves was a gift, and her happiness conjured my own. All I wanted was for her to feel satisfied, and it was an added bonus that I got to see my brothers let down their guards some more and not be so distant.

I felt my connection with all of them deepening because this took a huge level of trust. And that trust hadn't been broken

yet. I was confident in my relationship and in the love that Brianna and I shared, and as long as I felt that connection between us, I had no problem with her being with the others.

Plus, it all turned me on to no end. I could watch her writhe and moan for days and nights and some helping hands certainly were welcome to make that happen.

“I’ll watch the eggs. Make sure the bacon doesn’t burn to a crisp,” Emmett told Aziel with a warning glare as I hovered in the entrance of the kitchen.

Aziel smirked as he manned the spatula.

“I wouldn’t dare,” he replied.

“Now, now. Let’s not fight,” Brianna said as she squeezed between them to check on a pan of breakfast potatoes. She shared smiles with each of them as they all hovered by the stove, moving around each other in sync to fix breakfast for everyone.

“Morning, captain.”

I turned to see Bowen sitting at the dining table with a cup of coffee. He looked tired, but he seemed to be hanging in a lot better than he was after our failed mission. I could only imagine why.

“Have a good night?” I asked with a playful smirk.

At first, Bowen’s face almost seemed to pale, but when he realized that I wasn’t mad, the side of his mouth curled up as he nodded.

“Yes, sir,” he replied.

I nodded to him before sitting at the dining table, watching everyone else drag themselves to the table as they gradually woke up. Conversation sparked all around me, and I took a moment to watch everyone eat, drink coffee, cook, and laugh like we did this every morning. Well, ever since we came here, we did.

Things felt different. My unit had always operated well together because we were like brothers, but it was almost like Brianna was a missing piece. A missing flare of warmth. She

lit up these guys' faces with grins like they were the happiest bastards on the planet. When she walked into a room, everyone was looking her way.

A defeat like we had yesterday would've taken us days to get over, but the energy in the room wasn't doom and gloom like it was yesterday. There was a hopeful vibe that brought a smile to my face. We were going to complete this mission, and we were going to do it with her help, whether it was her language skills or just her comforting presence.

How could I not be fine with her getting closer to the others when things were better for everyone? Our relationship was sound. My brothers were happy and more honest about their feelings. And my wife was glowing with happiness.

Letting her bloom with the help of others was one of the many ways I could show her how deeply I loved her. Even if it was a bit unconventional.

And the fact of it being so unconventional did spark a hint of uncertainty and doubt in my heart at times. But that was what happened when things were new and unexplored. This was new territory to navigate, and as long as I kept an open mind, I wasn't nervous about what came around the corner. I just wanted Brianna by my side.

"Guys! We've got a problem!" Elijah shouted from his room before his footsteps thudded through the cottage. He ran into the kitchen with the laptop, his breathing puffing in and out. "Rebels say a bomb has been planted near their base. It could make the parking garage collapse right on top of them if it goes off!"

Everyone stood from the table, making it jostle. Fluffy eggs, crisp bacon, and golden potatoes were left abandoned as everyone grabbed their gear. My heart pounded heavily as my brain started to work, unfolding a plan in my mind as everyone met me on the porch.

"Alright, Mo and Andre on me. We're going to handle the bomb. The rest of you need to establish a perimeter around us and make sure we're not walking into a trap," I told them

before turning to Brianna. “We’ll need your translation skills, but I don’t want you anywhere near that bomb.”

“I’ll have to be close,” Brianna urged me before grabbing my arm, her eyes locking with mine. “I’ll be fine, but we need to go. We can’t let all of those people die!”

Her words kicked me and everyone else into gear. As terrified as I was for her safety, she was as determined and ready as everyone else, and I wasn’t going to slow us down when we had work to do. That was why all of us were here.

“Let’s go!” I said before turning and leading everyone into the city.

Aziel, Emmett, Erick, and Bowie took the lead, checking the area with their guns raised as we approached the site of the bomb near the rebels’ base.

“Clear,” Erick told us before everyone started to fan out to create a perimeter.

Brianna stayed close to my side before pointing ahead.

“There’s Andric!” she said.

My heartbeat thumped in my ears, nearly muffling her words, but I caught sight of the dark-haired rebel as he carefully made his way to us. My eyes swept over the empty area, but it didn’t take me long to see an odd-looking box about fifty feet away from the entrance of the parking garage. The bomb had to be contained in there.

Brianna and Andric started talking back and forth in Vlasic. Andric moved his hands in animated motions, fear gleaming in his eyes as he gestured to the bomb and then the parking garage.

“There are no sightings of enemies in the area, but they suspect someone dropped it off not too long before they messaged us. They took a quick look, and it’s a general IED with a detonator,” she explained to me, Mo, and Andre.

Andre nodded as he patted his Kevlar vest.

“I’ve had bomb disarming training,” he said.

“We’ll assist,” Mo spoke up as he nodded to me.

I turned to Brianna.

“I’ll keep Andric informed through you. If we can’t diffuse it, we’ll need to evacuate the rebels,” I told her. The air felt ten times hotter than normal knowing that a bomb could go off at any moment.

Brianna nodded and spoke to Andric, while Mo, Andre, and I carefully made our way to the cardboard box.

Andre peered into the box as Mo and I gave him a few inches of space. He had more knowledge than anyone else on bombs. His eyes suddenly grew wide.

“Anyone got a flashlight?” he asked.

Mo grabbed a flashlight out of his belt and shined the beam into the box.

My heart jolted to a stop at the sight of a black, cylinder-shaped IED with visible wires hooked to a small radio. The bomb was scary enough to look at, but I finally saw what Andre was staring at.

A digital clock with ten minutes left.

“We have to get moving,” Andre said as he quickly dug around in his belt for a pair of wire cutters. He flexed his hands a few times as he knelt down, making sure he was steady as he continued to inspect the bomb.

I turned to Brianna.

“There’s a timer for ten minutes!” I shouted.

Brianna’s jaw dropped.

“Ten minutes? We need to get out of here!” she yelled back, sheer terror making her pitch hike up.

I shook my head and motioned to Andric.

“Tell him!” I told her before turning back to Andre. “Do you have enough time?”

Andre carefully moved the wires a little, leaning a few inches closer to look at the radio.

“Yes, but I need to focus,” he said, sweat already glistening on his brow.

I looked at Mo, who had a worried but determined look on his face. We had come across these situations before when we didn't know if we were going to make it out alive or not. All we could do was trudge forward and do what we did best.

“Fuck! My hands won't be still,” Andre gritted out before shaking his hands. He then breathed in deeply, a bead of sweat rolling down his face. He gripped a wire connected to the detonator and placed the wire cutters around it.

This bomb could still go off at any moment. The atmosphere around us seemed to lose its sound, but the weight of the air also seemed to increase, crushing my chest and shoulders as I waited for the snip that decided our fate.

“Steady,” Mo murmured, keeping the flashlight focused on the wire.

Down to one minute. Each red number ticked down more and more. Smaller and smaller.

“Thirty seconds left... twenty-nine... twenty-eight... twenty-seven... come on, Andre,” Mo told him with gritted teeth.

Andre pressed down, snipping the wire and making the phone and timer go dead. He released the breath that he had been holding before looking up at me with big eyes.

“Detonator is dead,” he reported.

My chest ached as I finally breathed in, nearly feeling dizzy. We all rose to our feet, staring down at the bomb. It was still explosive, but it was safer to move to a less populated area. If it was shot or triggered another way, the rebels would still be safe, but the hardest part was over.

“We'll dispose of it,” Mo told me, patting my shoulder before he and Andre got to work.

I jogged over to Brianna, who stared after Mo and Andre with pure worry in her eyes.

“It's okay. The detonator is dead,” I assured her.

A relieved expression filled her face before she turned to Andre and relayed the message. He said something back before nodding to me and running back into the parking garage.

“He’s going to tell the others. I can’t believe you guys diffused a bomb!” Brianna gasped as she grabbed my arms. “My heart still won’t stop racing!”

“Adrenaline is a hell of a drug,” I laughed a little, feeling restless and energized. This helped make up for the defeat that we suffered yesterday. “Andre and Mo are good at what they do.”

Brianna let her hands slide down my arms slowly as she smiled a little.

“It was cool watching them be so focused and practiced with their hands,” she admitted.

“Just cool?” I asked with a smirk.

Brianna blushed and shrugged.

“It was... kind of sexy,” she replied before grimacing. “Is that weird?”

I shook my head as I put my arm around her and led her away from the scene.

“No, it’s not,” I assured her, feeling my adrenaline spike at the thought of her being turned on by them in the midst of danger. “I’m sure they’re good with their hands in other ways too.”

Brianna looked up at me.

“Could I find out?” she asked. “With you?”

“I’m always down to watch you be pleased,” I told her.

Brianna bit her lip as she shook her head.

“I want you to join in this time. With them,” she explained, hope glinting in her eyes.

I had been dying to touch her, even if it had been a pleasure just watching her be touched by others. Hell, I was burning hot

with a ton of adrenaline, and I had a feeling that Andre and Mo were riding a good high too.

“Let’s get back then,” I said. “I expect you on the bed and ready.”

“Yes, sir.”

* * *

While the others did a perimeter run around the cottage to make sure our area was still safe, I found Andre and Mo as they headed to the cottage, pushing each other and laughing as they talked about their big save.

“Hope you guys aren’t about to be busy,” I told them as I stood on the porch, wrestling with my impatience knowing that Brianna was waiting for us in the bedroom.

“Busy?” Andre questioned me.

“We could celebrate with a drink,” Mo replied as he nudged Andre. “Not every day you diffuse a bomb.”

“I could think of another way to celebrate,” I offered as I raised an eyebrow at them, catching their interest.

“What’s that?” Andre replied.

I nodded my head toward the door of the cottage.

“Follow me,” I replied before leading them into the cottage and down the hallway. I paused outside of my bedroom and turned back to them. “Brianna was impressed with you two today. Your handiwork specifically.”

Intrigued looks immediately filled their faces.

“Oh, really?” Mo asked.

“She wants to show you just how impressed. If you don’t mind joining us,” I told them as I looked between them.

Andre shared a surprised and eager look with Mo.

“Well, I’m not turning that down in a million years,” he chuckled. He was softer spoken than his other two brothers, but that didn’t mean he was the same way in the bedroom.

Mo nodded in agreement.

“If you’re cool with it, boss, I’m right behind you,” he confirmed with a nod.

I was more than cool with it. I needed this to happen because I had a lot of steam to release. With a pleased grin, I opened the bedroom door and led them inside where Brianna was seated at the bottom edge of the bed. Beautiful and bare.

“I knew you guys were good at what you do. But... wow,” Brianna said as she smiled at them, her cheeks already flushing pink. Nervous energy radiated from her, but I could tell that she was also turned on by the way she rubbed her thighs together.

“We’re good at quite a few things,” Mo assured her before the three of us moved toward the bed.

I pushed Brianna down onto her back and crouched near her head so that I could lean down and kiss her, covering her soft lips with mine. I dominated the kiss, my tongue breaking past her lips to brush against hers.

Brianna moaned in response, her lips parting in a gasp.

I looked down to see Mo taking one of her nipples into his mouth, while Andre knelt in front of the bed and buried his face between her thighs. I hummed in pleasure as her body writhed and arched in response to every little touch. My hand settled around her jaw, drawing her eyes to mine.

“Feels good?” I asked, feeling glad to be in the action. I couldn’t help but want to take control like I did in the field.

“Yes,” Brianna breathed out. Her eyes fluttered shut as Andre sucked her clit into his mouth.

“Open your eyes,” I told her.

Brianna opened her eyes only for them to roll back. Her back arched off the bed, her body tensing as they both worked her with ease.

Mo dragged his teeth over her nipple before covering it again with his mouth.

Andre dug his fingertips into her thighs, anchoring her down so that he could rhythmically flick his tongue across her clit. Over and over. He moved one hand to push a finger deep inside of her, preparing her for what was next.

“Oh...” Brianna gasped as she grasped at the bedsheets.

“Come for them. Show them how good they please you,” I ordered her.

Like a snap, Brianna came undone, shuddering through her first orgasm with a weak cry. She dropped back down on the mattress with an uneven breath, her face flushed.

My cock throbbed as I watched her, already wanting to be buried inside of her.

“Suck them off. I need to be inside of you,” I told her before me and the guys rotated. I freed my erection as I settled between her thighs, tearing my shirt off and pulling my briefs and army pants down enough to not be in the way. I drifted the head of my cock through her folds.

Brianna whimpered, her hips wiggling a little as she yearned for more. As Mo and Andre knelt on either side of her, she reached out once they undid their pants, wrapping her fingers around their erections to stroke them.

“That’s good,” Mo praised her as he rocked into her hand.

“That’s it,” Andre groaned as she worked them from base to tip. He let his head drop back, shadows falling across his dark skin.

Brianna sat up more, resting on her elbows and offering her mouth instead. She went back and forth between them, her lips working up and down their lengths.

I groaned at the sight, my sense of control breaking. After liking myself up with her entrance, I plunged inside to the hilt.

Brianna moaned around Mo’s cock, making him curse under his breath. She pulled off him to gaze at me, giving me a pleading look that spurred me to start pounding into her.

“Yes!” she gasped, reveling in the roughness. She started back up with Mo and Andre, letting them thrust into her mouth with

each turn.

Heat covered my skin, burning hotter with each deep thrust. Seeing the curves and slopes of her body worked me even closer to finishing. She had no idea how gorgeous she looked, and I caught the guys peering down at her figure too.

“You look so damn good like this,” I told her as I gripped the underside of her knees, pushing her legs up more so that I could go deeper. “Don’t stop until they’re satisfied.”

“With a mouth like hers, it won’t be long,” Andre groaned, his lean chest quickly rising and falling.

Mo nodded in agreement as he rocked into her mouth when it was his turn.

“Fuck. I’m right there. Don’t stop,” he breathed out before letting out a groan as he buried his cock in her mouth.

Brianna took everything, swallowing him down before going to Andre to finish him off too. She peered up at him through her lashes, sliding her tongue up the underside of his cock.

Andre was a goner soon after. He dove his fingers into her hair and thrust in and out of her mouth over and over as deep as he wanted until he came with a grunt.

