



THE WANDERERS - BOOK 6

HAVEN

A Reverse Harem Novel



USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

BECCA JAMESON



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ABOUT THE BOOK

There is no safe place in the world anymore, especially for women. For several decades, the birth rate of females has been declining. Militants, the government, and private citizens alike will do anything to find young women and force them into unthinkable arrangements.

Against the darkness of this world stand The Wanderers—a secret society born to provide sanctuary for anyone who believes in free will and democratic notions. Their numbers are growing and their citizens live in safe, hidden compounds.

Harmony's path in life has always been predetermined. She was lucky to have been permitted to stay with her mother until she was twelve. Many girls were not so fortunate. But that was eight years ago. She'll be twenty soon, and she's been a ward of the state, living in a girls' home, for almost half her life. The clock is ticking. Females have no rights in the new world. She will be wed against her will to a man she did not choose and has not met on her twentieth birthday.

Unbeknownst to Harmony, a team of Wanderers has a plan to rescue her. It's risky. It might fail. All four men are endangering their lives for a woman they've never met. But in this post-apocalyptic society, danger lurks around every corner and risks are taken for the better of humanity every day.

Mykel, Eldin, Blane, and York have very few details to go on, but they intend to rescue Harmony if it's the last thing they do. What they don't expect is to fall head over heels for the woman. Their mission is to bring her to The Wanderers bunker and reunite her with her mother. But that plan might take a detour if their affection for Harmony is reciprocated.

PROLOGUE



Eight years ago...

“Psst. What are you doing?” Alysia whispered.

Harmony flinched before she glanced at the girl in the bunk next to hers. “Nothing,” she lied as she slid the pamphlet under her mattress.

It was early in the morning. The sun was just coming up. The alarm hadn’t gone off yet. This was the window of time each day when Harmony could improve her mind without being detected.

Except apparently Alysia had caught her. Suddenly her eyes went wide as she brushed a lock of red hair from her face and leaned closer. “Can you read?” she hissed.

“Of course not,” Harmony lied again.

Alysia sat up, spinning around so she could put her bare feet on the floor and lean in even closer to Harmony. She glanced around before she set her elbows on her knees. “You can read.”

Harmony pursed her lips. Sure, she could read. There wasn’t anything to read around here in this godforsaken home

for girls that was more like a prison. The only way Harmony could keep her mind engaged was to find random things to read. She'd stolen the directions that came with the new oven in the kitchen this time. They'd been taped to the side. No one had paid any attention to them. Of course they hadn't. No one who lived or worked in this home knew how to read.

“Will you teach me?”

This shocked Harmony. She wasn't sure how to respond.

Alysia grabbed Harmony's hand. “Please. I heard one of the guards saying that reading is power. That's why they don't let us learn to read. I want some of that power. Please teach me,” she pleaded in a whisper.

Harmony looked around. No one else had woken up yet. “It's too dangerous. If we got caught...”

“Some of the other girls want to know how to read also. Can you write too?” She looked excited. “And do math? Of course you can. You just got here. You're already twelve. You learned stuff on the outside before you were brought to this girls' home, didn't you?”

It was shocking how quickly Alysia pieced together Harmony's education. She narrowed her gaze. “If you tell anyone, I'll deny it.”

Alysia shook her head. “I would never tell. I swear. I want to know too. Every time I see words, it frustrates me. They're just scribbles. They have no meaning. I want to know.”

Harmony thought about Alysia's enthusiasm and insistence. She wondered how many of the other girls in their dorm room might also be sponges for information.

She knew how lucky she was—if a moderate level of education could be considered lucky in a world where she was

only permitted to stay with her mother for the first twelve years of her life before she was stolen from the only home she'd ever known and sent to live at a girls' home.

Compared to the other girls in this home, she was lucky. Most of them either never knew their parents or didn't remember them. Most were kidnapped and brought here as infants or toddlers.

Harmony had led a different life. She had no idea who her father was, but her mother had been a teacher before the fall of society. She'd been hired by a prominent family in The Republic to educate their son and his friends. As a show of good faith and a "kindness," Harmony's mother had been permitted to keep her daughter with her until she was twelve.

What no one except the three boys and her mother knew was that Harmony had learned right along with them. She'd loved learning from a very early age. She'd soaked up everything her mother had said, usually even faster than the boys.

Braylon and Riggs had been five years older than her. Storm had been seven years older. She'd been like a little sister to them. In fact, they had been the ones who had taught her to read when she'd been about three. They'd done it just to see if it was possible. When her mother had found out, she'd chastised them, but she hadn't stopped them from continuing to work with her, and she never said another word.

There had been something different about those three boys. They'd been kind and considerate. They'd never told a living soul what they'd taught Harmony in secret. She owed them.

She owed her mother too. She'd been sly and sneaky, making sure Harmony was as educated as possible by working

with her indirectly. Harmony was pretty sure she had far more education than the average boy of twelve.

“Harmony?” Alysia hissed again. “What do you say? Will you do it? Will you teach me?”

Harmony licked her dry lips and took a deep breath. She knew one thing for certain. Alysia was right. Reading was power because knowledge was power. She owed it to Alysia and anyone else who wanted to learn to help them. They’d have to be careful. They’d have to sneak around and study when no one was looking. But Harmony couldn’t think of anything she’d like to do more than educate the other girls.

“I’ll do it.”

Alysia silently clapped her hands together. Her expression said she would be dancing around squealing if it wouldn’t attract attention. “When can we start?”

“I don’t know. We’ll need to figure out where and when we can work and not get caught. We need something to write with and something to write on.”

“I don’t care if we use sticks and the dirt in the back of the playground as long as I learn to read and write.”

It wasn’t a bad idea. At least to start. They could sit on the far side of the playground and pretend they were playing jacks if anyone showed up. Harmony could start with letters and numbers. If other girls were interested, it would get trickier, but she was suddenly determined.

It would work. It had to work.

Because knowledge was power, and one thing Harmony knew for certain was that girls were not stupid. They were just as smart as boys. Perhaps even smarter. If girls were educated, the world would be a better place.

Harmony should have felt nervous about this plan. Instead, she felt a sense of peace. At twelve years old, she felt like she knew what her calling was in life. She could be a teacher. Even if she had to teach in secret for seventy years, that's what she would do. Share her wisdom with anyone who wanted to listen.

CHAPTER 1



Present day...

Mykel took a deep breath and pulled his hat lower on his head as he waited for someone to open the door. As far as he was concerned this was the riskiest part of the mission he and his partners were preparing to execute.

This was the third time he'd come to the Hanson residence. He hoped it was also his final visit. He also hoped Marian herself opened this door. She had the first two times. He needed his luck to hold out one more time.

He was at the side of the estate. The service entrance. The place where deliveries were received. And he had a delivery.

He held his breath and stood taller as the door squeaked open, beyond grateful to find Marian standing in the doorway. "Floral delivery for the Hansons." He held out a large arrangement.

"Thank you. These will look fantastic on tonight's dinner table." She handed him an envelope, and he handed her the flowers. Tucked between the stems was a note. Marian would find it.

Marian glanced over her shoulder before whispering, “Do you really think you’re going to pull this off?”

“Yes.”

Marian slowly closed her eyes. “Thank you. No matter what happens, I want to thank you for trying. If you manage to rescue my daughter and get her someplace safe, I’ll be indebted to you for life.”

“It’s my pleasure.” He tipped his head and turned to walk away. One minute later, he was back on his bike, pedaling out of the neighborhood.

It took ten minutes to get back to the abandoned warehouse he and his partners were using as essentially a command center for this operation. As soon as he stepped inside, Eldin, Blane, and York stopped their collective pacing and breathed sighs of relief.

“Success?” Eldin asked.

“Yes.” He held up the envelope Marian had handed him. He hadn’t been expecting to get something from her. He’d been there to give her information.

“What’s that?” Blane asked.

“No clue. Marian gave it to me.”

York took it from him and opened the envelope. He pulled out a piece of lined paper and unfolded it before he started reading. “*Received another communication. Date is still accurate. Hope is overflowing my heart. God be with you.*”

Mykel drew in a deep breath. “So we’re on schedule. Two days until showtime.”

Eldin nodded. “I can’t believe we’re this close to pulling this off.” He ran a hand over his head. “It seems like it’s been

too easy.”

Blane clasped both his hands behind his head and stretched. It was obvious he was also feeling uneasy. “This is the first time we’ve traveled this far to rescue someone. It’s the first time we ventured so deeply into enemy territory. We didn’t expect to find so many people working for the resistance within The Republic.”

Mykel shook his head. Blane was right. The four of them had been running rescue missions for The Wanderers for several years. They’d had amazing success. They’d never traveled as far east as Virginia before. Nor had they infiltrated The Republic like this. It had always seemed far too risky.

Their mission had always been to save lives, but this was different. In two days they were going to intercept the transport of a woman en route to her arranged wedding. A wedding to a wealthy member of The Republic. A wedding she had not consented to. A wedding to a groom she had not met.

This was the way of The Republic. Kidnap girls, hold them in group homes until they turned twenty, and sell them to the highest bidder. This was The Republic’s response to the fact that the female birth rate had mysteriously diminished to about one in eight births over two decades ago.

Freedoms had come to an end. The only free society Mykel was aware of in the country was the underground organization that referred to themselves as The Wanderers. He was grateful to be a member of that society.

“We’re ready,” York stated. “We’ve been planning this for almost six months. We’ve been fortunate enough to discover that a good percentage of the people living under the rule of

The Republic are defiant and willing to do whatever it takes to help people escape.”

Mykel nodded. “Our luck has been abundant. Let’s hope it holds on for a few more days.”

“I still can’t believe Harmony has successfully been sending letters to her mother for the past month,” Blane mused.

Mykel couldn’t believe it either. It meant that at least some of the employees at the home where she lived were working for the good guys. “It’s certainly helpful that she has been able to confirm not just the date but the time of her wedding.”

“We’ve got this,” Eldin said. “It feels good.”

“Yeah. Let’s just hope we don’t encounter a snag.” Mykel was well aware that if anything went wrong, there was a good chance he or any of his partners might not live to see another day.

“Let’s hope Marian doesn’t either. If she’s not able to get to the rendezvous point after we secure Harmony, it will be damn near impossible to make another arrangement,” Blane said, though this was something they all knew.

Mykel had given Marian the final details, letting her know when and where they would pick her up. Everything needed to run like clockwork. As soon as both mother and daughter were secured, the six of them needed to get as far away from Virginia as fast as humanly possible. The entire state would be looking for them.

CHAPTER 2



Eldin tucked his weapon in the back of his jeans and moved quickly into place. It was showtime. They'd planned for this day for months. All that was left was the execution.

So far, everything was on schedule. Blane had informed everyone that Harmony had been picked up from the girls' home at precisely four o'clock. She was traveling toward the church in a black SUV. The only person with her was the driver.

Eldin had no idea what the political leanings of the driver were. Considering how many people Eldin had met in the past few weeks who worked for The Republic, there was about a fifty-fifty chance the driver himself would freely turn over Harmony without argument.

Eldin and his partners weren't counting on that though. It was an unknown variable. What was shocking was how trusting this community seemed to be. The girls' homes were secure like fucking fortresses, surrounded by armed guards. No one came in or out who wasn't well vetted.

Oddly, when it came time to transfer one of the girls to her arranged marriage, the system was rather lax. The leaders hadn't seen any resistance for years, so they didn't expect to be ambushed.

It wasn't difficult to believe, Eldin supposed. After all, most of the girls were sent to one of these "homes" that were more like purity prisons as infants or toddlers. No one was looking for them. Most often, their parents had been murdered or banished years ago. Twenty years ago.

Harmony was different. Harmony had been permitted to stay with her mother, who worked for a wealthy family, for twelve years. Her mother was still living. Her mother had never stopped hoping she might be reunited with her daughter. She'd never left her place of employment in the past eight years.

After nearly twenty years in their employment, the Hansons never once suspected Marian had anything to do with the disappearance six months ago of their son, Braylon, his bodyguard, Storm, his best friend, Riggs, or his wife, Haley.

It would have been an immense embarrassment to the family, but they had kept Marian in their employment as a house manager. That kind of trust was what made this rescue possible. It put Marian right where Eldin and his partners needed her to be so they could easily make contact. It also allowed Harmony to send messages to her mother for the past month.

Eldin lifted his walkie-talkie up and pressed the button. "I'm in position."

"Me too," Mykel responded.

"Three," York added.

Eldin glanced at his watch. The SUV would pull down this side street in about one minute. This was the crucial part of their plan. It had to work or the entire mission would be aborted.

There were so many variables that had to go as planned. If the SUV went down the wrong street, all bets were off. If the driver was too observant, all bets were off. If someone in one of the surrounding buildings heard the commotion and called for help, all bets were off.

Eldin flattened himself to the door of an abandoned business, his body hidden in the slight alcove. He kept his eye on the strip of nails he'd laid down in the road as he heard the SUV approaching, reminding himself of yet another factor that could have gone wrong. Someone else could have driven down this side street before the SUV and ruined everything.

That hurdle had been avoided.

Eldin lifted the walkie-talkie again. "Five seconds."

He didn't need a response. He simply needed to inform his partners who didn't have a clear view.

"Four, three, two, one..." he muttered to himself.

In the next second, the SUV hit the nail strip. Both front tires popped instantly, and the driver lost control of the car before he slammed on the brakes and skidded to a stop.

"Wait for it..." Eldin whispered to himself. He needed to be patient. They all did. Getting too hasty wouldn't bode well.

Finally, the driver opened the front door and jumped down. "What the fuck," he shouted. He should have been more aware of his surroundings. He should have looked around before he exited the SUV. He made mistakes. Crucial ones.

Eldin watched as a dart whizzed through the air and hit the driver in the arm. "Bullseye."

The guy jerked around, reached for the dart, and pulled it out. "Fuck," he shouted before looking around.

“Too late, buddy.”

The man lasted about three more seconds before he dropped to the ground.

Eldin raced for the SUV as fast as he could, praying Harmony wouldn't freak the hell out. Before he could reach her, she had opened the door and jumped out of the car.

“Please tell me you're the good guys,” she stated as she glanced at first Eldin and then Mykel and York.

Eldin was stunned, but grateful. This was going to be easier than he'd expected. He smirked. “We are. No time to chat. We need to run.”

Harmony was already pulling her fancy shoes off and tossing them to the side. “Let's go.”

Eldin was impressed. This woman was no wilting flower. She was all business. Bad ass. Fierce. He suspected if she had ended up married this afternoon, she might have stabbed her new husband's eyes out with one of those deadly heels of hers and escaped on her own.

Without hesitation, Harmony took off running behind York.

Mykel took a position at her side.

Eldin took up the rear, keeping an eye out for any disturbance. This was all going too smoothly. Too easily.

A car sped to a stop at the end of the street right on time.

“We're getting in that car,” Eldin informed her from behind.

She nodded and kept running.

Seconds later, all five of them were inside the vehicle, and Blane was pulling away from the curb.

“What now?” Harmony asked the moment they were on the move.

Eldin was on one side of her, York on the other. Mykel had taken the front passenger seat. It was Mykel who reached over the seat and tossed back some clothes.

Harmony caught them. “Thank God. I don’t know who you guys are, but you seem prepared. I hope you know what you’re doing.” She twisted to one side so her back was facing Eldin. “Can you rip the buttons off this stupid dress?”

“You want me to tear it?” He was kind of surprised. He shouldn’t have been.

She looked over her shoulder and lifted a brow. It was the first real look he was getting of her. She was stunning. Long dark hair had broken loose from the updo it had been in while she’d run for freedom. It hung in wild curls around her shoulders and partway down her back. Her eyes were dark brown. Her features were petite, but he knew in a glance this woman was fierce. No one should fuck with her.

“It took twenty minutes to get this dress on me. We don’t have that kind of time. Do you think I care about it? Rip it,” she ordered.

Eldin reached up, grabbed the collar with both hands, and yanked hard enough to tug her backward. She must have braced herself though because the dress gave way, and she didn’t end up sprawled in his lap.

“Thank you,” she murmured. She held the front of the dress against her chest and tugged the black T-shirt from the pile of clothes to hand it to York. “Can you help me?”