I breathed in deeply as I kept rocking into her, feeling her core tense as she approached her own orgasm. I was right there with her, a heated haze swirling in my head.

“You did so good. Let me reward you,” I told her before pressing my thumb against her clit.

Brianna jolted from the sensitivity, but she soon tensed, focusing on the orgasm that was right on the horizon.

“Oh!” Brianna gasped once it hit her, making her head fall back.

I gritted my teeth as I slammed home, spilling inside of her as she still shuddered. My head felt light, making me settle back on my knees as she collapsed back between Andre and Mo, who each shared a brief kiss with her.

This arrangement felt too good to be true, but it was our reality. It was working even better than expected. But what came next after our mission ended?

Could we really go back to how things used to be?

Chapter 19

David

After Mo and Andre left the bedroom, I turned to Brianna as she sat up and fanned herself, cooling down from the intensity of our heated night. A pleased smile crossed my face as I admired the messiness of her hair and the pink blush on her cheeks. She looked so beautiful like this that I couldn't even find words to properly explain it.

"Did you have a good time?" I asked as I reached out to rub her thigh.

Brianna smiled back and nodded.

"I'm glad you joined in," she told me. "Being with the others is really nice, but even the sex that you and I have been having has been so intense since we got here."

"In a good way?" I asked with a teasing tone.

Brianna laughed as she brushed her hair away from her face.

"A very good way," she assured me.

I chuckled as a spark of heat lit up in my chest. I was glad to know that she was having a good time with everyone, including me. Our connection really had deepened.

"You know, I've actually picked up some tips and tricks from watching you," I told her before leaning close to her ear. "I can't wait to try them out."

A playful squeal left her when I teasingly nipped her ear. Her soft laughter rang in my ears as we lightly grappled before holding each other with sweet smiles on our faces.

“As long as I’m with you, I’m down for anything,” Brianna said as she nuzzled her face against mine.

I smiled as I leaned my head against hers, able to hear the pure love in her voice. We had overcome so much together from the start, but there was more obstacles to come. More things that we needed to talk about. With how things were progressing, it was probably time to have another conversation about what we were doing.

“How do you see our marriage? After we’ve done all of this?” I asked her, wanting her honest opinion.

Brianna’s face straightened when she realized that our conversation had taken a serious turn. She sat up straighter and crossed her legs.

“I think our marriage is stronger than before. We communicate more. We spend more time together,” Brianna replied. “It’s what I’ve wanted for a while now. Granted, I didn’t expect this arrangement to be a way to solve that, but... I’m grateful for it. I’m grateful for you and how you gave this a chance.”

My heart ached as I took her hand.

“I want you to be happy,” I told her. “I’m happy when you’re happy, and I can tell you really like being with the others.”

Brianna looked away for a moment, biting into her bottom lip as her brow furrowed in thought.

“What is it? You can tell me,” I encouraged her, knowing that something heavy was on her mind.

Brianna sighed and brought her eyes back to mine.

“Would you still feel the same way if I told you that I don’t just like the guys for the sex? I like them beyond that,” she admitted before shrinking back a little like she was preparing for me to be upset.

My face softened as I squeezed her hand.

“You have feelings for them?” I asked.

Brianna swallowed hard.

“Maybe. I don’t just like having sex with them. I like... being around them. Listening to them talk. Making breakfast with them,” she told me before shaking her head. “It feels wrong just saying that.”

I sat up more and cupped her face in my hands, drawing her worried eyes to mine.

“You shouldn’t feel guilty. I’m not upset,” I promised her.

I couldn’t help but feel a little jolt of surprise when those words left me. I probably should’ve been jealous of my wife developing feelings for other guys, but all I saw when she was with them was happiness. My wife soaked in the adoration that she deserved, and my brothers were happier and more comfortable than I had ever seen them before.

It was hard to be upset when the people I cared about the most were so content, and it wasn’t like I was left out. I was right there with them, enjoying a new sense of connection with every single one of them.

“Really? You’re not just saying that, right?” Brianna asked, still looking concerned.

I offered her a comforting smile as I shook my head.

“I’m not just saying that. You know that I care about the guys. They’re family to me besides my actual little brother,” I replied. I hadn’t seen him in forever, but he was saving lives in his own way as a firefighter. “But I love you. I love seeing you so happy and pleased when you’re with them too.”

Brianna’s eyes glittered with happiness before she wrapped her arms around my neck, leaning into my arms for a warm embrace.

“I love you so much,” she murmured. “Thank you.”

I rubbed her back, my cheek pressing against hers. She was right. Our marriage was stronger than ever before because of such an unorthodox decision, but every relationship was different. Ours was one of a kind, and there were more layers to it than anyone on the outside would ever be able to guess.

As long as Brianna still wanted to fall into my arms too, I was content with her seeking the company of the men I trusted the most. At the end of the day, there was nothing better to me than the people I cared about being happy and safe together.

But we had to survive this mission first, and the hardest part was yet to come.

Chapter 20

Brianna

My eyes swept around the room as I sat on the couch in my parents' living room. My childhood home. A place of memories and lessons that couldn't be contained by these off-white walls. Where my parents and David stared down at me with looks of disgust and disappointment on their faces.

"I can't believe this! How could my own daughter do something like this?" my dad asked, his angry voice booming throughout the room as he threw his hands up. He was a tall, large man, always towering over others with his thin, short hair and dark eyes.

My mom, a petite woman with long hair that matched mine, cried into her hands, sniffing and letting out a shuddery breath.

"I'm so... disappointed," she said before she glared at me. "How could you betray your husband like this? How could you go crawling to other men when he's always been here for you?"

I parted my lips in shock as I looked between all of them, my head spinning as they shamed me. I turned to David, who watched me with crossed arms and a stony expression.

"I thought you were okay with it. Didn't we agree on that?" I asked as my eyes started to burn, confusion and fear striking me in the chest like a bolt of lightning. What happened? We were happy with the arrangement!

At least I thought.

“How could I be happy when I’m married to a slut?” David bit out as he stepped closer to me, his eyes darkening.

I flinched at his words, a tear spilling from my eyes. I hadn’t ever heard him speak to me like that. Ever!

“David...” I murmured, my throat tightening painfully.

“You’re not worthy of him or his love,” my mom told me as she moved closer as well.

My dad followed suit as they all stalked toward me like predators going after prey, making me feel smaller and weaker with each step that they took.

“You will pay for the wrongs you’ve committed!” my dad snapped.

I put my hands up as I squeezed my eyes shut, darkness taking hold of me as they swarmed me. My pleas fell on deaf ears, the sound ringing in my mind as I shot up in bed with sweat glimmering on my forehead and a gasp.

My eyes darted around the bedroom in the cottage as I grounded myself to reality. Or tried to. The tension and intensity of my nightmare loomed over me like a shadow, making me shift in discomfort as tears stung my eyes. It was just a dream, but... what if it came true?

What if David changed his mind and my parents found out? Not that I had much of a close relationship with my family anymore, besides my brother, but their influence was so hard to shake. They would be quick to let me know that I disappointed them. They weren’t happy with Ryder when they found out that he was sharing the love of his life with his friends, and I knew that it would be ten times worse for me because I was the daughter.

I couldn’t deal with their disappointment on top of the uncertainty that I already felt.

What if I was setting my marriage up for failure by letting this carry on? David had good intentions, but I was the one sleeping with other men. I was the one changing everything and putting things at risk.

As much as I wanted to talk to David to ease my mind, he was gone with the guys on a run this morning. Plus, another perspective might do me some good because he would just tell me what he told me last night.

I grabbed my phone off the nightstand and tapped on Delilah's contact, not even knowing what time it was for her. I just hoped that she picked up because I really needed to talk to someone about what was going on that wasn't another person involved in it.

"Hello?" Delilah asked, luckily sounding awake.

"Delilah, I need to talk to you," I told her, the words blurring out of me as my eyes burned.

"What's wrong?" Delilah now sounded urgent.

"David and I... we decided that I would come along on this mission with him and his unit so that we could work on our marriage. He's gone so much that it's hard to talk to him or even spend time with him," I explained, trying to get to the point. "But this way I could be with him while we worked things out."

"You guys aren't getting a divorce, right?" Delilah replied.

Tears broke from my eyes at the thought. What if things ended that way?

"No, but we agreed on... an arrangement. The guys in his unit seemed interested in me, and I kind of was interested in them too. Well, I was interested a lot, but I wasn't going to cheat or anything. I wouldn't ever do that!" I told her, my words stringing together. "But David told me it would be fun to open up the bedroom to the other guys. So, we did that."

"You opened up your marriage?" Delilah asked, making sure she had the story right.

"We did. We were having a good time. Things were great, but... I told David that I might be getting feelings for the other guys. He was fine with that, but I'm so scared that what we're doing is going to shatter our marriage," I admitted, bile rising in the back of my throat as nausea hit me.

“If David is okay with everything, you shouldn’t worry so much, right?” Delilah replied.

“I guess, but I can’t shake this nervousness that I feel. I can’t help but feel greedy... like my own husband isn’t good enough for me. It makes me feel terrible, even if that’s far from the case,” I sighed as I shook my head.

“If it makes you feel this bad, maybe you need to take some time to think about it more before you get involved with them again,” Delilah suggested. “I know it’s complicated feeling things for multiple people, but you don’t have to act on what you feel all the time. If you want to just be with David after this mission, you can do that. You can move in whatever direction you feel comfortable with.”

I released a slow exhale, trying to relax a little, but the uncertainty of everything still put me on edge. What was the right decision? My instincts told me to run far away, but that stemmed from my fear. Was that really the right move?

“I’m just confused,” I told her. “I didn’t expect things to turn out this way. These guys are really great, and they’re all so close to David. The last thing I want to do is ruin that or ruin our marriage.”

“It’s a balance. Trust me, it was a learning curve figuring out how to be with multiple guys at once,” Delilah replied. “But if you can communicate and find that balance, you could be happier than ever before. Just don’t completely shut the door on anything, okay? Get through the mission, get home, and then decide.”

She was right. I wouldn’t fully understand how I felt until we were back home in our own house surrounded by our typical surroundings. Everything was different out here, so the things that worked here weren’t guaranteed to work back at home.

All I could do was wait and see if things fell apart or made sense in a way that I never expected. We were almost at the point of figuring that out, and every single second that passed by felt like torture.

Chapter 21

Amir

The air around me grew silent and heavy as I strode through the woods separating the cottage from the city. The rest of the unit walked ahead of me with their guns and their gear on, not a word being spoken. Today was the day we were going to take down Dimitrik.

After some back-and-forth correspondence with the rebel leaders thanks to Brianna's help and some recon on our own, we finally located a bunker on the outer edge of the city where Dimitrik had been hiding since our last attack. He had been lying low for a while now, but he'd popped out a few times to get supplies in the city where the rebels had spotted him.

Now, we had a plan in place to take him down and give the power back to the rebels. The civil war could finally be brought to an end.

If we succeeded.

My eyes strayed to Brianna as she walked between David and Mo, my heart racing. She truly became one of us, stepping up to the plate and working just as hard as the rest of us. She believed in the rebels' cause, and she was just as determined to help them overthrow their power-hungry dictator.

She truly was amazing. I didn't think that me and the others could get any closer to each other, but having her around made the whole group even more cohesive. We weren't just a unit. We were a family.

"We'll meet the rebels up ahead before hitting the bunker," David told us as he gestured to the trees. He led us along the

edge of the city until we could make out a group of figures ahead.

Brianna stepped forward and greeted the leaders with a polite nod before turning to David.

“They’re ready when we are,” she said. She glanced over in my direction, shooting me an encouraging smile that I returned. Her fists clenched in anxiousness, but that wasn’t going to stop her.

David turned to me.

“Scope out the entrance to the bunker,” he said.

I nodded and hurried ahead, moving up a slight slope and pausing at the highest point where I could peer down at the cement entrance of a bunker that went underground. After setting up my sniper rifle, I peered through the scope, inspecting the front of the bunker and seeing a few shadows moving just past the open entrance. Who knew how many were inside.

With a steady inhale, I got up and hurried back to the group.

“Open entrance. I see some shadows from guards just inside,” I replied.

David nodded and looked at the others.

“I figured as much. We’re going to draw them out and sneak a group inside to locate Dimitrik,” he said.

Brianna relayed the message to the rebel leaders, who started speaking words that I couldn’t explain.

“They want to be part of the group to go inside,” she said.

David frowned, his eyes narrowing.

“We won’t be able to communicate with them. Not unless...” he trailed off before shaking his head. “No, you won’t be coming inside with us. It’s too dangerous.”

Brianna fixed him with a stern look.

“I can look after myself. Just lead the way,” she replied before gesturing to the leaders. “They deserve to be part of this effort.

Let me help them like we came here to do!”

Her strong words took my breath away, prompting me to share impressed looks with the other guys. She could be shy at times, but when she was confident, she was bold.

David held her gaze for a few moments before sighing.

“Fine. But you’ll stay close. Emmett and Bowen, I want you flanking her the entire time,” he ordered, pointing around at everyone. “Amir, you and Mo will watch our backs from inside of the bunker. The rest of you will assist the rebels on clearing out the enemies who rush outside after our distraction.”

Aziel hopped up and down a few times, getting pumped.

“Let’s fucking do this,” he said before bumping his fist against mine. “Be careful, brother.”

I nodded to him before nudging Andre.

“You do the same,” I told him. I wanted all of us to make it out of this in one piece.

“Get in position and start the distraction!” David told everyone, prompting everyone to flare out so that they could surround the bunker’s entrance on all sides without being seen. Once he lifted his hand, Aziel tossed a smoke grenade toward the entrance.

It set off with a bang, white smoke pouring from the capsule and clouding the entrance from sight. On cue, I followed David, the three rebel leaders, Mo, Emmett, and Bowen toward the bunker from the left side. The sounds of grunts and confused shouts rang from the smoke, dark silhouettes starting to form the closer we got.

I reached out and placed my hand on Bowen’s shoulder, while he did the same with Mo. We trailed each other, sticking to the inner left wall of the entrance as shots started to ring out from right outside the bunker. The smoke was starting to clear, and I could hear incoming footsteps. We had to kick things into gear.

“Incoming!” David shouted before bullets started to fly.