“Of course.” York took the long-sleeved shirt from her and pulled it over her head.

Harmony released the front of the dress as the shirt covered her.

It was completely inappropriate for Eldin to be thinking about her in any way at all, but it was impossible not to. Her back was smooth and tempting. She wasn't wearing a bra, which meant her breasts were now loose behind the shirt.

He swallowed and shook thoughts of this woman's breasts from his damn head. *Rescue, Eldin. Rescue. You're not here to lust after her.*

“I assume we don't have time for modesty,” Harmony said as she lifted her sweet ass to pull the yards of white fabric out from under her. “But maybe you two could look out the window for like five seconds while I put these pants on?”

Eldin's face heated as he jerked his gaze away from her. He felt like an ass for staring. Nevertheless, he managed to watch her out of his peripheral vision as she escaped the rest of the silk and lace, snagged the black jeans, and lifted her butt off the seat to tug them on.

“Okay, I'm decent,” she declared. “Someone tell me the plan,” she continued as she tugged the tennis shoes onto her feet. Next, she lifted her hands to pluck several clips from her hair until it fell in thick waves all over the place.

Eldin thought he might be drooling. He'd lost his mind.

When she finished with her shoes and sat back, she glanced at York and then Eldin before turning her attention to the front. “Is someone going to speak? You're making me nervous. You can save the introductions for now. I won't remember names, but tell me the plan.”

Her thick hair whacked Eldin in the shoulder and arm over and over. He didn't mind. He wanted to grab it though. He wanted to fist it, pull her head back, and kiss her.

Jesus. He was definitely losing his mind.

Mykel twisted from the front seat. "I'll give you the rundown. We're with a group of people who live in a safe location outside of The Republic. We rescue people—mostly women—and bring them to safety. We learned about you from a woman named Haley. Do you remember her?"

Harmony's eyes went wide. "Yes. Pale. Dark hair. Five-four? She was sold into marriage to someone about a year ago."

Mykel nodded. "That someone was the family your mother works for. The Hansons."

"Braylon?" She looked shocked.

Mykel nodded. "Yes. It's a long story, but she escaped The Republic with Braylon, Riggs, Storm, and Rush."

"Who's Rush?"

Mykel waved a dismissive hand between them. "That's not important right now."

"Tell me," she demanded.

Eldin flinched at her side and took a breath, deciding it was better to just tell her. "Rush is the man who was kidnapped and sent to impregnate Haley when she failed to get pregnant by Braylon. He was from our society. He led the rest of them to safety."

Harmony stared at Eldin with wide eyes. "I always thought Bray was uh... in top shape. I'm surprised he couldn't..."

Mykel groaned. “Can we come back to this later, please?”

Eldin shot him a quick look and then met Harmony’s gaze again. “He’s right. It’s complicated. Can we please deal with the immediate plan? We’ll explain the rest later.”

She nodded. “You’re right. Go on.”

Blane continued to drive. He was getting close to the edge of the city though. The five of them couldn’t just drive out of town as if they were on a joy ride. It didn’t work that way.

They were almost at their first destination though, so there wasn’t much time to explain the next step in this mission. Eldin took over. “Listen. We need to get out of sight. Blane’s going to pull into an abandoned warehouse. We’re going to hide out there for several hours. Two of us will stay with you. Two of us will go get your mother.”

She gasped. “My mom is coming with us?”

“Yes.”

She ran a hand over her hair. A smile spread across her face, the first one she’d granted them with. “Oh, God. That’s...” She shook her head. “I can’t thank you enough. Does she know you rescued me?”

Eldin nodded. “She knows that was the plan. She can’t know if we were successful or not yet, but she should be at the rendezvous point soon. Timing was important. She needed to disappear about the same time as you. As soon as word gets to the Hanson family that you’ve escaped, The Republic will have men surrounding the residence. We never would have gotten close to her.”

Harmony ran a hand down her face. “Makes sense.” She rubbed her temples next. “I can’t believe this is happening. I had hope, but part of me refused to believe I wouldn’t actually

end up at the altar getting married to a stranger and spending the night being raped.”

Eldin flinched at how blunt she was. The Republic was a fucked-up government. Their system of stealing girls and raising them to be sold like breed cattle was so barbaric. If he could save them all, he would.

Harmony suddenly stomped on the yards of white fabric under her feet. “I’m never getting married,” she murmured. “What a gross institution.”

For some reason that made Eldin’s chest tighten. It shouldn’t have. People didn’t get married in his community. The Wanderers didn’t bother with that sort of thing. But they did live in committed family units. Those who wanted to anyway.

Eldin and the rest of the men with him in this car had been together for many years. They were essentially a family. They’d even had a female partner. They’d adored her, worshiped her. When she’d died five years ago, they’d mourned her.

Eldin had hardened himself against falling for another woman. He knew they all four had. By unspoken agreement, they’d spent every moment since her death working tirelessly to free other women from oppressed situations. They didn’t have time for another intimate relationship. He didn’t suppose any of them had the strength to endure another loss like that.

As he watched Harmony stuff the wedding dress as far under her feet as possible, he felt a twinge of something he hadn’t let himself feel for years. She was fierce and determined. She was nothing like what he’d expected.

Most of the girls who were sold out of one of those homes were meek and withdrawn. Resigned. Ignorant about the world. This wasn't true for Harmony. She wasn't like other girls. She wasn't even a girl at all. She was a woman. She'd probably been a woman since she'd been twelve.

He wanted to know more about her. He wanted to know what she'd been through. He wanted to pull her into his arms and tell her she was safe now. He wanted to kiss her furrowed brow and reassure her.

He wouldn't do anything of the sort, of course. It wouldn't be appropriate, and she didn't need that kind of comforting right now.

Blane pulled the car straight into the warehouse they'd scoped out. It had giant open garage doors. As soon as he turned off the engine, he jumped out and hurried to close the garage bay they'd entered, hiding the car from sight. Buying them some time.

As Eldin climbed out of his side of the car, he turned to offer Harmony a hand, but jerked it back when she ignored him and clambered out on her own. She was fiercely independent.

The first thing she did was adjust her black jeans, smoothing her hands on her thighs and stretching her legs. "Is this how they're supposed to fit?" she asked, glancing up.

Eldin licked his lips. Those damn jeans fit her far too well. "What do you mean? Are they too tight? We can find others. We were just guessing."

She shook her head. "No. I mean in general. I've never had a pair of pants on."

“Jesus,” York muttered as he came around to their side of the car. “We didn’t think of that. Would you rather we find a dress or skirt for you?”

She frowned. “God, no. I kind of like the feel. I’m just adjusting.”

York nodded slowly. His gaze was on her lower half too. “Well, to answer your question, they definitely fit.” He jerked his gaze away and drew in a breath.

Eldin tried not to smirk. At least he wasn’t the only one affected by Harmony.

Mykel cleared his throat. “They look fine,” he informed her. His gaze was also narrowed on her lower half.

So was Blane’s. He jerked his attention to her face and held out a hand. “I’m Blane.”

After she shook it, she said, “I’m Harmony. I hope you know that and you didn’t rescue the wrong girl.” She gave a slight chuckle.

Blane grinned. “Thank God.” He pointed around at the rest of his partners. “Mykel, Eldin, York.”

She nodded. “Got it. Blane, Mykel, Eldin, York.”

Blane nodded. “Mykel and I are going to meet your mom. The three of you will catch up with us on the outside of town after dark.”

“Okay. Good. And, thank you again. Be safe.” She rubbed her hands together as Mykel and Blane left through a side door.

“Hungry?” Eldin asked.

“No. Tell me more about how you ended up rescuing me. I’m grateful that I at least had a heads up, but that’s about all I knew. Someone was going to intercept my transportation and I should trust whoever that was and run like my life depended on it.”

Eldin pointed to a pile of crates in a corner of the warehouse. “Let’s sit.”

York stayed with them, but he positioned himself near a window and pinned his gaze to the outside.

Harmony perched on one of the crates only a foot from the one Eldin chose. She looked at him anxiously.

Eldin had no idea how he became the spokesperson for the group, but apparently that was the case. “So, we told you about Haley.”