Once I could see, I made out a large room with concrete walls, crates of supplies, and cots where the enemies slept. There were two other doors that led to hallways, and I had a feeling that Dimitrik was hiding down one of them. I raised my gun and fired a few times, catching an enemy in the knee and then the chest to knock him flat.

“Split up!” David yelled as he pointed around quickly, signalling for me to follow him, Brianna, Jovan, Mo, and Wojtek. Bowen, Emmett, and Andric went toward the other hallway after clearing the room of enemies.

My heart thundered in my chest, sweat breaking out on my forehead as I moved to Brianna’s side. She ducked her head, staying low and close to my side as I guided her down the hallway after David and the two rebel leaders.

“Just stay close!” I shouted over the sound of gunfire and shots throughout the bunker and just outside where another fight was happening.

With wide, alert eyes, Brianna nodded and stuck with me as we poured into another room with cots and bags of supplies. But that wasn’t all.

Dimitrik and four other enemies popped out behind cots and stacks of bags to open fire on us, making us split.

“Watch out!” Brianna gasped as Dimitrik raised his pistol and fired right at David. She dove toward her husband, shoving him to the side and making the bullet strike the wall right where his head was a second earlier.

“Kill them!” Dimitrik roared.

Adrenaline fired through me, pushing me forward as I aimed and fired at one of the enemies. I shot twice, missing once and hitting one shoulder.

“Get down, Brianna!” I yelled as bullets whizzed past everyone as we ducked and tried to hide behind whatever we could.

Brianna crouched behind a cot and placed her hands over her head, shielding herself as David rushed forward and tackled Dimitrik.

“Go, go!” Wojtek said, motioning for everyone to swarm forward as another enemy went down from a bullet to the chest.

Mo and Jovan rushed the two remaining enemies, firing direct shots and putting them down with grunts and gritted teeth. We weren't losing this fight.

“You're done, you son of a bitch!” David shouted in Dimitrik's face as he pinned the seething dictator down on the ground with a knee on his chest.

I released a shaky breath, my pupils blown wide and my chest rising and falling with heavy inhales and exhales. I wandered closer to Dimitrik as he writhed and spat at David. My heart thudded so hard that my chest nearly ached.

We got him. The war was over.

I turned just as the other guys hurried to the doorway, their eyes wide with hope and worry. All I had to do was nod to them for them to know what happened.

“Fuck yes,” Aziel said with a grin.

I chuckled and bumped fists with my fellow soldiers as David forced Dimitrik to his feet.

“You will pay! This isn't over!” Dimitrik spat, his voice weighed down by his Vlastic accent. He seethed at all of us, but when the rebel leaders approached him, his face reddened with rage. “Traitors!”

Jovan shook his head.

“No. You are,” he said.

I turned to see Brianna pressing against David's side, looking as smug and happy as the rest of us as we watched the fall of a horrible dictator.

“We will take him,” Andric told us as Wojtek and Jovan grabbed Dimitrik's arms. He nodded to us with a smile of gratitude. “Thank you. We will never forget this.”

Brianna told him something in Vlastic before the leaders dragged Dimitrik out of the room, forcing him to step over the

bodies of his own men. She turned to us with a smile.

“I told him that it was our pleasure. Taking down bad guys is our job,” she said.

David wrapped his arm around her shoulders and kissed her temple.

“Yes, it is,” he told her before looking at all of us. “There’s no one I trust more than all of you. No one else I want by my side.”

“We’re right there with you, captain,” I told him with a nod that the others copied. We were brothers through and through, and this was what we did. We got the job done.

We fought hard. My eyes shifted to Brianna’s as we met gazes, sharing a warm look. My heart immediately stopped for a few seconds, taking my damn breath away.

Holy shit. She made me love hard, too. What was I going to do?

What were any of us going to do now?

* * *

By the next sunrise, we were packed up and ready to leave Vlasica. The rebels would deal with Dimitrik and the other traitors how they saw fit, which meant our job was over. It was time to go home.

Usually, we left a mission laughing and joking because we were riding the high of success. We succeeded, but there was a quiet, sad atmosphere surrounding us as we flew back to the United States. Hell, I was dragging my feet.

No more fun nights drinking with everyone. No more working missions with Brianna. No more late-night fun in the bedroom. No more moments that felt like we were all a big family.

Who wanted to leave that?

“There’s a lot to say, but I can’t really find the words,” David said once we all got off the plane and gathered in the baggage claim area. He placed his hand on Brianna’s back, sharing a bittersweet look with her. “We all did a damn good job. This

was probably the best mission ever. On and off the battlefield.”

“And we’ve been on a lot,” Erick said with a nod.

“There’s definitely one difference,” Andre replied as he smiled at Brianna.

Brianna smiled back, but her bottom lip trembled for a second. She breathed in deeply before stepping forward and wrapping her arms around Andre’s neck to hug him tightly.

“I’ll miss all of you. Thank you for making me feel welcome,” she said before hugging Emmett. “And for making me feel like I could truly make a difference.”

The sadness weighing down the air was crushing, making each breath feel like a struggle. I didn’t want this to end. I didn’t want to go home without knowing if I would ever see her again. I didn’t expect to fall in love during this mission, especially with my captain’s wife.

“You made more of a difference than you know,” Mo told her, kissing the top of her head as she winded her arms around him.

Brianna sighed wistfully before leaning into Elijah’s embrace, nestling her cheek against his chest.

“You guys have too,” she said.

But how big of a difference? Enough for her to want this to somehow continue? But how could it? The mission was over, and we all lived apart.

“You shouldn’t be a stranger, you know,” Bowen told her as he took her hand and drew her close, his hands settling on the small of her back.

“I know,” Brianna murmured, her eyes gleaming as she fought back tears. She squeezed his hand before turning to Aziel, accepting a kiss on the cheek that made her smile. She went to Erick, letting him sweep her into a tight hug before she moved toward me. “I’ll never forget this.”

I held her gaze as she came closer, my heart threatening to beat out of my chest. I hadn’t ever felt this way before. I was

fine letting women flit in and out of my life, but I wanted to beg her to stay.

“We won’t either,” I managed to say before hugging her tightly, inhaling the sweet scent of her hair. I rested my chin on top of her head, my burning eyes sweeping around to see the others gazing at her longingly. Our moments with her felt too short. “Take care of yourself, okay?”

Brianna sniffled a little and nodded, squeezing me extra tight before eventually letting go and stepping back. She looked at the others again, her eyes noticeably glimmering.

“Again, thank you... for everything,” she said.

The guys and I nodded, but I could feel the desperation and defeat in the air. There was more that we wanted to say, but we didn’t know if it was right to say those things. The feelings that we kept locked away.

Brianna returned to David’s side, tucking herself under his arm. She waved goodbye to us before letting him lead her away. Her eyes caught mine one more time, and my throat tightened as I lost every ounce of oxygen in my lungs. Once more, she left me breathless.

But just like that. It was over. She was gone.

Chapter 22

David

Silence filled the car as Brianna and I headed back home. I glanced over at her briefly, watching the way her mouth formed a stiff line as she peered out of the side window. She hadn't said much since we left the airport. It was supposed to be exciting coming home, but excitement was the last emotion that I felt in this car.

"I told Matty we'd catch dinner with him sometime, now that we're back," I told her, referring to my little brother. Well, not exactly little anymore. He was a firefighter saving lives, while I was overseas saving lives.

"Hm?" Brianna asked, snapping out of her daze to look at me.

I frowned when I realized just how distracted she was. We were so in tune with each other back in Vlasica, but when I looked at her now, her attention was far from being focused on me.

"Matty wants to get dinner with us sometime," I repeated.

Brianna's shoulders slumped a little, but she put on a small smile and nodded. She then drew her eyes away and looked out of the window again. The car fell silent again, and it was unnerving. It wasn't usually like this.

Excitement and happiness had burned up and darkened into tension and sadness. Maybe regret.

We didn't explicitly talk about what we were going to do once we got back home. Whether the arrangement was going to continue or not. Maybe it would be good for us to spend some

time together alone, to see what our marriage truly needed. Maybe the arrangement was a temporary need.

But we wouldn't know until we got home and saw how things unfolded.

"I love you," I said as I glanced over at her.

Brianna slowly drew herself out of her thoughts, tearing her eyes away from the window to peer at me once more. She smiled at me, but she had smiled at me for years. This one looked... forced. Like she wanted to smile for me, but she really wasn't smiling for herself.

The last thing I wanted was for her to act happy only to please me.

"I love you," she told me. "I'm just tired."

If we hadn't gone through what we did with the guys, I would've accepted that as a good answer because we had a hell of a time in Vlasica. We saved lives, fought intense battles, and solved daunting problems. But something told me that she wasn't just tired.

"Are you sure? Do you want to talk?" I asked, my eyes shifting between her and the road as we neared our street.

Brianna reached out and gave my hand a squeeze.

"I'm okay," she replied before turning up the radio's volume, classic rock music filling the car.

Somehow, it still felt so quiet in here because she didn't feel like talking. As much as I watched to push and pry into her brain to figure out why she looked so lost, I decided against it. She would only push away more.

She had to come to me.

When we got home, she went right to the bathroom to take a shower, leaving me alone in the bedroom with a heavy feeling in my chest.

Home didn't really feel like home. All I could think about was all the fun times we had in that cottage with the guys and how we all came together like we had lived like that for years.

Now, she seemed to feel so alone, and there wasn't any brightness in her smile. I wanted to fix that, but I just didn't know how. Never had I ever felt so useless, and it was the worst feeling in the world.

* * *

"Brianna! Are you up?" I called out as I ventured toward the bedroom. I checked the time on my tactical watch, frowning when I saw that it was close to noon. This was the seventh day in a row that she had stayed in bed so late, which wasn't normal for her at all. She was typically a morning person.

Brianna groaned when I walked into the bedroom and opened the blinds to let the sunlight in. Her hair was slightly matted in the back from lying down for so long, and her eyes were half-lidded.

"I wanted to sleep a little more," she murmured.

I sighed and sat on the edge of the bed next to her, my heart hurting. I wasn't used to seeing her so down for so long. Sure, she had her moments of doubt and sadness like we all did, but this was different. It took over her whole being, making her a shell of the happy, pleased woman that I was with in the cottage with the guys.

"Let's go get something to eat. How about that breakfast place you like? I'm sure they're still serving at this time," I suggested as I gave her thigh a little nudge, hoping that I could get her to perk up at least.

Brianna wrinkled her nose and shook her head. She turned onto her side, putting her back to me.

"No, thank you. I'm not hungry," she said as she stared ahead, the sheets swallowing her body.

I frowned and rubbed her back. She hadn't been eating much lately. Hell, she hadn't been doing much of anything lately. It was like she couldn't find the strength or willpower to even be herself, and I barely recognized the somber, still person in our bed.

"I'm worried about you," I told her. "Are you sick?"

Brianna sighed and turned to face me, a frown lining her lips.

“I just have a lot on my mind. I’m sorry,” she said.

I leaned closer to her, my hand caressing her cheek. I could see the sadness in her eyes. The conflict. Just having a lot on her mind was an understatement, but I tried not to push. The last thing I wanted was for her to draw away even more than what she had already been doing since we got back.

“Do you want to talk about anything? You know that I’m here for you,” I told her.

Brianna offered me a faint smile and placed her hand over mine.

“Maybe not right now. I wouldn’t mind if you would just lie with me for a while, though,” she said, some of the sadness fading into hope. She didn’t truly want to be alone, but she wasn’t ready to say what was on her mind.

Even if I could take a guess.

“Of course,” I replied before spooning her from behind and wrapping my arms around her. I pulled her against my chest, resting my forehead against the back of her head as she gradually relaxed. Despite having her wrapped up in my arms, I still felt a sense of distance between us.

It crushed me to know that she was suffering so much and trying to heal on her own. All I wanted was for her to open up to me and let me help her. But I feared that this wedge that had been driven between us wasn’t going anywhere any time soon.

Maybe even never.

Chapter 23

Erick

C hilled beer lightly seared my throat as I knocked back my second drink of the night. Country music rumbled through the bar's speakers, mingling with the casual voices of the other patrons. Once I set my half-drunken glass bottle down, I glanced to my left and right where my brothers sat.

"Great to be home. I guess," I said.

Emmett merely grunted as he stared at his third bottle of beer that the bartender just placed in front of him. He took a long sip, not even bothering to answer. That was enough of a reply.

"I really haven't done much of anything since getting back," Elijah admitted. "Went to the gym a few times. Ate at McDonald's by myself. That was more depressing than usual."

Typically, I would've chuckled at a comment like that, but it was hard to laugh when I had been feeling just as isolated.

"I'm used to eating alone," Emmett replied, but his eyes seemed distant. Sure, we were all used to being single and being independent, but we didn't miss a woman like this. We didn't picture something different. Something we wanted.

"I just haven't felt like doing anything. I had some old college buddies reach out when they heard I was back in town, but I don't feel like hitting a club or even playing a basketball game," I muttered as I tapped my fingertip against the side of my bottle. Nothing interested me.

Nothing but her.

"I wonder how Brianna is doing," Elijah spoke up, saying all of our thoughts out loud.

We hadn't spoken about Brianna since we got back home, but that didn't mean we weren't all thinking about her. She slipped into my mind when I least expected it. When I was making breakfast in the morning. Taking in the peace of nature on my back porch. Lying in bed at night as the television played some crime show.

She was always there in the back of my mind, demanding my attention. My affection. I wanted to give them to her so badly, but she was miles away with her husband. That was where she belonged.

"She and David are probably doing well," Emmett replied in a gruff voice. "That's all that matters."

"Of course," Elijah said in a quieter voice than before. He then sighed. "I just miss being around her."

"Yeah, me too," I agreed. "I don't think I've ever met anyone like her before."

Emmett remained quiet for a few seconds before finally speaking.

"I never thought I'd feel something so deep for a woman again, but... that changed with her," he admitted. He didn't look us in the eyes, though, his voice adorned with guilt. "It shouldn't have, though."

"Can't help how you feel. None of us can," I reminded him, not wanting him to feel even worse than he already did. We all felt guilty about feeling something for our captain's wife, but guilt didn't erase the feelings.

I didn't know what could.