She nodded. “Yes. And you also glossed over several details. Tell me more.” She leaned forward, hands on her thighs. “Something about a man named Rush. And where are they? Where are you guys from? Are we going there?”

Eldin smiled. “I’ll tell you everything.” God, he liked her. He liked her spunk. Her temerity. “You want the short version or the down and dirty?”

“The whole thing. Please.”

He chuckled. “Okay. If you remember Braylon—”

“Oh, I remember him well. I’ve been gone eight years, but I remember everything. I can’t imagine him married to someone from the girls’ home.” She shuddered. “I remember Haley. I didn’t know her well. We weren’t in the same section.”

“Well, to be completely blunt...” Eldin glanced at York to find him snorting. The asshole was just grateful he didn’t have to explain the blunt part of things.

“Please, be blunt,” she encouraged.

Eldin drew in a breath. “If you remember Bray as a good guy, you’re right. He refused to have sex with his wife after they married.”

Her eyes popped open wide and she grinned. “Seriously? How did he get away with that?”

“He didn’t. Not in the long run. He lied. He pretended he was having sex with his wife, but he never touched her.”

Harmony put a hand over her heart and sighed.

Eldin smiled. It was a true love story. It made his heart swell too. “Also, he fell in love with her. So did everyone in her vicinity.”

Harmony’s eyes went wide. “Storm? Riggs?”

“Yep. And believe it or not, Rush.”

She winced. “So Rush was brought in to father the child?” She fisted her hands.

“He was. He was taken hostage several months before and held in a prison. He’s a doctor. He assumed he’d been taken by The Republic for his medical knowledge. Instead, he ended up in a prison cell for months with no information until he was transported to the Hanson estate for his sperm donation.”

She gasped. “Jesus. It doesn’t seem like being forced to have sex with someone besides Braylon would be better. That sounds worse.”

“She didn’t have sex with him either.” He lifted a brow, but of course she stared at him in confusion.

She was a bright woman who was as educated as she could be, but using a turkey baster to impregnate someone was out of her wheelhouse.

Eldin wasn’t excited to be explaining the intricacies of the birds and the bees to this woman he’d just met, but he also wasn’t going to leave her hanging. She deserved answers. “He put his sperm in a container and a doctor put it inside her. She didn’t even have to meet him in person.”

Harmony’s eyes widened further. She stared at him while she processed this information. “I’ve never been more grateful that my mother taught me everything she could before I was taken from her at twelve. I was too young for half the things she taught me, but believe it or not, I think I understand.”

“Good.” He blew out a breath, relieved to be done with that subject.

“So, in the end, those four men escaped The Republic with a pregnant Haley who still hadn’t had sex with a man.”

“Yes.”

“Wow. But Rush is the father?”

“Yes.”

“Does she see him?”

Eldin let out an audible sigh now. “The five of them live as a family unit now.”

Her eyes popped completely out of her head. “Seriously?”

“It’s not uncommon in free society. You’ll see.”

“Where is this free society?”

“West. We’ll be traveling west for several days to get there. We call ourselves The Wanderers. We live in underground bunkers that are completely self-sufficient. We live by a set of laws, but primary among those is free will. No one is forced into a relationship with anyone.”

She searched his face.

He wasn’t surprised by her confusion. Newcomers were often stunned. It took a while to catch up. “However, the fact is there are still far too few women in the world. As a natural result, many family units inside the compound are comprised of one woman and multiple men.”

Harmony leaned back, processing again. “I’m really sheltered.”

“You’re obviously a sponge. You’ll catch up fast.” He wasn’t simply humoring her. He meant every word.

“So Haley voluntarily lives with four men. Does she, uh...”

Eldin held up a hand. “I have to assume, but I certainly don’t discuss their sex lives with them. Those four men love her to pieces. She’s the center of their universe. That baby is going to be loved and adored by all of them.”

“When is she due?”

“She has about two months left.”

“And I’m going to get to see all of them?”

“Of course.”

She glanced at York and back at Eldin. “Are the four of *you* a family? Do you have a wife?”

Eldin swallowed. “We are a family unit. We did have a wife. She died five years ago. We’ve stayed together and dedicated our lives to rescuing people like you.”

She winced. “I’m so sorry.”

He nodded. “We are too. It’s a dangerous world. There are no guarantees. You have to make the most of every single day and live like it might be your last. We loved Suzanne to pieces, and she knew it. She knew.” He stopped talking, not wanting to make this into a pity party.

Harmony reached over and grabbed his hand, squeezing it. “I’m certain she knew, and I can tell you are all amazing good men. I’ll never be able to thank you enough for what you’ve done for me.”

He flipped his hand over under hers and returned the squeeze. “It’s what we do. It’s like a calling. Every time we bring someone new into the fold, we know it was worth every moment of the danger.”

CHAPTER 3



Harmony's heart was beating fast. She'd never been this close to freedom. Not in her entire life. Granted, she'd lived a relatively good life for the first twelve years. She'd been one of the lucky ones. She would always be grateful that her mother had negotiated keeping her for over a decade. It was nearly unheard of.

But the clock had run out, and there was nothing they could do. In the end, eight years ago, Harmony had bravely and stoically gone with the two women and the slew of guards who came to take her into state custody.

"How are we going to get out of the city without getting caught?" she asked.

"On foot. There are places with less patrol and holes in the fences. There are tunnels and bridges and rivers. Tonight we will go through a crude manmade tunnel that runs under a fence in a remote section."

"Okay." She nodded. She had so many questions. Millions. But the important thing for now was that she was halfway to freedom. She wouldn't accept it or relax her guard for days. Perhaps weeks. Or maybe never. But if she could get out of the city tonight...

“May I ask how you were getting letters to your mother this past month? Who was making that happen?” Eldin’s voice was so kind. Caring. She wasn’t the first woman he’d rescued. All four of them had apparently rescued others.

He was also still holding her hand. He’d turned it over so he was pressing her fingers against his thigh, but he hadn’t let go of her, and she found she liked the connection. It felt nice.

“Some of the women who work at the girls’ home are sympathetic. They are in no better position than any of the children. They aren’t glorified state employees. They’re not free to come and go as they please. No matter how you slice it, they are prisoners of the system too.”

His brow was furrowed. “Do they go home at night?”

“No. They live on site. They don’t have days off or any freedom. They’re given room and board in exchange for essentially raising hundreds of children and seeing to their care. For most of them, it’s the best thing that could have happened to them. They have food and clothes. They aren’t homeless or abused. They aren’t working in labor camps or worse.”

“You know a lot about the system,” he pointed out.

“I’m inquisitive. I ask questions. I ask them until I get the answers I want.” She smiled at him.

He chuckled. “I can see that. But who did you ask?”

“The women.”

“How are they chosen?” York asked from the window.

She knew he was listening intently. He wasn’t as talkative as Eldin. Or perhaps he was on guard and didn’t want to risk

not paying close attention to anything that might happen outside that window.

Harmony glanced at him, tugging her hand free at the same time. It felt awkward letting Eldin continue to touch her. But she instantly felt the loss when she drew her hand back.

Looking at York, she answered him. “Most of them are infertile or have already given birth to several children. They aren’t useful as incubators for The Republic, so they are sent to raise other children.”

“I hate to ask, but where are their own children?”

“Adopted by rich families of The Republic.” She chuckled. “I feel like I know more than you do about the inner workings of The Republic. How is that possible?”

Eldin smiled. “In many respects, I’m sure you do. We’ve never traveled this far east. We’ve always considered it too dangerous. Most of the time our efforts are against rogue militias that pop up all over the place. They live as nomads, taking what they want and who they want as they travel across the land.”

She winced. “How does your society stay hidden?”

“It’s mostly underground. Our people live in large elaborate bunkers hidden from view.”

“And no one ever infiltrates?” She felt skeptical about how that worked.

“We’re very careful. It’s an elaborate system with more than one bunker.”

She nodded slowly. It sounded like heaven.

York spoke again. “I’m curious how you know so much about the inner workings of The Republic? These women told

you things?”

She shrugged. “I made a trade.” A trade she was quite proud of.

Eldin’s brows shot up. “You traded with the women who were responsible for guarding you for information? What did you have to trade?”

She grinned and sat up straighter. “An education.”

She loved the smile that spread across Eldin’s face, and when she glanced at York, he too was smiling broadly.