"But we can control what we do," Emmett pointed out before sipping on his beer again. "I dealt with a marriage that fell apart. It tore me up inside, and I don't want that for them."

"They both seemed fine with letting people into the bedroom, though," Elijah said with a frown on his face.

"They didn't agree to any of us catching feelings," I told him before releasing a slow exhale and shaking my head. "They agreed to the sex. David was cool with it, but I doubt he'd be

fine with the guys in his unit having feelings for his wife. That's a whole other line to cross."

"You're right," Elijah murmured as he lowered his head. "I don't want to drive them apart, and I don't want our unit to suffer either."

"I know we all care about her and it's more than just sex, but I think it's too risky to do anything about our feelings," Emmett told us as his eyes swept over both of us. "It could hurt their marriage, and we could lose David's trust."

After a moment, Elijah and I both nodded in agreement. That was the best, most responsible thing to do, right? We had to put others before ourselves, no matter how badly we wanted something.

Or someone.

"So, no contact. We don't reach out to her. We just go about our lives and wait until the next mission," I said. "That means no sulking. Go out and see your civilian friends. Hell, buy something cool if it makes you happy."

"I doubt she'll be on the next mission. We won't have to worry about... getting hooked again," Elijah replied, his voice almost sounding pained.

I missed her so much that even the thought of letting her break my heart was better than this numb sensation that clouded my chest and head. It felt like I was floating, but it wasn't in a good way like I was gliding among clouds. It was like I was drifting away into endless space, unable to tether myself down.

She was gravity, but because I cared about her and David, I had to go without her. I had to let myself drift away.

"I think I'm going to head out. I've been meaning to take a run," I told them, not even caring that I was just drinking. I didn't care if I got sick or whatever. I already felt as bad as I could.

"You sure? We could come with," Elijah offered with a somber look on his face.

I shook my head. It wasn't good for us to be alone so much, but it felt like I was in mourning. I longed for something that I couldn't have, and I felt like dealing with that by myself.

"It's fine. I'm just heading to the park. It shouldn't be too busy around this time," I replied before giving them a brief nod and putting some money on the bar.

I didn't look at them again before leaving the bar, a soft breeze blowing through the town. I ventured to the small park with a pond and a running path, already breaking out into a jog before I even hit the pavement. Ever since I had gotten back, I had been standing still in place.

Running was the next best thing. Running from my troubles. My thoughts. My torturous, unfulfilled desires.

Chapter 24

Brianna

The feeling of a warm hand roaming up the side of my body coaxed my eyes to flutter open. Telling from the dim light outside, it was just before dawn. Despite feeling weighed down by the pressure of another day spent grappling with my conflicting emotions, I managed to turn over and face David, who had a concerned look on his face.

He had that look on his face ever since we returned from Vlasica, and it was because of me. I was stuck in a vortex of uncertainty and sadness, and he kept trying to reach out to me to pull me out, but I didn't let him. Guilt seeped into my very soul as I took in the worry in his eyes.

"I miss you," David murmured.

My heart ached as I gazed at him. I didn't want to just hide in my shell away from the world and from him, but it was daunting thinking about coming out and facing the fact that our arrangement with the guys was pretty much over. We hadn't talked about it. I hadn't heard from the guys at all, so I assumed that they all moved on without a problem.

The thought of that stung, but I didn't want to say it out loud and cause an issue between me and David. We were supposed to be strengthening our marriage, and I knew that I wasn't helping things by shutting him out.

"I'm sorry," I told him as I placed my hand on his cheek. "I know I've been worrying you. It's just taking me a moment to get used to being back here. To how things used to be."

David nodded in understanding before taking my hand and kissing my palm.

“I know. It’s an adjustment. Whatever you need, I’m here for you,” he reminded me.

I shared a grateful smile with him, a warm feeling gracing my chest. The tension in my body steadily alleviated as we gazed into each other’s eyes, silently connecting. We had both dealt with a lot lately. Emotionally. Physically.

I had been too shrouded in the darkness of my own thoughts that I didn’t take a moment to appreciate the fact that I wasn’t alone. I didn’t ever have to worry about being by myself because David loved me so deeply. I could see that in his eyes.

Without a word, I leaned forward and pressed my lips against his, my eyes sliding shut as I reveled in the warmth of his mouth against mine. Gradually, our lips started to move. Pressing. Brushing. Caressing.

David brushed his fingers through my hair as he slowly pushed me onto my back. He moved over me, his knee nudging my thighs apart. Our kiss deepened, his tongue brushing mine to draw a pleased sigh from me.

“I missed this too,” he told me.

I smiled and ran my hands up his bare chest, my heart starting to hammer as heat burned through my body. I missed feeling turned on like this. Like my body was being warmed by blissful fire.

“Touch me. Please,” I breathed out, yearning to be caressed again.

David leaned down and kissed my neck, letting his hand graze over my tank top to squeeze my breasts through the thin material. His fingertips slid lower, dipping beneath the waist of my panties to glide through my folds. He slowly rubbed my clit, his mouth still caressing my neck.

“Oh...” I gasped when he kissed the spot just behind my ear. I shuddered in bliss, pushing my hips up to grind against his hand.

In a flash, a memory of being with Amir and Aziel filled my mind. How they pleased me and moved me with their strength.

How David watched with desire in his eyes. The thought turned me on even more, my body's sensitivity increasing.

"You're so wet," David murmured. "I love feeling you like this. Especially when you were being pleased by the other guys."

My heart stopped at his words. I didn't expect to hear that, but I couldn't help but feel another swirl of heat in my stomach at the thought. We had such a good, blissful time when we were all together. Like pieces of a puzzle.

I couldn't help but yearn for that. David and I were a blazing fire together, but when we were paired with the others, we roared. We were complete.

"It felt so good," I told him as I ran my hands over his strong shoulders and arms. "It feels good now."

David pushed my tank top up over my breasts, his lips securing around one of my nipples to suck. He pushed a finger inside of me, pressing the heel of his hand against my clit. With each thrust of his finger, he rocked his hand against my clit, creating a storm of pressure and friction that made me writhe in pleasure.

"That's it," he said.

My mind shifted to the time Erick and Emmett worked their magic on me with a vibrator and Emmett's fingers. My breath hitched, pressure tightening in my lower stomach as my orgasm approached.

"I need you inside of me," I begged David as he pushed another finger inside of me, needing even more.

David nodded and sat up to free his cock from his sleep pants. He rocked his length through my folds a few times, gathering up my wetness before slowly sinking inside of me.

"Fuck," he breathed out.

I wrapped my arms around his neck, drawing him down for a heated kiss as he bottomed out. My mind traveled back in time again, taking me to the moment when David fucked me like

this while I pleased Mo and Andre. I swore my skin was tingling with heat and need at that point.

David started rocking into me, cupping the back of my head in an intimate motion as we kissed. He didn't go fast and hard. He went slow and deep, bottoming out each time he thrust. Somehow, that nudged me closer and closer to orgasm at a rapid pace.

"You feel so good, baby," he told me. "You're a damn gift. I'm glad I shared you."

A moan escaped me as my nails dug into his shoulders. I loved being shared. Having so much happiness and pleasure surrounding me while my husband looked on with satisfaction and joined in as he pleased.

"I won't last," I gasped as he pushed me down into the mattress, pinning my body down with his.

"Don't hold back," David replied before slipping a hand between our warm bodies. He pressed his fingertips against my clit, giving me the extra friction I needed to tumble over the edge.

My nails raked down his back as I threw my head back, a pleased cry ripping from me. The pleasure shook me to my core, making me tremble as he thrust a few more times until he spilled inside of me with a grunt. I let out a shaky breath as I melted into the bed, feeling boneless.

I needed that. A release.

David peered down at me with a warm smile.

"Good?" he asked.

I smiled back and nodded.

"Good," I replied.

David clicked his tongue.

"I want it to be better than good," he chuckled before tilting his head. "What would make it perfect?"

I should've smiled brighter and told him it was perfect, but a heavy thought filled my head, making my smile wilt.

David frowned.

“What is it?” he asked.

All of my conflicting thoughts came rushing to the forefront of my brain. They had been quieted down for a minute, but our sex made them intensify.

“I can’t stop thinking about the guys,” I admitted. “I love you so much. You’re my soulmate, but I miss what we had with the others. We felt... complete.”

“You want to keep our bedroom door open?” David asked.

I bit into my bottom lip for a moment before shaking my head, my breathing becoming harder to do.

“I want more than that. I feel more than that for them. I know I already told you that I like them beyond sex, but... I think it’s even more than that,” I told him, my throat tightening. I couldn’t believe I was saying these words, but it was all I had been thinking about since we parted ways with the guys!

I truly didn’t grasp how attached I had become to them until they were gone. I didn’t know how deep my feelings went until we were apart.

David’s eyebrows lifted.

“You love them?” he asked as his eyes started to widen.

My chest ached as I stared up at him. I gently nudged him off so that I could sit up, my heart hammering in my chest.

“I think... I don’t know. I just... I won’t let anything get in the way of our marriage, okay? I just wanted to be honest,” I told him.

David didn’t say anything for a few seconds, thinking hard about my words as I sat there terrified that he was going to be upset.

I couldn’t be here right now. I was too afraid to hear what he had to say.

“I’ll be back later. I need a walk,” I said as I hurried out of bed to pull my clothes on and grab my phone.

“Brianna, wait,” David said.

I didn’t wait. I hurried out of the house and walked through our neighborhood, tapping around on my phone until I tapped the call button on Delilah’s contact.

“Hello?” she answered.

“Delilah, I don’t know what to do. I told David I had deep feelings for the other guys,” I blurted out as my eyes started to burn from fear. What if I ruined things by saying that?

“Okay, breathe,” Delilah told me. “What did you say?”

“I said I missed the guys and that I liked them more than just a crush,” I said. “When he asked if I love them, I said I think so.”

“Do you?” Delilah asked.

I stopped walking as the magnitude of it all dropped down on me.

“I do. How is that possible? How can I love multiple people?” I asked her. “I loved David first!”

“Love isn’t some finite resource. You can love so many people in your life,” Delilah told me. “Hey, look at me. I love more than one man, and we’re all happy because we communicate and know what to expect from each other. It’s all about communication, so you made the right move telling him.”

Ryder was one of those men. He was happier than ever with her, but would David feel the same way as Ryder now that I admitted my feelings for the other guys?

“I ran out of there before he could really say anything. He seemed shocked,” I said as I swallowed hard.

“This could change a lot of things for you guys, whether he’s fine with it or not,” Delilah pointed out. “But you shared a lot of intimacy with these guys. A lot of trust. Of course, feelings developed, but you need to talk to David about those feelings more. And maybe you need to talk to the others too depending on what you guys decide.”

I forced myself to breathe in deeply. She was right. It all came down to communication if I wanted anything to work, and I did. I wanted this to work so badly, but even this fantasy seemed a little too demanding for reality and its routinely cold nature.

Could I really have everything I wanted without losing everything?

Chapter 25

Amir

Silence rang through my house, creating an uneasy, abnormal atmosphere in a place that was often full of music, people talking, or some sort of action movie playing. There was always life in my house, but it was dead silent today.

And every day since I got back from Vlasica.

I tore my eyes away from my tall living room window, forcing myself not to stare out at my busy neighborhood for another thirty minutes. I just didn't feel like doing anything. I didn't want to see anyone or go out anywhere.

Well, that wasn't true. I did want to see someone, and I wanted to go where she was at.

I wanted Brianna.

I shook my head at myself as I ran my hand over the top of it. I managed to avoid catching feelings for a woman for years now, but Brianna waltzed into my life with her glowing smile and sexy wits and ripped the rug out from right under my feet.

Damn it. Just... damn it.

I thought I was safe from heartbreak. But I had been suffering for days now, thinking about her and how I had fallen for someone so unattainable. She was married to my captain, of all people!

I wouldn't dare cross a man I respected and cared about so much. He was like my brother like all the rest of the guys in my unit, including my actual flesh and blood brothers. But I missed Brianna a lot.

Hell, I tried to even entertain the idea of hooking up with some of my past flings to try to get her off my mind, but I just couldn't do it. All I wanted was Brianna, and I couldn't have her.

What a sick joke.

A knock on my door drew me out of my thoughts, prompting me to sigh and walk to my small foyer. It was probably a buddy I met while partying or a past fling who heard I was back in town. I opened the door and was met by the sad face of my brother.

"What's up?" I sighed as I let Aziel in. "Where's Andre?"

"At home. He didn't feel like coming out," Aziel replied as he walked over to my couch to slouch down on it. He sighed and leaned his head back.

It seemed like they were just as down as I was, but was it for the same reason or something else entirely different? I moved to stand in front of him, crossing my arms over my chest as I lost to my curiosity.

"What's got you down in the dumps?" I asked just to hear him say it and to make sure that I wasn't all alone in my thoughts.

Aziel shifted his eyes to mine, giving me a pointed look.

"Don't act like you don't know," he said as he sat up more. "I can't stop thinking about her, man. I've tried, and it's wrong, but..."

"But you caught feelings," I replied simply. I knew that I wasn't the only one who felt this way. I saw how the other guys looked when she walked away from us at the airport. It was like a piece of us died that day, and we had been spending our time off mourning.

Aziel sighed and nodded.

"Yeah. I didn't want this, you know? I didn't want to fall for David's wife, but she's amazing," he said. "I want more than the sex. I want... everything."

Those were the words of a heartbroken man. The same words that went around and around in my own head.

At least I wasn't alone. It was always easier to suffer with someone else, especially if it was over the same thing. Or person.

Even if that was a selfish thing to say.

"But we can't have that. We can't have her," I told him before sinking down on the couch next to him. "She's probably plenty happy with him. I mean, I want that... I want them to be happy..."

"But it'd be nice if the arrangement we had worked for everyone," Aziel said, finishing my thought. "I think that's too good to be true."

"Can't blame a guy for dreaming," I replied with a weak laugh that I couldn't put much spirit into. It sucked not being able to have what I wanted when this was the thing that I wanted the most.

"Hell of a mission," Aziel said with a bittersweet look in his eyes. "I'll never forget it."

How the hell were we going to handle the next one? How could we look David in the eye when we loved the person he swore his life and love to? I didn't know how things were going to play out next, but it was safe to say that everything changed the moment we all met Brianna. Things couldn't magically go back to how they were before.

I parted my lips to reply, but there was another knock on my door. I pitched a confused look at Aziel, who reflected my expression. We weren't expecting any other company. Hell, I wasn't even expecting him!

"Maybe Andre dragged himself out of the house," I said as I got to my feet, figuring that made the most sense.

Aziel shrugged as he did the same, following me over to the foyer. Our footsteps echoed throughout my quiet house, mingling with the firm knocking. Damn, I hoped that I wasn't in some sort of trouble.

"Maybe," he replied.

There was only one way to find out. I grabbed the door handle and opened my front door, my heart stopping at the sight of David. Holy hell, did all of my thinking about his wife somehow conjure him?

“David,” I said, nearly sounding breathless as my heart remembered how to beat again. He didn’t look angry, but he had a damn good poker face when he needed to use one.

David looked between Aziel and me as we stared at him in stunned silence.

“We need to talk.”

Chapter 26

David

Nervousness seeped into my very soul as I looked around my living room, taking in the sight of my unit standing in my house all together for the very first time. Honestly, it was a bit jarring, but I was glad that they were here.

I asked them to be.

After some thinking after Brianna left the house once she'd told me her true feelings regarding the guys, I realized that I still didn't feel jealous or upset. Hell, I even tried to make myself jealous over the fact that my wife had feelings for them, but... I wasn't.

All I could think about was how I trusted these guys with my life and the life of the most precious person in the world to me. If something happened to me, I could trust them to take care of her and to not let anything bad happen to her. Ever.

I couldn't be angry at that. At the thought of my wife always being happy and loved for who she was. She deserved so much for being the best wife and person I had ever met, and I wanted my brothers to be happy. They didn't have the best luck when it came to love, especially because of our work.

Brianna understood, though. So, I understood her and her feelings. The same ones that deepened for the other guys.

The bottom line was that I loved her, and I wanted her to be happy. Together, we were all happier, and if I could figure out a way to make it work, I would because I didn't want to lose any of these people in my life.

So, why not give it a shot?

“Thank you for coming all the way out here. I know some had to travel farther than others,” I told everyone as we all stood around the living room, filling up the space with tension and hope.

“We’d drop everything if you needed us to,” Mo assured me, coaxing the others to nod in agreement.

“Like I told all of you, she doesn’t know that I’m doing this. It’ll be a shock to her, but I know that she wouldn’t ask me to contact you guys or even go out of her way to contact you all personally. She’s still hung up on thinking that I’ll be upset,” I explained as I stood between Erick and Bowen. “I want everyone to be honest here, okay? Don’t worry about me. I’m happy when she’s happy.”

Everyone nodded again, the atmosphere weighing down heavily as we waited in anticipation. I didn’t exactly know how she would react, but I wanted to do this for her. We all needed a push sometimes, and she deserved to know how much she was loved. How much she was adored.

Brianna still didn’t realize how incredible she was, and I hoped this showed her that there was no limit on the amount of love there was in the world for her.

I checked my phone, my heart rate peaking.

“She’ll be home any minute now,” I told them. Ever since she told me the truth, she hadn’t said much to me, but I had been planning this for the past two days. The moment she told me that she would be gone for a little while to go into town, I knew that this was the time to put my plan into motion.

The guys nodded and straightened up, clearing their throats and preparing themselves for one of the biggest moments of their lives.

On cue, the front door opened a few minutes later. The sound of rustling and footsteps came closer and closer to the living room until Brianna stepped inside, her jaw immediately dropping at the sight of everyone standing shoulder to shoulder with each other.

“What...” Brianna trailed off, her words getting caught in her throat as she stared at us in shock.

Amir stepped forward first. He didn't go to her, but he made his presence known enough for her to latch her attention onto him.

“I know this is a lot, but we have a lot to tell you,” he said. He then took in a breath, and I swore I hadn't ever seen Amir look so nervous in front of a woman before. “I'm good at not falling in love. I can usually rein my feelings back and move on like nothing, but... you make it impossible, Brianna.”

Emmett joined Amir.

“I was determined not to fall in love again after my divorce. But that changed when I met you,” he added with a small smile on his face.

“Everything changed when we met you,” Mo spoke up. “I felt truly seen by you.”

“You accepted us for who we are, and we adore you for who you are. Every bit of you,” Bowen told her.

Brianna sniffled a little, her bottom lip threatening to tremble as she looked between all of the men as they spoke their truth and spilled their feelings.

“You helped us in more ways than one. You're smart as a whip, and you're the most gorgeous woman we have ever laid eyes on,” Elijah added with a warm smile.

“You rocked our world,” Andre chuckled. “We hope that we've made an impact on you too.”

“Most of all, we want you to be happy,” Aziel told her.

“Because you make us happier than we've ever been before,” Erick finished, silence trailing his words as everyone waited for her to process everything that was just said.

Brianna dabbed at her eyes with her knuckle, blotting away any tears that tried to leak out. She breathed in deeply before turning to me, looking conflicted as I expected. I knew that she wouldn't be honest until she learned how I truly felt too.

I walked up to her and took her hands, our eyes meeting. She was holding back so much, but I didn't want her to. I just wanted her to be honest with everyone and with herself about how she felt.

"When I married you, I promised to give you everything you ever wanted, and I promised that I would always make you happy," I told her, reminding her of the vows we said so long ago. That day felt like yesterday, but my love for her had grown even stronger over the years. "Remember I said that when we were getting married?"

Brianna's eyes glimmered as she nodded.

"I remember," she said.

"I want to uphold my vows, and I know that you're happy when you're with the guys. When you're with all of us," I told her as I squeezed her hands in a comforting manner, feeling them start to tremble. "I want you to be with them too so that you can truly feel as loved and worshipped as you deserve."

"Really? Are you sure it's the right thing to do?" Brianna asked, still sounding unsure and worried.

It meant a lot to me that she took our marriage and my feelings so strongly into consideration, which told me that this was indeed the right choice for us. I smiled and glanced around at the guys before looking back at her.

"It's the best thing to do. You being with the guys won't hurt our marriage. Actually, I think you not being with them is harming our marriage. I don't want you to be distant from the people you love," I told her. That was our big problem in the first place. Distance.

"I don't want you to think that I don't love you. That you're not enough or something like that," Brianna said as she moved closer to me.

I shook my head, not wanting her to worry about that. I didn't want her to worry about a thing.

"I know that you love me, and I know that they love you. They'll take care of you like I take care of you, and that makes

me happy,” I assured her. “Let yourself be loved like you deserve, Brianna. That’s all I want.”

Brianna gazed into my eyes in silence for a few seconds before looking around the room at the guys, who waited with hopeful smiles. She breathed in deeply and nodded, swallowing hard as her eyes watered.

“I want all of you. I used to feel so guilty even thinking that, but... if you all want me to, I don’t want to hold any of us back any longer,” she said.

I shared a look with the guys. One of eagerness. We had held back so much when we didn’t need to, and I was ready to let the floodgates open. I was ready for all of us to accept how we felt and act on that. We knew what we wanted, and there was no reason to dig our feet in now since the air was finally cleared.

“We don’t want to hold back either,” I told her as I took a step back, drawing her a little closer to the guys before pausing. “If you’d like that.”

Brianna’s eyes gradually darkened as she looked between everyone, her grip on my hand gradually tightening. She finally met my eyes, and the look on her face made my heart race.

“There’s nothing I’d like more.”

Chapter 27

Brianna

A needy gasp broke from me the moment my back hit the mattress of mine and David's bed. Aziel, Mo, and Elijah soon came into view as they hovered over me, while the rest sat on the edges of the bed or found spots to sit at around the bedroom so that they could watch the scene with excitement in their eyes.

My adrenaline and desire clashed, working me up and firing me up as I reached for them. My lips melded with theirs as I turned my head from side to side, kissing them all and wanting more and more of them. My need for all of them was infinite, but I knew that I would temporarily be very sated at the end of this.

"She's already so excited," David said from the side of the room. He watched with crossed arms, admiring the scene with a satisfied look on his face. "You know what I'd love to see? I want to see her ride someone's face."

"That'd be my pleasure," Aziel chuckled before pressing one more kiss against my lips.

Mo and Elijah shared a grin with him before they started peeling off my clothes, helping me kick off my jeans and strip off my shirt. My bra and panties were thrown off soon after. They blocked Aziel for a few moments, taking time to kiss my neck and tease my nipples with their fingertips and lips.

I sighed in bliss, rolling my head back. My eyes traveled around the room, watching Emmett and Amir murmur to each other with eager looks on their faces. Bowen was watching with intense eyes, while Erick and Andre were already

gripping themselves through their jeans because they were already hard.

Mo swirled his tongue around my nipple, caressing my breast in his hand, while Elijah did the same with the other one. He lifted his head to peer down at me.

“Don’t hold back when you ride his face,” he told me.

“We’d love a show,” Amir said from the side.

My face warmed up, but I couldn’t help but feel turned on at the thought of doing something like that. I hadn’t ever done it before, but all of their praises and compliments rose my confidence enough to give it a shot.

Aziel lay down on his back and reached out for me, guiding my knees on either side of his head. He leaned up and dragged his tongue over my center with one swipe, a hum of satisfaction following the motion. He set to town, lapping at my clit as he gripped the top of my thighs.

“Oh...” I gasped as I leaned my head back, my hands moving to my own breasts as pleasure spread throughout my body.

“Let her touch you,” David told Mo and Elijah. He moved his hand down his body to the front of his jeans where there was a visible ridge.

My stomach twisted in need at the sight. I wanted to reach out to him, but I knew that he wanted a show. He was the director running the whole thing. When Mo and Elijah worked off their clothes and got close enough to me on either side, I reached out and wrapped my fingers around their erections, stroking slowly before getting faster.

“I think she can handle one more,” David said before nudging Bowen. “I want her mouth put to work too.”

Bowen didn’t hesitate. He stripped off his clothes and climbed onto the bed to stand in front of me. After stroking his hard cock a few times, he pushed the head past my lips before sliding his fingers into my hair. Gradually, he thrust into my mouth, going deeper with each motion.

I relaxed my jaw and let Mo and Elijah wrap their fingers around my hands to guide my strokes better. Between being guided by them and being precisely licked by Aziel, I knew that there was no way that I would be able to hold off my first orgasm for long. The air was too hot, and the scene was too naughty for me to resist.

Bowen groaned when I moaned around his cock.

“That’s it,” he told me.

“Start grinding a little, baby,” Mo said as he worked my hand up and down his length.

I pushed past the flicker of nervousness that I felt and started grinding down on Aziel’s tongue, controlling the pressure and pace of the friction. The pleasure hit me like a small wave, giving me a glimpse of what was coming as I continued working myself down on his face. The graze of his nose and stubble drove me crazy, heat gathering in the pit of my stomach.

“Damn it, that’s hot,” Elijah gritted out as he moved my hand faster, his cock starting to harden even more as he watched the scene.

“A little more,” Bowen breathed out, watching the movement of my hips as I chased my own orgasm.

I peered up at Bowen through my lashes, sliding my tongue along the underside of his cock as he went deeper into my mouth. I was teetering on the edge at that point, my body burning hot from the exertion and pleasure. It was intoxicating, and I fed off their pleasure like they fed off mine.

Mo cursed as he came first, painting my hand with white lines as he let out a faint groan.

Seeing him tumble off the edge did me in. I ground down one more time on Aziel’s tongue before falling apart, moaning around Bowen’s cock to the point where the vibrations made him a goner. I swallowed him down, only having to stroke Elijah a few times before he spilled over the top of my hand.

When they drew away from me to catch their breaths, I had a moment to gather myself before I felt Aziel move from under

me. I was guided down his body until I felt his hard cock against my center. My hands gripped his shoulders as I steadied myself, my eyes growing wide from the sudden shift in movement.

“Ride me again,” Aziel told me with a grin on his face. “If you can handle it.”

“I can handle it,” I assured him, already wanting more. I looked over at David, who was already stroking himself at the scene. “A lot more.”

“That’s my girl,” David replied with a chuckle. He nodded to Emmett and Andre. “Go on. Join them.”

“Gladly,” Emmett said before approaching the bed.

Aziel pressed a heated kiss against my lips before gripping my hips. He rocked his erection against my clit as Emmett and Andre moved to the left of him, offering their hard lengths to me.

I parted my lips and teasingly dragged my tongue over each of their cocks, a pleased hum leaving me as Aziel positioned the tip of his length against my entrance. A moan drifted from me as Aziel sank inside of me all the way to the hilt.

“So good,” Aziel groaned as he started rocking up into me, his grip tightening on my waist.

As heat rolled through me, I steadied myself enough to slide my lips over Emmett’s cock, moving my head up and down a few times before doing the same to Andre. While Aziel thrustured into me, I moved back and forth between Emmett and Andre, giving them both attention and bliss like they were all doing to me. A cycle of pleasure.

“You’re doing so good,” Andre praised me as his forefinger briefly caressed the underside of my chin as I took his cock into my mouth. He rocked into my mouth a few times before I pulled off with a pop.

Emmett drifted his fingers into my hair and directed my mouth to his erection, holding me in place as he did a few thrusts.

Aziel started pounding into me harder, chasing down his orgasm. He slid his hands down to grab my ass, holding me down as he thrust deeper and deeper.

“Fuck,” he gritted out as he went faster.

Muffled gasps and moans drifted from me as Aziel fucked me with fervor. I could feel a tense sensation in my lower stomach, preparing to snap. I didn’t need that much more.

Andre came first, but he pulled out of my mouth, deciding to finish on my face. He stroked himself with a groan, only moving when Emmett followed suit with a gritted curse.

I stuck my tongue out, catching what I could of both of their releases, while the rest coated my cheeks and chin. A gasp rattled from me as Aziel wrapped his arms around my body, anchoring my chest down to his. The hard thrusts that followed made me a goner, shuttling me toward my second orgasm that had me shaking and crying out in bliss as stars exploded in my vision.

Aziel spilled inside of me with a grunt before pulling out. He leaned his head back, catching his breath as I rolled off with a shaky exhale.

“I hope you’re not done yet, honey. You still have a few guys left who are dying to enjoy you,” David told me.

I shook my head.

“Far from it,” I told him, wanting to please them all.

David nodded to Amir and Erick.