“How the hell did you get away with that?” Eldin asked.

“Long story.”

“We have time.”

“Okay... When I first arrived eight years ago, I used to find anything to read I could get my hands on. Didn’t matter if it was the back of a box or the directions for the lightbulbs. I was afraid I would forget if I didn’t keep my mind sharp.”

“We heard about how your mother, with the help of Bray, Riggs, and Storm, made sure you were as educated as possible. But you had to keep that to yourself, right?”

“Definitely. One day another girl caught me. I was scared out of my mind, but she didn’t turn me in. She begged me to teach her to read and write. So, I started tutoring her. At first it was just the two of us, but over time it grew. There were several girls who wanted to learn.”

“And you didn’t get caught?” York interrupted.

She nodded. “Oh, we did. Scariest day of my life. I can’t fathom what the punishment would have been if anyone had turned us in to The Republic. One of the women who managed

our dorm discovered me teaching two girls one morning. I tried to insist we were just playing and didn't know what any of it meant, but she didn't believe me. She walked away. I was in a panic all day. Later that night, she cornered me in the bathroom, blocking the door. She told me she wouldn't tell anyone if I taught her too."

Eldin gave her another proud grin. Something about him made her feel warm and special. He was truly listening to her. Intently. As if her words mattered. Both men were. She wasn't used to a man even glancing her direction, let alone holding eye contact or speaking to her.

The only times she could remember a man speaking to her was to order her to do something. They never looked at her. She had no value to anyone except to be raised to reach an age when she could produce offspring for someone.

"So you started teaching that woman, and she imparted information about the outside world to you," Eldin summarized.

"Yes. It grew. Eventually I was teaching more women. Directly or indirectly. Often I gave lessons to one and she turned around and educated the others."

"And they're all stuck there in that damn prison," York pointed out. His voice was filled with frustration and disgust.

"Yes," she murmured. "I hate that I escaped. I hate that my dorm mom helped me escape, and she's still there."

Eldin reached for her hand again and entwined their fingers together. "I'm sorry."

Harmony wondered if there was any way to get them out. It wasn't a reasonable proposition of course. She wasn't even safe yet herself. It's not like two guys could show up with a

knife and free a hundred women and children. And then do what with them?

Harmony shook the idea from her mind and took a deep breath. "When do we leave?"

CHAPTER 4



York smirked at Eldin.

Eldin shot him a glare.

That only made York smirk deeper. He was probably just jealous though. After all, when Harmony had gotten exhausted from waiting, Eldin had folded up his jacket, set it on his lap, and encouraged her to curl up on her side and rest.

Harmony was out. She probably hadn't slept well in a long time. York knew he certainly wouldn't be sleeping well if he were counting down the days to an impending arranged marriage to a stranger.

He shuddered at the idea. He wouldn't even want to do it as a man. For a woman it had to be a horrifying proposition. It didn't matter how brainwashed the girls in that home were, it would still be daunting.

Which reminded him, somewhere in this godforsaken city was a man who was undoubtedly tearing up the city one block at a time looking for the breeder his parents had purchased for him.

Harmony had probably been sold and promised to someone years ago. The guy had been waiting for years for

tonight. Too bad for him, York and his partners had thwarted his plans.

“We need to leave soon,” he whispered. “It’s almost dark.”

Eldin nodded. He hadn’t taken his eyes off Harmony since she’d fallen asleep. In fact, he’d absently played with a lock of her hair for most of that time.

It had been a long time since Suzanne had died. The four of them had been hardened from the experience. They hadn’t said so in words, but York knew they all agreed they couldn’t go through something like that again.

As far as York knew, none of them had glanced twice at a woman in five years. Until today. Eldin might not admit it, but he was enchanted. York certainly was. Mykel and Blane hadn’t spent enough time with her to be under her spell, but they would be too as soon as they experienced a few hours in Harmony’s presence.

She was nothing like York had expected. She was fire and spunk. Life. Hope. Fresh air. Even though she’d spent eight years in captivity, it hadn’t killed her spirit. A light shined inside her. She wanted to live.

Her hope was contagious in a world where York didn’t often feel hopeful. Today he felt a spark of something he hadn’t felt in a long time. Maybe it was lust.

He needed to tamp it down and ignore it. They were not out of the woods yet. He wouldn’t breathe easily until they were about fifty miles outside of Virginia. This place was toxic. It was making his skin crawl.

Eldin set a hand on Harmony’s shoulder. “We need to leave,” he told her gently.

She flinched and sat up so fast she surely got a head rush. She glanced around, getting her bearings. “How long was I asleep?”

“An hour,” Eldin told her. He rose to his feet and shook out one leg.

York smirked again. His leg was probably asleep from Harmony cutting off the circulation. No way would he say anything, nor would he have jostled her to adjust his position.

York grabbed his backpack and tugged out a leather jacket. He handed it to Harmony. “It’s chilly outside. You might need this.”

“Thanks.” She shrugged into it.

It was hard not to stare at her for a few seconds. With the black jeans, black T-shirt, black leather jacket, and masses of black hair, she was a sight to behold.

Fierce. A fighter.

“I’m ready,” she declared. She reached out a hand. “I can carry that.”

York shrugged into the backpack and handed the other to Eldin. “We’ve got it.”

She nodded without argument.

“Stay close behind me,” York told her. “Eldin will bring up the rear. You can be the most bad-ass woman alive as soon as we get you to freedom, Harmony, but please don’t try to stray from my lead on this, okay?” He wanted to be firm without insulting her.

She gave him a nod. At least she wasn’t going to argue. He could tell she was itching to spread her wings. He had no idea how she’d managed to hide her true self for eight years, but

she must have. From what he'd heard, girls in those homes were expected to be demure and quiet. He doubted they cocked out a hip, rolled their eyes, and demanded equal rights.

After pushing through a side door, York looked both ways and then took off. He could hear Harmony and Eldin on his heels. They had a long way to go, and they had to do it on foot. He hoped she was up to it.

Who was he kidding? He knew she was. She would never complain.

York kept his eyes on every damn thing for the first five minutes. His heart was racing as he headed for the tree line on the other side of the main road. As soon as they got inside the trees, he would breathe easier. He didn't want to encounter anyone or get hung up between the warehouse and the trees.

If he'd had his way, they would have spent the last few hours ensconced in the foliage, but it hadn't been practical. They'd needed to hide the car. Plus there had been no guarantees about the weather. If they'd headed for the trees a while ago, they could have been caught in the rain and then been cold. Hypothermia wouldn't have done anyone a bit of good.

York drew in a deep breath and let it out the moment they were off the main road and out of sight. He reached back and grabbed Harmony's hand, giving it a tight squeeze. It had been instinctive. Nothing more. At least that's what he told himself.

She leaned close to him. "Now what?" she whispered.

He smiled to himself. This woman liked a play-by-play. That was for certain. And he thought she was fucking awesome. He turned toward her, pulled her against his side, and whispered, "Now we hike. It will take a while."

He was standing too close to her. It wasn't entirely necessary to keep his voice so low. He was also aware that Eldin was right against her back, also standing close.

Her breath hitched and she nodded. "I'm up for it. I promise."

"I'm not worried. We have time. We don't have to rush. Let me know if you need to slow down or take a break. We have water and protein bars too, if you get hungry."

They'd all eaten a bar before she'd fallen asleep, but he wasn't sure how much she'd eaten in the last few days.

"Thank you. I'm good. Let's go."

He couldn't help but smile as he turned and led the way deeper into the trees. He continued to hold her hand, telling himself it was because he didn't want to lose her in the dim lighting. It wasn't that damn dark though. He just liked holding her hand.

She was soft and hard at the same time. Smooth skin, soft in all the right places, but a strength about her that spoke of determination and tasted like freedom.

When she tripped over a stump, he caught her. Eldin also grabbed her hips and helped her back onto her feet. When she started breathing heavily, he stopped for a few minutes and pretended he too needed to catch his breath. When a scampering noise in the bushes made her flinch, he rubbed a hand up her back to soothe her.

Harmony was easy to be with. He liked her. A lot. Too much.

It took two hours to reach the fence line.

Harmony grabbed York's arm when he stopped. "How did you know where you were going? It seemed so haphazard."