“Go for it,” he said as he continued slowly stroking himself.

Amir and Erick crawled onto the bed, directing me onto my hands and knees. Amir crouched in front of me, while Erick moved toward me from behind.

“What a lovely mess,” Amir said as he admired my face.

I smirked and swiped off all their release with my thumb, licking it clean just to put on a show.

“Aren’t you naughty? Open your mouth,” Amir said with a smirk as he tapped the head of his cock against my lips.

I gladly opened my mouth, letting him slide his cock inside to the halfway point. He slowly rocked himself in and out, and I was relaxed and ready to take him all at this point. My entire body was blissfully sore and tired, but I was determined to get to every single one of them.

Erick teased my clit with his fingertips before pushing his cock inside of me. He moved his hands over me, caressing my ass and hips. His fingertips traveled up my back as he leaned over to kiss the back of my shoulder.

“Perfect,” he told me, making my heart flutter. He started thrusting into me, jostling me between him and Amir.

I enjoyed the back-and-forth, letting them guide me and move my body while the others watched and my husband pleased himself. Heat burned even beneath my skin, working its way low in my body. My sensitivity was nearing its max, making my skin tingle with heat and need.

“Don’t close your eyes,” Amir said as he gazed down at me, watching me take his cock.

I lifted my eyes to his as they started to tear up. He thrust even deeper, making spit slip out of the sides of my mouth. I knew that he was eating up the sight as he went faster, chasing his orgasm.

Erick gripped my shoulders and pounded into me, keeping me upright and steady as they both moved. He lowered his head for a moment, breathing in sharply as he focused on the pleasure.

I pushed my ass back against him, wanting him to fall off the edge. A few more backward thrusts of my own made Erick pull out and spill onto my back and the top of my ass. He moved back with a winded breath, letting me focus on bringing Amir to peak pleasure with a few more bobs of my head.

Amir came with a grunt, burying his fingers in my hair as I took it all. He breathed in deeply and exhaled slowly.

“Perfect girl,” he murmured, shooting me a grin before moving away.

I collapsed onto my back, not even caring how dirty the sheets were getting. I felt warm and elated, like I was floating, but I wasn't done yet. I lifted my head as David crawled over me, a gasp leaving me as he entered me in one smooth thrust.

David smiled down at me as he brushed my hair away from my face.

"I won't last long. Not after watching you come so many times," he said as he rocked into me. "How about one more?"

I whimpered with a nod as I rested my hand on the back of his head, gazing into his eyes as he fucked me slowly and deeply.

David licked his fingertips and pressed them against my clit, rubbing at the same pace as his thrusts. He groaned as I tensed at the sensitivity, his forehead dropping to mine.

"Fuck, I love you," he breathed out.

"I love you," I told him, my breathing growing more ragged as my orgasm built up. It would sap all of my strength and energy, but I needed it. I craved it at this point.

David only had to thrust a few more times before slamming home, making us both tumble into bliss at the same time. He stroked my hair as he gazed down at me, taking in the sight of me flushed and pleased.

"Good?" he asked with a chuckle.

My eyes swept around the room as I saw the guys recovering, drawing a smile onto my face as I looked back up at David. I meant my next words with everything that I had.

"Perfect."

Chapter 28

Elijah

When the following morning arrived, I was still reeling from the events of yesterday. I couldn't believe that we all admitted our feelings and had the best night of ecstasy. Obviously, none of us wanted to go home after that, but it was hard to fit a bunch of guys in one place.

Luckily, Brianna had a spare apartment unit that we could stay at for now. So, we all decided to get some sleep for the rest of the night and talk the following morning. There was a lot to discuss, especially since there were so many of us, and two of us were married.

It was hard to sleep because my mind kept racing, wondering what was going to happen next. Brianna wanted to be with all of us, but what was the next step? How could we all be together?

With a deep breath, I rose from the couch I slept on that night and walked to the kitchen to sit at the dining table where Andre, Mo, Bowen, Emmett, and Erick were already sitting with cups of coffee. After making myself a cup, I leaned against the kitchen counter, waiting for Aziel and Amir to join us before speaking.

"When are they coming by?" I asked.

"Any minute now," Bowen replied as he checked his tactical watch.

"I don't know what to say," Emmett admitted. "I mean, I know what I want, but there are a lot of moving pieces in this scenario. Location, our jobs, and all of that."

I sighed as I nodded in agreement. The logistics of it all was the hard part, but if anyone could figure out a tough situation, it was all of us. We dealt with danger, destruction, and doom so much that I believed we could work this out, especially since it was so personal.

“What if we can’t make it work? Even if we want this more than anything else?” I asked with worry glinting in my eyes.

Tense silence flooded the room for a few seconds as everyone let my words soak in. Love failed in so many instances because it wasn’t enough to keep people together. So many other factors ruined a relationship, and what if we couldn’t overcome those?

“There are some things that’ll be out of our control. Future missions. Telling other people we care about,” Andre pointed out.

My stomach churned with anxiety as I pictured all of those future scenarios. Pain was a part of love, but the question was... was it worth it? I already knew my answer.

“Regardless, I’m going to fight for what I want,” Amir replied as his eyes swept around the room. “What about you guys?”

It didn’t take long for nods to fill the room. Doubt still lingered, but it wasn’t the strongest emotion in the room. When it came to Brianna, it would never overtake the care that we felt for her and the hope that we harnessed for the future.

“The ball will be in their court,” Mo said. “It’s their marriage they’re allowing us into. We’ll figure out how to properly be one unit.”

We all nodded, staying quiet until there was a knock on the door.

“Got it,” I told them before hopping to my feet and hurrying to the door with a racing heart. I always felt that way when I saw Brianna, and I felt even giddier knowing that she loved all of us too. When I opened the door and saw Brianna and David standing there, I smiled and stepped to the side. “Come in. Thanks for letting us stay here.”

“It’s no problem. Better than having you guys be stuck paying for a hotel,” Brianna pointed out, squeezing my arm before following David into the kitchen where everyone was waiting. She walked around and gave everyone a warm embrace and a kiss on the cheek. “I missed you guys. Even if it was only for a night.”

“That’s still too long,” Amir assured her with a charming grin that made the rest of us chuckle.

David smirked and leaned his back against the doorframe.

“So, obviously, we have a lot to talk about since we didn’t do too much talking yesterday,” he said, prompting a few of us to share coy looks. “We have a great thing going, but some of you live an hour to three hours away. Getting all together might be a little tough sometimes.”

“We’ll make it work,” Emmett assured him. “Hell, I’ll move closer to everyone. I’m the one who lives farther away.”

“You’d move? Just to be closer with all of us?” Brianna asked with wide eyes full of awe.

Emmett smiled at her.

“Of course. All of you are my family. You mean the most to me,” he replied. “I’d be happier being closer anyway.”

“I’m not too attached to my place either. A fresh start would be nice,” Mo agreed with a nod.

Brianna placed her hands over her heart.

“It means a lot that you guys care so much and are so willing to work things out,” she told us. “I know this is all so unorthodox, but no one can control how they feel. No one can control who they love, and I care so much about all of you.”

Warm murmurs and smiles filled the room, the atmosphere lightening. I knew that we could work things out. I only lived about thirty minutes away, but if there was ever a good opportunity to move closer, I would take it. I cared about her and the others that much to uproot myself.

Suddenly, David’s phone rang. He checked the caller ID, his eyebrows furrowing as he showed the screen to everyone.

“It’s Major Beckett,” he said, making my heart rate speed up. We knew what that meant. He answered the phone, and everyone remained silent as he said a few short sentences and nodded to himself.

The anticipation was killing me! What was going on? What was Major Beckett saying? Did David look upset or determined?

“Yes, sir,” David replied before pocketing his phone.

“You’re leaving again. All of you,” Brianna guessed with teary eyes. She went through this so many times, and my heart ached for her and the pain that she was feeling right now. It wasn’t fair for us to be ripped away from her this soon after admitting our feelings for her!

David looked at everyone before finally speaking.

“We’re being sent back to Vlasica to help with peace negotiations,” he told us before turning to Brianna. “You’ve been cleared to join us if you’d like.”

Stunned silence filled the room as we all processed the sudden news. Brianna reacted first with an enthusiastic nod.

“Of course!” she said with a bright smile on her face. “We’re going back to Vlasica!”

Everyone patted each other on the back or embraced in a swarm of celebration and relief. We weren’t being sent into a warzone without Brianna. We were going back to the place where we instilled peace and fell in love with her. What better place for all of us to go together after confessing our feelings?

I wrapped my arms around her when she reached me, hugging her tightly as she laughed happily into my chest.

“I can’t believe this!” I told her, still reeling from it all. I thought I wouldn’t ever go back to Vlasica, but this is a good reason to go. It might actually be a pretty relaxed mission.

“Me either!” Brianna said as she took my hands. “I’m excited to go back to where it all began.”

Our mission in Vlasica would always be special to me. We’d stopped a civil war, and we fell in love with a woman who

rocked our worlds in more ways than one. We all became closer because of her, and we were stronger than ever before.

Going back was a surprising but symbolic next step now that we were all together like we were meant to be.

David clasped his hands together, catching our attention as excitement buzzed in the air.

“Well, everyone, get to packing. We’re going to Vlasica!”

Epilogue: Brianna

Voices echoed throughout the main corridor in Moranta's city hall building. I breathed in deeply as I gazed up and down the hall, seeing groups of people gathered outside of the auditorium where the peace negotiations would be held. Despite us being here not too long ago, so much seemed to have changed since then.

Clean-up and recovery efforts began right after we left Vlasica, so the city's war wounds were gradually healing thanks to its citizens' help. Rubble was removed. Stray weapons and armor were cleaned up. Streets were cleared. Moranta and all of Vlasica had life being breathed back into as we spoke.

"How are you feeling?" David asked as he moved to my side. We all huddled outside of the auditorium together, waiting to go inside and begin. While I translated between David and the other Vlasica leaders and citizens, the other guys would stand guard to protect me and any others from possible harm.

The air felt light and peaceful today, though. No one wanted to fight anymore.

"A little nervous. I want this to go well," I told him. "I have this irrational fear that I'll translate one word wrong and make

everyone hate each other.”

David chuckled as he placed his hand on my cheek.

“That won’t happen. You’re amazing at what you do, and we’ll make sure no one hates each other,” he assured me as our eyes met.

Calmness washed over me as we shared a warm smile with each other. He was right. They had my back, and the worst of the conflict in Vlasica was over. Now, it was time to get the details for peace down and wrap up this chapter in our lives.

“Not feeling nervous, right?” Aziel’s voice came from behind me.

I turned and shook my head.

“Not anymore,” I replied as I looked between everyone with gratitude in my eyes. “I know I have the best security detail in the world.”

Bowen smirked and patted his chest above his heart.

“How sweet,” he said, coaxing a few chuckles from the others. His face then turned serious. “But you know that we’d turn a city upside down for you.”

My heart fluttered at his words, especially since I knew that they were true. All of these guys were willing to do so much for me and our blooming relationship. What we had wasn’t just some arrangement anymore. We were officially together. A family. A unit.

I couldn’t be happier, and I was truly enjoying the spoils of a relationship like this. Delilah wasn’t wrong in the slightest. Having so much love surround me was the most incredible thing ever, and I couldn’t thank David enough for helping all of this happen.

He was my rock, and I felt more loved and supported than ever.

“Well, let’s keep Moranta in one piece. It’s already been through enough,” I said with a light laugh. “We did a good job helping the rebels end the civil war.”

“You were a huge help,” Elijah told me.

“Huge,” Mo agreed.

Amir moved closer to me, placing his hands on my upper arms as he gazed down at me.

“We’re super fucking proud of you, Bri,” he told me. “You didn’t just catch up to us. You set a whole new pace.”

My eyes threatened to burn with happy tears as I smiled up at him.

“Thank you,” I said. There was so much more to say, but I had a feeling he could feel the gratitude radiating off me at that point. I was so worried that I would step on their toes or slow them down when I first joined the unit, but I was in my element out there with them.

We were meant to be a team for that mission, and I was honored to be back here with them.

Andre stepped up closer to his brother, shaking his head.

“No, thank *you*,” he said. “We wouldn’t have been able to do this without you.”

My eyes swept over all of them, my heart pounding from the love and support surrounding me right now. They uplifted me in ways that I hadn’t ever experienced before, helping me shed layers of my insecurity that weighed me down for years. On top of that, they helped me shed so much guilt that I carried with me too.

My parents would faint if they found out about my relationship, but I wasn’t planning on telling them anything. If they found out, I didn’t care either because I was truly happy. I had an incredible husband and eight other partners who were so loving and protective of me.

Believe it or not, falling for them bettered my marriage with my husband. Some things worked out in crazy, unexpected ways, but I enjoyed every bump and curve of this ride. From my vantage point, we had many adventures left to go, starting with these peace negotiations.

After that, who knew? What I did know was that I didn't ever have to worry about being alone. We all gravitated to each other like we were meant to be, and no obstacles could come in our way.

"You guys can't make me cry before this conference," I told them as I blinked my eyes rapidly.

"As long as they're happy tears," Erick said, his hand brushing my lower back.

All they did was make me cry happy tears. My emotions for them were overwhelming at times, but how many people could say they were in love with so many people at once? My heart could barely take it, but the ache was intoxicating. It reminded me of how alive I was with them.

"Always," I replied, giving him a smile before turning to David. "I'm ready when you guys are."

David glanced around at everyone else, getting nods that they were ready to head inside and get in position. He placed his hand on my upper arm, rubbing gently.

"I know you are," he said with pride in his voice. "I'm glad you're here with us, Brianna."

His words stole my breath away as we gazed at each other, sharing a moment that was silent but intimate. Distance almost split us apart, but we were closer than ever before. Emotionally and physically.

We survived danger and destruction and division to get to where we were at now. That was a hell of an adventure. And a damn good story to tell someone someday.

"I'm not going anywhere," I promised him. There was no place that I wanted to be other than with him and the guys.

They were home in every sense of the word, even if we were thousands of miles away from our houses. They gave me more warmth and comfort than any building or plot of land. A home was crafted from love, and I loved these men more than anything else in the world.

There was no truer saying than home was where the heart was,
and I was right where I belonged at last.

THE END

Coming Soon...

Get ready to turn up the heat with the next installment in the series, **10 Firemen's Ignition!**

Journalist Zoe Collins returns to her hometown, chasing the spark of an arson case. Little does she know, the flames of investigation will lead her to a passionate encounter with 10 irresistible firefighters.

As she navigates the scorching chemistry and unexpected romances, Zoe discovers that love can be the ultimate firestarter.

But beneath the surface of desire lies a smoldering mystery that threatens to engulf Zoe's newfound happiness. Will the blaze of romance survive the rising flames of secrets and danger?

Find out as Zoe's journey unfolds in a steamy tale of love, redemption, and 10 Firemen who are ready to set her world on fire.

Get ready for a scorching ride!

Free Preview: Ten Firemen's Ignition

Prologue: Paolo

Smoke rose into the sky in dark clouds, fading among the darkness of night. I had seen more fires in my forty-six years than I could count, but weight still settled on my shoulders as I watched a destructive blaze swallow a small but charming house whole. The heat from the fire washed over me in a suffocating wave, even being felt through my firefighter gear.

“When will it end?” I muttered beneath my breath, the sound of defeat lingering in my words.

For the past few months, my crew and I had been fighting fire after fire, barely able to catch our breaths before we were called again. I didn’t know what in the world was going on in this town, but it wasn’t anything good. Something weird was going on.

“Concentrate on the second story left window!” Cohen, my station officer, shouted as he and Jae controlled the hose, spraying water into the broken second story window where flames were crawling through.

The white vinyl siding of the house was already stained black from the smoke pouring out of the windows and front door, smearing every good memory with a stroke of destruction. My crew fanned out, working the house, telling neighbors to stand

back, and searching for the house owners. Murmurs of concern sounded behind us as worried onlookers watched the flames lick their way upward and outward, sparks crackling in the night sky.

A moment later, Garrett, my search and rescue specialist, stumbled out of the house, ushering along a scared, young mom and her baby. Coughs broke from them as they hurried toward the street where the fire truck was parked and where Angus, our EMT, was waiting to treat the injured.

The young woman glanced around, soot streaks staining her straight, blonde hair as she cradled her baby against her chest.

“Connor? Where’s Connor? He was right behind me!” she shouted, panic making her voice shaky.

“Is that your son?” Garrett asked her as he looked back toward the house.

“Yes, my son! He’s only eight. He runs and hides when he gets scared!” the woman fretted with tears in her eyes.

I turned to Gabe, the hazmat technician and Garrett’s older brother, who was geared up and ready to go.

“Go!” I told him before walking over to the woman. “He’ll get your son. Let Angus check you and your baby over, okay?”

The woman couldn’t take her eyes off the house, but she let Garrett lead her over to Angus, who had an oxygen mask ready if needed.

Gabe stormed into the house, disappearing in the midst of the dark smoke.

My heart thudded heavily as I trained my eyes on the door, waiting for the twenty-five year old man to pop back out of the house with a young boy in his arms. Cohen and Kit were doing a good job controlling the fire from spreading too much more, but the structure was starting to weaken from the flames eating away at it.

The house could collapse from the inside! I had seen it countless times. How could charred structures hold up an entire home without crumbling into ash?

“Come on, Gabe,” I murmured, sweat glistening on my forehead under my helmet as each minute passed by.

“Where’s my son?” the woman cried from behind me.
“Connor!”

“Damn it,” I breathed out as I turned to Garrett, who stared at the weakening house with worried eyes. His brother hadn’t reappeared yet.

Garrett started to step forward to charge back into the house, but he paused when we saw a dark silhouette appear in the smoke.

Gabe thundered out of the house with a small, blonde-haired boy in his arms. He cradled the child against his body, shielding him from smoke and fire. The moment they hit fresh air, Gabe leaned his head back for a second, taking a deep breath.

Garrett hurried over to him, helping him carry the boy over to his mother, who threw her arms around her son, while Angus held her other baby.

“Oh, I thought I lost you!” the woman cried into her son’s hair.

A relieved breath left me as the flames started to die down, and everyone was safely out of the house. A decent crowd occupied the street behind me, watching with horror in their eyes. It could’ve been any of their houses.

I glanced to the left and paused when I saw a woman in her twenties standing on the outskirts of the crowd. Maybe my eyes were hazy from the smoke or it was just dark, but she looked incredibly pale.

“Ma’am, are you okay?” I called out as I started walking toward her.

She didn’t take her eyes off the fire, her lips slightly parted with shock. She started to take a step back, but she swayed a little, her hand reaching out to steady herself. It was like she was moving in slow motion, though, not having the reflexes to catch herself.

“Ma’am!” I shouted just before her eyes rolled back.

She fell backward, crashing down on the street and laying completely still.

Breathless, I broke out into a run toward her, the fire drifting to the back of my mind. It wouldn't stay like that, though. There was bound to be more destruction around the corner. I just didn't realize how much worse things were about to get.

Chapter 1

Zoe

Bright white light slowly seeped into my vision as my eyes slid open, allowing more radiance into my vision to fight the darkness that I had been lost in for... I didn't even know how long! I blinked my eyes, trying to make all of the fuzzy, blurry shapes form actual objects. After a moment, I made out a window, a chair, a television mounted on the wall, and machines.

My heart jolted as I realized that I was staring at a vital sign monitor. Its steady beep filled my ears as my wide, green eyes darted around the hospital room. An IV had been inserted into the top of my hand, and my body was now donned in a stiff hospital gown.

What the hell happened?

I narrowed my eyes as my brain worked to get itself up to speed. At first, there was a thick haze in my mind, clouding my memories as I tried to recall last night and what happened to land me in the hospital. The deeper I waded into the fog, the more I uncovered until I had the full picture in my head.

There was a fire!

I could remember the heat on my skin. The tight sensation in my chest when I heard the mother's screams. The lack of breath when I watched those firefighters rush in and out of that house without hesitation. Then, there was the lightheaded sensation that I felt before everything went black.

I swallowed hard as I sank back into the pillows stacked on the hospital bed, my heart rate increasing just from the thought of last night. I hadn't ever witnessed a fire rescue before, and the

intensity caught me off guard. Hopefully, that didn't happen again since I came here to write about fires.

My eyes darted around in search of my phone. I needed to call my boss, who was hundreds of miles away in North Carolina where The Blue Ridge Times's main office was located. That was my new home, while this town that I was stuck in now was where I grew up.

Alright, maybe saying that I was stuck here was a bit harsh. I came here for work because there was a suspicious, obvious arson problem in this town, and I was a journalist. This case was calling my name, and it kind of felt meant to be since this was my hometown.

But things weren't that simple. Nothing ever was.

Part of why I left my hometown years ago was that I wanted to chase my dream of being a reporter. I wanted to spread my wings, but I didn't feel like I could in a random small town in Nevada. The same town where I suffered such a crushing, numbing loss.

An ache echoed in my chest as my mind shifted to my mom and how the last three years spent without her had been agony. I was close to both of my parents, but my mom was like my best friend. She was a passionate researcher, who studied criminal behavior, and her passion and determination inspired me.

She was the type of person who lit up any room that she walked into, and I felt like I could tell her everything. Outside of just me, I remembered the way my dad gazed at her with pure adoration in his eyes like he fell in love with her all over again each and every day. It was my first glimpse at true love, which was something that I hadn't experienced myself yet.

And that was another painful blow.

Because of a hit and run incident that killed her instantly, my mom wouldn't ever see me walk down the aisle. She wouldn't be able to experience being a grandmother. Her love story with my dad ended far too early and abruptly.

A family was shattered that day, and things hadn't ever been the same.

Just being back in Rockview made me uneasy, and I hadn't even been by my childhood home to visit my dad yet. I wanted to see him, but things hadn't been the same between us after my mom passed and after I left for Raleigh. Our once close relationship was distant and stiff, and I wasn't sure if that would ever change.

Honestly, given the pain surrounding my family and this town, I was surprised that I even came back. Even the air felt suffocating, like it was trying to kill me, but I kept my eyes on the ultimate goal, which was to pursue this arson case and bring some form of justice and closure to the community that I grew up in.

The same community who brought me and my dad food so that we didn't starve from grief and who continued leaving flowers on my mom's grave for weeks after the funeral. From what I learned so far, a concerning amount of arson incidents had been popping up all over town, and I had a feeling that there was something deeper going on. My boss agreed when I pitched the story to him.

"Oh, you're awake!"

I snapped out of my thoughts and turned my head to see a middle-aged, brown-haired nurse approach me.

"What happened to me? I just remember feeling dizzy and everything going dark," I asked her.

The nurse checked my chart and then my vitals before pitching me a friendly smile.

"You experienced extreme stress and fainted," the nurse replied. "The fire chief saw you fall and had you transported here."

The fire chief. I thought hard, trying to remember if I saw him or not. I remembered watching quite a few firefighters running back and forth and being in awe of their bravery. There was one of them who seemed to be calling the shots, but I didn't get a good look at him.

“How long was I out for?” I asked her, my body tensing as I prepared for the answer.

“Maybe an hour,” the nurse said.

I released a relieved breath. At least it wasn't for hours, but I still had a strong feeling that I had some missed calls and messages regarding work.

“Is my phone in here?” I asked her as I glanced around.

The nurse nodded and walked over to a small table that had a plastic bag full of my clothes and belongings. She carried it over to me.

“I'll have the doctor come by soon to check on you one more time. After that, you should be discharged,” she told me.

“Thank you,” I said before digging around in the bag to pull out my phone. As expected, I had a few missed notifications from my boss. With a grimace, I quickly hit his name in my call log to call him back.

After a few rings, there was a crackle before Zachary Fields' voice filled my ear.

“Zoe! You went MIA on me,” he exclaimed.

“I know. I'm sorry. Literally, a few hours after I got into town, there was a house fire, and I rushed to get on scene,” I explained as I tried to sit up a little. Pain struck my lower back and my ribs, making me grimace. I must've fallen hard when I passed out.

“Wow. Talk about meant to be, right? See anything suspicious? Creepy dude in a hoodie? Signs of intent?” Zachary replied with eager energy in his tone. He was more than a decade older than me, but he had the energetic nature of someone in their twenties.

Unfortunately, I was so rocked to my core by all of the fear, destruction, and chaos that I didn't even remember why I was there when I was staring at the fire. With the fire in front of me and the woman's screams in my ears, all I could think about was staring at the devastating scene of my mom's car crushed

on her side. It brought me back to that moment, and I couldn't escape it.

If I was going to tackle this case, I had to get a grip. Things were only going to grow more intense as I deepened my investigation and found out more information on what was going on in my hometown, and I couldn't be fainting every time something big happened. This was my shot to put out a huge story and prove myself as a journalist.

"I got there midway through, so I missed the start. I'll be quicker next time, though," I told him. I didn't want to tell him about the whole passing out thing because he wouldn't believe that I was cut out for this story!

"I need you to be on this, Zoe. You said you could do more over there than here, so I'm relying on you to bring back something good," Zachary replied.

"I'll bring back the best story I've ever written," I promised him with sheer determination in my voice. This could make or break my career, and I gave up so much for it already.

"That's what I want to hear! I'll let you get back to it," Zachary cheered, hanging up before I could even say goodbye.

I needed to get going soon. Where was the doctor? I impatiently shifted in bed, ready to get out of here and hit the ground running. There was a huge story waiting for me out there!

When I heard approaching footsteps, I sat up more, doing my best to ignore the ache gripping my body. There was a knock on the door, making me relax in relief. Finally.

But the doctor didn't step inside. Not that I knew what he looked like, but I fully remembered the face of the man who just walked into my room. The face of a man who I thought I wouldn't ever see again.

Chapter 2

Matty

I couldn't believe my ears. Zoe Collins was back in town.

I tightened my grip on my steering wheel and hurried to the hospital, my heart beating quickly. When I heard her name on the emergency services radio, I thought I was hearing things at first, but I would've recognized that name anywhere.

Years ago, we went to high school together, and even if things weren't perfect, they were certainly memorable. Then, she packed up her things and left, and I thought I wouldn't ever see her again. What was she doing back in town?

I didn't know another Zoe Collins, but I had to go check and see if it was really her and if she was okay.

Perfect timing too. I was just on my way home after leaving my brother David's house for dinner. The side of my mouth curled up as my thoughts drifted back to that dinner and my brother's unconventional but pretty damn cool family. It was him, his wife Brianna, and the eight other soldiers in his unit, and they all made this seamless, happy family.

Maybe other people would find it weird, but they were probably stiff losers anyway. Even though I wasn't looking for a big, happy family moment right now, that didn't mean I couldn't find it cool for other people, especially for my older brother. Though, it did make me wonder what kind of family I would have in the future.

If I ever got to that point. It scared the hell out of me even thinking about trying to settle down and not screw things up.

For now, I was going to put my all into my new job as a firefighter. Maybe I could make a big difference like my brother. He definitely excelled in all of the areas that I sucked at, but that didn't make me love him any less. There was no one more inspiring to me.

When I made it to the hospital, my brain shifted gears as I parked, my adrenaline kicking up again. I headed through the front entrance and walked up to the receptionist's desk.

"I'm here to see Zoe Collins. She was a recent admittance," I told the older woman running the desk.

"Just a second," she replied as she peered through thin-framed glasses at me. She clicked around on her computer before looking back up at me. "Room 208."

"208. Thanks," I said with a grin before turning and heading down the hallway to the right.

Nurses and doctors passed by me as my brown boots thudded against the white flooring that matched the white walls. Why did hospitals have to look so... sterile? In an off-putting way.

When I saw Room 208 up ahead, I slowed my steps a little, trying to prepare myself. Admittedly, I was a little nervous about seeing her again because it had been so long. My history with her was a bit complicated, and I just hoped that she had a good response to seeing me after all these years. It would've been kind of embarrassing for me to have rushed here, only for her to send me away.

Regardless of my uncertainty, I walked into the room and saw her there in the hospital bed with an equally shocked look on her face. Holy shit. It was actually her!

"Zoe," I said with a small laugh of disbelief.

Zoe continued to stare at me like she was witnessing a paranormal event, her body not moving an inch.

"Matty," she finally replied. She shook her head, barely disrupting the auburn waves of hair that I distinctly remembered her braiding a lot in early high school. "What are you doing here? How did you know that I was here?"