He smiled at her. "I walked it four times in the past few weeks."

Her eyes widened in the light of the half moon. "To prepare for tonight?"

"Yes. I didn't want to risk fucking it up. We needed to be able to do it in the dark."

Eldin stepped closer. "York is our scout. He always figures out our escape routes and plans them."

"Thank you," she said reverently.

York pointed to the fence in front of them. "Do not touch any part of that fence. You'll get electrocuted. It won't kill you, but you'll wish you were dead."

She drew in a breath. "Got it. We're going under?"

York nodded. "Yes. The tunnel is narrow and crude. It's literally been burrowed out of the hard earth in this section. There's brush covering it on both sides. Are you claustrophobic?"

"I have no idea. I don't think so," she responded.

Eldin set a hand on her shoulder. "York will go first. You go behind him. I'll bring up the rear. We don't have to rush. Try to just breathe and don't think about it."

"Okay." She chewed on her bottom lip. She was nervous. She had every right to be.

"Where's my mom?"

"I'm not sure. She and Mykel and Blane will be crossing here too, but I can't know if they already did or if they are

behind us. We have a meeting location a few miles on the other side.”

“What if they’re not there?” she asked hesitantly.

“We wait.”

“How long?” she whispered.

“They’ll be there,” York assured her. He knew what she was referring to. What if they got caught and never made it. He refused to face that possibility, so he didn’t want her to either.

“I’m ready.”

Eldin set his hands on both her shoulders from behind and squeezed. “You’re the bravest woman I’ve ever met outside of The Wanderers. I know you can do this.”

“I can,” she insisted.

York switched his backpack from his back to his front and cinched it tight. It would be easier to carry it hanging in front of him. There wouldn’t be enough space for him to wear it on his back. He either had to drag it, shove it along in front, or wear it.

Eldin did the same.

“Let’s go.” York led them the last several yards to where he knew the opening was. He carefully lifted the haphazard pile of boards and slid it to the side before jumping down into the makeshift tunnel. This section was a bit wider than the rest of the journey would be. He could almost stand. He stepped to one side and turned to face Harmony. “Jump down. I’ve got you.”

She didn’t hesitate. She sat on the edge, let her feet hang, and shoved off.

York grabbed her by the waist on her way down to slow her fall and keep her from twisting an ankle. “Stay right behind me.” He headed into the dark tunnel on his hands and knees. It was going to be stressful for her. Hell, it was stressful for anyone.

A moment later, he knew Eldin was in. He heard the boards being dragged back over the entrance.

“Jesus. I can’t see a thing,” she murmured.

“It’s a straight shot,” he told her over his shoulder. “You might prefer to close your eyes. Pretend you’re wearing a blindfold and we’re playing a childhood game.”

“What kind of childhood games did you play in dark tunnels with blindfolds?” she quipped.

Eldin chuckled behind her.

York crawled as fast as he could. It was going to take some time. He didn’t want to rush her, but he didn’t want to be in this damn tunnel any longer than necessary either.

He hadn’t mentioned it out loud, but there was always the possibility they would encounter small animals or snakes. Certainly worms. Possibly mice.

Sure enough, a few moments later, a scampering sound up ahead made him pause.

“Jesus. What is that?” she hissed.

The squeaking noise that followed told him it was a rat.

Harmony also squealed less than a second later.

York twisted around and grabbed her shoulder before covering her mouth. She was breathing heavily. In retrospect

he probably should have warned her. She'd have been more prepared.

“Shh,” he soothed as she relaxed. He lowered his hand. “I’m sorry. I should have mentioned the rats.” He slid a hand to the back of her head.

“Scared me to death. Anything else I need to know?”

“Probably, but let’s keep going. Try not to make a sound. I can’t be certain there aren’t people on the other side. We don’t want to be heard.”

“I’ll be as quiet as a mouse,” she murmured sarcastically.

He could smile. Neither of them could see him.

“One question,” she muttered. “Is anything dangerous or poisonous?”

Eldin was quick to answer. “No.”

“Snakes?”

Eldin followed up with, “Not likely, and if they are, they’ll be garden snakes. Nothing harmful.” He was probably making this shit up, but if it worked, York was okay with that. He wasn’t positive about the varieties of snakes in this area, but this tunnel was used by a lot of people. It was unlikely they’d continued to use it if it was filled with anything that harmful.

They kept inching forward in silence. The only sound was the heavy breathing of all three of them. There were a few more rats, but Harmony didn’t react or pause. The good news was as soon as the rats sensed the threat, they scurried away in the opposite direction. They were far more scared of the invaders of their space than vice versa.

“We’re almost there,” York shot over his shoulder when he caught a glimpse of light up ahead. Just a few more yards and

they could get out of this hole.

Suddenly, he heard a noise. He stopped and reached back a hand to grab Harmony. Luckily he managed to wrap his fingers around her arm. He hoped she would understand his meaning.

“Fuck,” Eldin whispered almost imperceptibly.

York cringed a moment later when he heard voices. *God dammit*. His heart rate picked up and he slowly turned his body so he was sitting, leaning against the dirt wall. He had to bend his head forward. The tunnel wasn't tall enough for him to sit upright.

Harmony crawled up to his side and wrapped her arm around his. She leaned into him, not saying a word. Bless her.

When Eldin's foot bumped into York's, York knew his friend was crowding Harmony from the other side, sandwiching her.

More voices. Indistinct. This was a bad sign. Very bad. This area should be completely deserted. No one from The Republic was aware of the tunnel, at least as far as York was informed.

A thousand possibilities ran through his mind, ranging from Mykel and Blane having been discovered with Marian to an increased level of security surrounding the town, hoping they would catch Harmony.

York was comforted by the fact that no one had entered the tunnel. Not even a light source other than the occasional flicker from roaming flashlights. He cupped Harmony's cheek and brought his lips to her ear. “You okay?” he whispered.

She nodded.

“We will wait.”

She nodded again.

York removed the backpack from his shoulders and slid it to the dirt. At least they had water and food. He also had a blanket if it got colder.

The longer they sat and waited, the more confident he was that no one above ground was aware of the tunnel or the three fugitives right under their noses. They needed patience and stamina. Tough things to ask for in a fucking dark, cold dirt tunnel.

Harmony snuggled up closer to him, wrapping her arm all around his and holding on tight. She was stressed. He couldn't blame her. He wasn't much better.

Eldin's hand came around her from the other side. His fingers brushed against York's elbow. Their heads were so close together that York could hear Eldin whisper, “Close your eyes, hon. Deep breaths. We're going to make it. It's just going to take a bit longer than expected.”

She nodded and audibly breathed in and out. She hadn't said a single word. She probably didn't trust herself not to panic.

It was going to be a long night. Possibly longer. Where were the others? Behind or ahead? Captured or safe?

So many questions. York also took several deep breaths. No sense worrying about the unknown. He'd been in scarier situations than this before. All of his partners had at one time or another.

They would make it. They always did. They had to.

No way in hell was he going to let anything happen to Harmony. They'd come so close to freedom.

Granted, the other side of this fence was only marginally less scary. It wasn't as though there weren't a hundred different threats outside the city. Even more than they'd encountered inside.

What York and all three other men were counting on was that the authorities would expect Harmony to be holed up somewhere inside the city. Escaping was too difficult and too risky. They would put all their effort into scouring homes and abandoned buildings.

Why then were they patrolling the other side of the fence?

CHAPTER 5



Harmony was okay for the first hour or so. At least that's what she told herself. It was hard to know for sure if it had really been an hour. She had no way of gauging the passage of time.

She was cold from sitting so long in the damp tunnel. Even though she was sandwiched between two men, she couldn't shake the chill. She was grateful for the leather jacket and even more grateful for the jeans.

Eldin had pulled out a blanket and draped it over the three of them, but it wasn't enough. Thank God the temperature wasn't lower than it was.

Voices came and went, sometimes closer, sometimes farther away. It was apparent The Republic was pacing the perimeter of the city. How long would they continue to do so?

"You're freezing," York whispered. He lifted his arm out from between them and wrapped it around her shoulders instead.

"I'm okay," she murmured. They had decided there was no way anyone could hear them if they kept their voices low. After all, they couldn't hear specific words even when the guards got their closest.