Now that I thought about it, that was a pretty good question to ask since I just appeared in her room without being summoned. I probably seemed creepy now.

“I heard your name over the emergency services radio. I’m working as a firefighter now,” I explained as I approached her bedside, my eyes doing a brief sweep over her body. “Are you okay?”

Zoe’s eyes widened.

“Seriously? You’re a firefighter? I was watching that house fire on Grady Street before I passed out,” she told me.

“No way. My shift wasn’t tonight. I was having dinner with my brother and his family,” I replied with a grin.

“David?” Zoe asked, squinting her right eye a little as she strained her mind to remember his name. She somehow remembered, though. All these years later.

“That’s him. Question of the hour, though. What are you doing back in town?” I asked her as I stopped by her bedside.

Zoe folded her hands in her lap, seeming to sit up a little straighter.

“I’m here to investigate the arson case. I want to write a piece about it,” she told me.

My eyebrows lifted.

“Hey, you became a journalist! That’s awesome, Zoe,” I said as I reached out to nudge her arm.

Zoe smiled and shook her head at me like she used to do a lot. She was beautiful back in high school, but she was even more gorgeous now with her sharp eyes and full lips. When she looked at someone, it was like she was peeling back their layers, searching deep without a lapse in attention. Maybe that unsettled people, but I found it a little endearing. She actually paid attention when someone talked to her.

A familiar spark of guilt went off within me, catching me off guard. I hadn’t felt that in a while. Whenever I noticed her beauty or just other things in general that made me admire her, I was taken back to high school when I was dating her best

friend, Rachel. We had a good relationship, but admittedly, Zoe was hard not to notice.

“Yeah, it’s been great. I write for The Blue Ridge Times out in Raleigh,” Zoe said. “I bet you’re a good firefighter. You’ve always been an adrenaline junkie.”

I chuckled and shrugged.

“I’m just a probationary firefighter right now to see if they like me enough to keep me, but it’s definitely been a thrill,” I told her before sitting on the edge of her bed. “How long have you been in town for?”

“Not even twenty-four hours. I got here around noon, put my things in my rental house, ate at Pizza King, and bolted over to Grady when I heard about the fire,” Zoe sighed, sounding tired from all the craziness.

“No clues yet, huh?” I replied.

Zoe shook her head.

“But I’m just getting started,” she said with a determined glint in her eyes.

I couldn’t help but grin a little. I had seen that look in her eyes so many times, whether she was hearing about a writing assignment in English class or someone challenged her to anything. She was competitive, and I doubted that had changed since I last saw her.

“You should come down to the station sometime,” I invited her. If she needed information about the fires that had been going on lately, that would be a great place to start. Hell, I was probably hired because there was so much arson activity, and the station needed extra hands to help.

“Really?” Zoe asked, immediately looking intrigued.

I nodded.

“Yeah, you can talk to the fire chief or the station officer to get some information for your story. Maybe it’ll at least point you in the right direction of where to look,” I suggested. If I was her, that was where I would start.

“Thanks, Matty. I wanted to get to the fire chief eventually, but I figured that it might be tough getting his attention given everything going on,” Zoe said.

“Luckily, I’ve got an in,” I told her, sharing a smile with her.

I just started working as a firefighter, and I was already starting to get burnt out from all the calls we had been getting lately. These weren’t small, petty fires either. Cars went up in flames. Houses were destroyed. Businesses were set ablaze in the dead of night. It was constant!

So, if she could figure out what was going on and expose whoever was behind all of this insanity, I was all for it. I wanted to help her because that would help us and this town.

Maybe part of me wanted an excuse to see her again too. She would be so busy working on the story, so her being at the fire station every so often gave me the opportunity to at least check in on her. Depending on how deep she got into this case, she was putting herself at risk. I didn’t want anything bad to happen to her.

“I can’t believe I’m seeing you right now. I figured I’d run into a few people I know, but I didn’t think I’d see anyone that I talked to a lot in high school,” Zoe told me.

I was glad that I caught her name on the emergency services radio. Maybe I would’ve run into her eventually while she was working on her story, but she would’ve been busy talking to other people and getting swept into the craziness of the case. It was nice having a moment alone with her right now before things got really intense.

Because they would.

“Well, I won’t be the only firefighter you’ll recognize,” I said as I nudged her knee through the white sheets.

Zoe lifted an eyebrow at me.

“Who else is a firefighter? I know this is a small town, but sheesh. I didn’t expect to know more than one,” she replied with a faint laugh.

Now that I was really thinking about my next words, I realized that she might not like my answer all that much.

“Garrett and Gabe,” I told her.

Zoe’s eyes widened as she leaned closer.

“Garrett and Gabe Wallace?” she questioned me.

A sheepish expression filled my face as I nodded.

“Yes,” I said, already seeing the tension forming in her shoulders as she stiffened. “I know you guys didn’t get along the greatest back in high school, but we’ve all grown up.”

Zoe ground her teeth as she thought to herself. She then sighed and shook her head, pinching the bridge of her nose.

“Of course, they’re firefighters,” she muttered under her breath. It was hard to tell whether she was aggravated or wary. Or both.

The tension in the air around us made the atmosphere a bit uneasy and awkward. The warm, exciting mood from before was long gone now, but that was my fault. At least I got to warn her, though, so that she wasn’t blindsided when she saw them.

“Sorry for the wait, Ms. Collins. I’m Dr. Jenkins,” a voice burst from my right, catching me off guard as a middle-aged man in dark blue scrubs and a white coat strode into the room at what felt like the speed of light. Busy man.

“I’ll leave you to it. Come by the station tomorrow when you’re free,” I told Zoe as I reached out to pat her hand.

Zoe flashed me a grateful look and nodded before turning to the doctor.

I smiled a little to myself as I walked out of the hospital room, knowing that I would see her soon. She was itching to get out of here and get to work, and I was more than willing to help her however I could. The only problem was that I wasn’t sure the other guys would feel the same.

Chapter 3

Zoe

After getting discharged from the hospital and sleeping for about eight hours, I was ready to go to the fire station and officially kick off my investigation.

I wasn't a detective or anything, but I prided myself on paying close attention to details and being able to weasel my way into places and situations that a lot of civilians would have trouble pulling off. When it came to journalism, boundaries had to be pushed to reach the truth.

And there was something weird behind all of these fires. Arson wasn't supposed to happen at such an accelerated rate like this, but the police hadn't experienced any luck. The firefighters were kept busy fighting the fires. What was the harm in a journalist poking around to find the truth?

Everyone in this town wanted these fires to end before more people got hurt, and I already associated enough death and tragedy with Rockview as it was.

My fingers drummed against the top of my steering wheel impatiently as I waited at the red light just before the fire station. I could see the large, brick building with red doors from where I was, and the sight made my heart rate spike. I was finally about to begin!

I would've started a little earlier if last night hadn't been so crazy. Not only did I pass out, but I also saw a ghost from my past. Matty Grady dated my best friend back in high school, so we spent a decent amount of time together since he was with Rachel a lot.

Nothing was wrong with that besides the fact that I kind of had a secret crush on Matty at the time. Of course, I didn't mention it or act on it because I didn't want to hurt Rachel's feelings or sever our friendship, but it was a bit of a struggle containing all of my feelings when I was around Matty.

Trust me, I wasn't the only one who had a crush on him, and I couldn't blame any of us poor souls. He had that carefree, warm soul that attracted girls like bees to honey, and he didn't lack charm at all. Just a smile could have someone wrapped around his finger.

If I was honest, I was struggling last night when he came into my room. When he reached out and touched me. When he smiled so brightly that it illuminated the room.

Damn it.

No wonder Rachel was enamored with him until they broke up during senior year.

There was no bad blood. The spark fizzled, and Rachel was planning to go to college out of state. I even attended her wedding a few months ago, so she still found true love outside of the charming Matty Grady. Meanwhile, I had a few flings that always led to someone getting hurt in the end. Love wasn't on the radar for me yet.

So, no matter how attractive Matty was, I didn't come to town to get caught up in burning desires. I came here to put out fires and make Rockview safe again.

But I did expect to be a little distracted, especially since Gabe and Garrett Wallace were also firefighters. It wasn't like I hated them or anything, but they made things tough for me in high school. We were at odds for nearly our entire high school career!

When I was a junior, I led a group called "The Radiant Rebels" and fought against certain rules and traditional high school norms that were outdated and ridiculous. I wanted to change the dress code rules, add healthier options for school lunch, and have the library be open for thirty minutes before the first bell so that students actually had time to browse and

pick out books to read. My closest friends, Rachel and Daisy, were also club members.

But there was pushback because the Wallace brothers and some other popular boys formed their own club called “The Eclat Crew” and distracted people from my efforts with their charm, popularity, and seamless camaraderie.

It disappointed me that they could flash their bright smiles and flirt their way around the school to get what they wanted like more vending machines and more privileges for athletes. Whether they intended to or not, they became my enemies.

When they tried to saunter up to me and use their charm on me to get me to relax, I quickly shut them down. That added a spark to our rivalry that lasted all the way to senior year. They made sure that they were front and center, overshadowing me and telling people to ignore me.

Just the thought of all that drama made me grind my teeth, but that was all years ago. As Matty had said, we had all grown up. So, what were the brothers like now?

I would find out soon.

I parked to the side of the fire station and got out of my white Honda Civic, a soft breeze blowing my hair behind my shoulders. My eyes shifted down as I smoothed down the dusty rose sweater with a white collar that I chose to wear this morning. Paired with a patterned skirt and ankle boots, it made up one of many business casual outfits that I packed for this trip.

I wasn't a fan of monotone colors or typical blazers with buttoned shirts. I liked a little bit of flair, and I added the same attitude to my writing.

As I approached the front of the fire station, I could see the fire truck parked inside through the large, open entrance. At least I came at the right time and not when they were out on a call. I strode through the front, hearing thuds from behind the truck.

“Hello?” I called out, hoping that Matty was around. He was my connection, and if anyone was going to help me convince

the fire chief to give me information and to let me stay close throughout the investigation, it would be him.

The thuds stopped, and a tall, dark-haired man with a matching beard stepped out from behind the fire truck. With his broad muscles and slightly grown out hair, he had a rugged look to him that made my stomach twist. Woah.

“Who are you?” he asked as he wiped his hands off with a shop rag.

My eyes shifted to the tribal tattoo winding up his forearm, my words refusing to come out at first. In my defense, he caught me off guard.

“I’m Zoe Collins,” I said as I extended my hand out for a handshake. “I’m a journalist at The Blue Ridge Times.”

“Cohen,” he replied as he shook my hand, seeming a bit stiff once I introduced myself. “Blue Ridge? Like North Carolina?”

I smiled and nodded, the warmth of his grip lingering when our hands broke apart.

“That’s the one,” I told him, having to tilt my head back a little to meet his ocean blue eyes. There was just something about a man with pretty eyes.

Cohen crossed his arms over his chest, raising an eyebrow at me in a suspicious manner.

“What’s a journalist from North Carolina doing here?” he questioned me.

Uh oh. I had heard that tone quite a few times before from people who were wary of journalists or reporters. They didn’t like being questioned or having anyone in their business, which I understood, but I was here for the good of the community. I wasn’t trying to dig out the skeletons in his closet.

“I’m here to write a story about the arson case. I’m hoping to work closely with you guys to uncover what’s really going on and make Rockview safe again,” I explained with a friendly expression, hoping to relax him. “Oh, and I’m from here.”

Cohen didn't lighten up in the slightest. In fact, his eyes narrowed slightly as he fixed me with a stern look.

"We don't really have time to accommodate a journalist," he stated. "We're in and out fighting these fires and getting people out of harm's way."

There it was. The resistance that I was so used to facing. He didn't want me to get in the way and slow down their progress, but he would have the opposite problem. They would have to keep up with me because I was determined to get to the bottom of this.

"You don't have to accommodate me. I want to work with you," I replied. "If I'm going to properly investigate these fires and figure out who's behind them, I need to be up close and personal. Where you guys are."

Cohen's jaw tensed, and I could tell that he wasn't in the mood to argue. That was just too bad because I drove all the way here for this.

"I think the police are better suited to figuring this out than a journalist," he commented, his tone starting to sharpen.

"How have they been doing so far?" I asked as I tilted my head at him.

Air puffed out of his nose sharply.

"They're doing their best," he said with some grit in his voice.

"I know they are, but this is a small town. We only have so many resources, and I'm here and ready to be a helpful resource," I told him before gesturing behind me. "Do you think I like hearing about the houses of old friends burning down or my favorite ice cream shop being torched? I don't."

Cohen lifted a hand, trying to wind our conversation down to a close.

"Which I understand, but you can wait until after the fires are out to investigate like everyone else," he replied as he started to turn away.

"Nothing has worked!" I told him, raising my voice to get his attention.

Cohen paused and turned back to me.

“Doesn’t mean they eventually won’t. Give it some time,” he replied.

I stepped closer to him with a look of pure defiance on my face.

“The longer we wait, the more will be destroyed,” I bit out. “Are you willing to risk that because you don’t want to work with me?”

Cohen shook his head at me, looking as aggravated as he sounded.

“It’s not a good idea,” he said. “I’m sure my fire chief will agree with me.”

Now, we were talking. I hoped that he wasn’t the fire chief because it would take a miracle to gain his trust. Maybe the fire chief would be easier to sway.

“Then, I want to talk to him,” I replied as I plastered a cheery smile on my face.

Cohen tightened his jaw, but he turned and stalked off, leading me away from the apparatus bay to take me to his boss.

If I was going to get what I wanted, I had to turn up the heat. So much was at stake, and I didn’t plan to be stopped any time soon.

* * *

~ End of Sneak Peak ~

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About the Author

Nicole Casey is a Contemporary Romance Author born and based in The City of Angels. She writes steamy contemporary romance with a happily ever after.

When she isn't penning sultry scenes, Nicole Casey loves getting lost in her daydreams, going for long nighttime walks, and fine dining. She is also a red wine aficionada and bookworm. Above all, she enjoys nothing more than spending quality time with her loved ones in both human and cat form.

Subscribe to Nicole Casey's newsletter to get her steamy romance story and be the first to hear about new releases: <https://authornicolecasey.com>