Her words said one thing, but she scooted closer to York as soon as he moved his arm, snuggling up against his chest. All three of them had scooted down so they were sort of lying uncomfortably on their backs, heads bent against one wall, knees bent with their feet braced against the opposite wall.

Harmony inhaled slowly, drawing in more and more of York's scent as the minutes passed. She'd learned Eldin's scent too. Both were becoming intoxicating. She hadn't been this close to a man in eight years. Even before that, she'd rarely been around men.

She'd known Braylon's father and several of his employees. Sometimes she'd seen Storm's father. Not to mention Bray and Riggs had been seventeen when she'd been taken. Nearly men. Not fully grown, but close to adulthood. Storm had been nineteen, already huge, already assigned as Bray's bodyguard even if it hadn't been official.

The boys she'd grown up with didn't count, however. They were more like big brothers to her. They sometimes teased and wrestled her, but as kids, nothing more.

These two men flanking her were totally in her space, and she found herself enjoying their touch. There was something comforting about having a firm male body or two against her. They made her feel protected. They helped keep her from panicking in the face of the unknown on the other side of this tunnel.

She could feel their breath on her neck every time one of them whispered in her ears. Warm, sweet, disarming.

Of course she'd never been kissed. Who the hell would she have kissed? Sometimes the girls giggled and joked about kissing each other, but as far as she knew, no one ever took

that kind of risk. If they'd gotten caught, there was no telling what the punishment might have been.

The main reason for keeping girls sequestered in those homes was to ensure purity, and that extended to everything sexual. They weren't told a thing about what to expect on their wedding nights, but they were told many times not to touch themselves or each other inappropriately.

Luckily for Harmony, her mother had spent countless hours telling her every single detail about sex and how babies were made. She didn't want her to be married off to a man without a clue of what to expect.

At the time, Harmony had been mostly horrified, but she understood the importance of her mother's words, and hung on to every detail, never forgetting. When she'd started educating the other girls so they could read and write, she had found herself also teaching them about what to expect on their wedding nights.

Once the other girls realized Harmony had an extensive education in her back pocket, they asked her anything they could think of. If she knew, she told them. After all, education was power. That included not heading blind into their marital beds. How barbaric.

"I've never been kissed," she muttered, partly to herself.

Both men flinched at her sides.

"Uhhh, I didn't figure you had," Eldin whispered. "That's basically the primary reason for those stupid girls' homes."

"Yeah..." She tipped her head back. It was too dark to see either of their faces distinctly, but she knew only inches separated them. "I think I'd like to be kissed." Suddenly it seemed important.

York cleared his throat and murmured, "I'm sure you will eventually, sweetness. We're going to get you out of here and take you far away where you can make your own decisions about when and who you want to kiss."

She sighed. "I already know when and who I want to kiss."

Both men stiffened. Eldin adjusted his body against hers.

She licked her lips, prepared to make her case. "I'm not a wilting flower. You said so yourselves. I heard you muttering about me as I was falling asleep earlier. You said I was a strong woman. I am. Both strong and a woman. I may have lived a weird sheltered life, but I'm not ignorant. I'm capable of making my own decisions."

York rubbed her arm. "I know you are, sweetness."

She smiled. She loved the way he called her sweetness. Eldin had called her hon. She'd liked that too.

Eldin spoke next. "You've only really met two men so far. You shouldn't feel rushed to kiss one of us."

"I don't feel rushed, and I don't want to kiss one of you. I want to kiss both of you. If I don't, how will I be able to compare?"

Eldin groaned softly. "Hon..."

"There are no guarantees in this life. We might get caught. This could be my last hour of freedom. If those men never stop guarding this tunnel, eventually we'll have to come out. I'll be captured. God knows what they'll do to or with me. I might be returned to the man I was supposed to marry, or I might be considered too soiled. I might be sent to a breeding facility. Do you have any idea what those are like?"

Eldin's breath hitched. "We've heard stories. We won't let that happen to you. Why do you know what they're like?"

"Because the dorm mother told us. She told us over and over to scare us into behaving so we wouldn't get sent to one." She shuddered. "I doubt anyone gets kissed at those facilities. I don't think they even let the women see the barbarian who fucks them."

York stiffened. "Though you did use that word correctly, I didn't know you knew words like that."

"I was twelve when I was taken. Remember? I lived with three older brothers. I know cuss words. Are you going to kiss me?"

York cupped her face. His thumb glided over her bottom lip. "Sweetness, don't take this the wrong way. I'd love nothing more than to kiss you. I'm sure Eldin would too. But you're not really in the right frame of mind to make such a decision. You're tired and hungry and cold and scared and not thinking clearly. I wouldn't want you to regret it later."

She groaned and swatted his hand away before rising up between them and leaning down so her face hovered above York's. This time she cupped his cheek and stroked his lips with her thumb. "Don't insult me. I know my mind. If you don't want to kiss me, that's fine, but don't act like I'm not capable of making a sound decision about my own lips. I'm not asking you to strip my clothes off and take my virginity. I'm asking you to show me what it feels like to be kissed, preferably by someone who isn't an asshole."

She didn't care that she was cussing. She hadn't used bad language in a very long time, but she knew all the words, and she damn well could use them if she wanted to. She was kind

of angry right now, but mostly humiliated. If they turned her down, she would feel like a child.

Eldin set a hand on her back and smoothed it up behind her neck.

She jerked her attention toward him. “If you start lecturing me too, I might die.”

“I won’t, hon. We didn’t mean to insult you. We would be honored to kiss you. If that’s what you want.”

“I wouldn’t have asked if I wasn’t sure,” she pointed out as she turned to drop back down between them. It was their decision now. She wasn’t going to beg.

Both men adjusted themselves so they were facing her, crowding her. Hands were on her, both men settling a hand over her stomach. They didn’t seem to mind they were touching each other.

Suddenly, she needed to know something. “In your family units, do you uh...”

Eldin slid his hand up to her neck. “If you’re asking if the four of us have an intimate relationship with each other, no, we don’t. Some men do. We certainly don’t judge other relationships. But the four of us focused all of our attention on Suzanne when she was alive. Sometimes we were all together. We aren’t worried about being naked together or bumping into each other, but our intentions don’t extend past that.”

“Oh.” It was so complicated. If she hadn’t had a top-notch education from her mother, she might not have had the knowledge to know a relationship between the men was even something to consider. Plus, if it weren’t for her mom, she might have thought it was taboo.

She prayed she would get the chance to see her mother and tell her how much she appreciated the education she'd been given. She'd silently cried herself to sleep hundreds of times wishing for one more hour with her mother.

Now it might actually be possible. If only they survived this night. And if her mother did too. She hoped to God her mother and the other two men who'd rescued them were already safe on the other side.

Safe was a relative term. She was well aware, but freedom was the important thing. It was more important than anything.

It was Eldin who leaned in closer to her face and kissed her cheek. "You want to feel my lips against yours, hon?"

"Yes," she breathed, already anticipating the touch with his face so close and his breath mingling with hers.

He nibbled a path from her cheek to her mouth, finally giving her a very gentle kiss. First one and then another.

Her first thought was how intimate the action felt. She hadn't expected that. She'd gone into this experiment with a more clinical process in mind, as if she was going to find out how mouths felt, but this was so much more.

After several sweet kisses, which she eventually managed to return, he licked along the seam of her lips. "Do you want more?"

There was more? "Yes," she whispered against him.

"Open your mouth for me, hon. Let me taste you."

She parted her lips, shocked when his tongue slid inside. He was slow and careful, but he stroked her tongue and along the edges of her teeth while her mind scrambled to keep up.

She grabbed his forearm, willing him to continue.

“Mmmm,” he murmured against her before he angled his head to one side and deepened the kiss.

Something inside of her unraveled. Her body felt like it had been strung so tight for so many hours, or maybe for her entire life. She felt an odd stirring inside her as if there was more, and she wanted to know what the more was.

She understood the mechanics, but she hadn't anticipated the feelings.

When he finally leaned back, he did so slowly. He was breathing heavily. Or maybe *she* was. Perhaps both. It seemed loud in the tunnel. It was just breathing.

She swallowed and licked her swollen lips. “Oh.”

He chuckled and gave her one last kiss. “You better kiss York too. Maybe he's better at it than me.”

She giggled softly, an odd unusual sound she hadn't heard in so long she'd forgotten what it felt like bubbling up from inside.

Eldin leaned back.

York rolled toward her. He cupped her face. “Have you had enough kissing?”

“No.” She didn't think she'd ever get enough kissing now that she'd tasted it. Perhaps she'd have been better off ignorant. If she got caught, this experience would be both a blessing and a curse. If she didn't get caught...

Then what? Was this a one-time thing? Would Eldin be interested in kissing her again? Maybe he was just being kind. Patronizing even.

She shoved concerns for the future from her mind and set her hand on the back of York's neck to pull him closer. It was

clear these two men didn't mind both of them kissing her, so she wasn't going to worry about that weirdness right now either.

York was more aggressive. He kissed her with more pressure and sucked her bottom lip in between his a moment later. The tug caused a whimper to escape her mouth, and she dug her fingers into his neck to hold him against her.

York groaned softly. She figured he would have unleashed something louder if it wouldn't have endangered their lives. It was obvious he was restraining himself. He kissed like he might never get another chance, sucking gently on her lips and then her tongue.

His kiss was more demanding, but she loved it just as much. She loved how he held her with his other hand, stroking her neck and her cheek. She loved how he consumed her as if she was his sole focus in life.

When he eased back, he did so growling as though he would have rather not.

She was panting now, and she reached for Eldin's hand to clasp it, wanting him to be as much a part of this, hating that she'd had these two encounters completely in the dark where she was unable to see their faces.

She had the oddest sensation that she'd rather neither of them feel left out. Bizarre. Before today, she hadn't ever considered being shared by more than one person. Not for herself or anyone. The thought was foreign to her.

Granted, she hadn't considered being with even one man, let alone two. Or four. A shiver raced down her spine as she reminded herself there were two more men in this family unit.

Harmony had known for a long time she would be married to someone. A stranger. Someone who may or may not have treated her with any sort of kindness. She hadn't let herself think about what it might be like or dwell on the fear. If she had, she'd have ended up vomiting her dinner nearly every night.

She'd escaped. Braylon, Riggs, and Storm had sent four men to rescue her. It was still mind boggling. She couldn't wrap her head around it. She hadn't seen them in eight years, and yet they'd sent help for her.

She smiled, feeling blessed as she rolled onto her side and settled her head against Eldin's chest. York rolled against her from behind and wrapped an arm around her, clasping her hand between them with his.

"Was it what you expected?" York asked.

"So much more," she whispered. "So much more. Thank you."

"You're welcome, hon," Eldin responded as he kissed the top of her head. "Any time."

She giggled. "So you'll do it again?"

He groaned. "I don't think I'd ever be able to turn you down. Do not doubt that for a single second. I'm pretty sure you reached in and snagged my heart the moment you jumped out of that SUV all fierce and ready to run. It was unexpected."

"It was hot," York added.

She smiled wider. "You like strong women?"

"Definitely."

"Was Suzanne a strong, fierce woman?"

“To the end,” Eldin confirmed.

“How did she die?” Harmony asked, hoping she wasn’t bringing up a subject that would upset them too much.

“She was shot. She was rescuing a woman and her newborn child and she was shot in the back,” York informed her quietly. He held her tighter.

“I’m so sorry.”

“It’s been five years,” Eldin murmured. “It hurts, but the pain has dulled. We keep doing what we do because it’s what she would have wanted.”

“What happened to the woman and the baby?”

“We saved them,” York confirmed. “It wasn’t pretty. I’m sure the woman still has nightmares. We weren’t kind to the man who shot Suzanne.”

Harmony winced. “He deserved whatever you did to him.”

Neither man responded. She assumed it had been ugly. She couldn’t blame them.

Harmony closed her eyes and took several deep breaths. Part of her wished they could kiss again. It had been amazing and had temporarily taken her mind off their problems.

Those two kisses had probably ruined her too. She struggled to imagine ever wanting someone else to kiss her like that. Except when she thought of the two men from the front seat of the car. She’d met them both so briefly, but they were a package deal. Mykel with his blond hair and piercing blue eyes. Blane with his brown hair and green eyes.

The two men with her right now were very different from the other two and each other, and yet, all four of them were attractive and would catch any woman’s attention.

Eldin was dark-skinned with black hair and dark eyes. York had light skin and brown eyes. His hair was brown and slightly curly. She wanted to run her fingers through it. And where was that idea coming from?

They held her between them as if she were the most important person on Earth. Would they have done that with any woman? Considering they hadn't taken on another partner in five years, she had to suspect they'd been selective and skittish.

On the other hand, just because they didn't currently have a permanent female companion in their lives didn't mean they didn't have sex with women sometimes. Maybe they treated other women like this, with gentle caring.

She didn't have the guts to ask. She'd rather consider herself special for the time being.

"Try to sleep for a while," Eldin encouraged, running his hand through her hair. It was a tangled mess. She hadn't touched it since it had fallen out of the updo meant for the wedding. Some random clips were probably stuck in the middle of it. If she had a hairband, she would pull it up on top of her head, but she hadn't escaped in her wedding gown with an overnight bag. She had nothing. Not one possession.

Of course she didn't have any possessions to begin with. She hadn't even had her own clothes for eight years. Everyone wore the same drab brown dresses in the girls' home. Each day they just put on one in their size. When they went to the laundry, they never returned to the same person.

She shuddered at the memory. She'd been wearing that dress just this morning before she'd been given the wedding dress. That seemed like ages ago.

York pulled the blanket back over the three of them.
“Rest,” he encouraged.

She closed her eyes and thought warm thoughts. It wasn't hard with two large men's body heat surrounding her.

CHAPTER 6



York reached for Eldin a few hours later, verifying his friend was also awake.

“Yeah, I noticed. What do you think?” Eldin whispered.

There hadn’t been a single voice in over thirty minutes. Was it possible the guards had left the area?

York thought they should move. “I’ll go first. Make sure it’s safe. Check out the area a bit.”

“Okay.”

Harmony made a small sound and shifted her weight. “Are we leaving?”

“I think so,” York told her. “Stay here with Eldin for a few minutes. Let me make sure the coast is clear. I’ll be right back.”

“Be careful,” Eldin said. “Your legs are going to be stiff.”

“I think mine are numb,” Harmony murmured.

York gave her thigh a squeeze. “Hang tight just a few more minutes, sweetness.” At the last second, he decided to lean over her and kiss her forehead. He lingered a second. He cared about her. He didn’t want this mission to go badly. If it did, he

just might die trying to save her. In a few short hours, she'd begun to mean something to him. She wasn't a random rescue.

It was dangerous. Caring. It affected his judgment. The last time he'd cared about a woman, she'd gotten killed.

Taking a deep breath, he forced himself to shake the sad memory from his mind. He needed to move.

After snagging his backpack and fastening it to his front, he crawled the last few yards to the exit. Carefully pushing the wooden, camouflaged cover a few inches to one side, he rose up and silently stuck his head out.

Holding his breath, he scanned the area. Nothing. Not a soul in sight. Not even a pillar of smoke in the vicinity. He pushed the cover the rest of the way off, planted his hands on the ground above him, and hauled himself up out of the tunnel.

He was as quiet as possible, not even disturbing a leaf. No one was in sight. Was that a good sign? Or were they hiding somewhere nearby, lying in wait, knowing Harmony would be smuggled out of the city in this area?

That was preposterous. There was no reason for anyone to suspect what side of the city they would leave from. Not only that, but as far as The Republic was concerned, Harmony could just as easily be hiding in a basement.

York rose to his full height, turning slowly in every direction. When he still saw no evidence of humans, he pulled the cover back over the hole and moved in the direction of freedom. He didn't want to take too much time, but on the other hand, if he got caught, he didn't want whoever discovered him to know he was traveling with other people.

Harmony who? I have no idea what you're talking about. I'm on a supply run for my boss.

There was a road not far from this location, and he headed that direction. If there were cars parked on the shoulder, that would indicate people were in the area. If not, he would feel more confident they were safe.

When he felt more certain, he started jogging toward the road. Nothing. No one. It seemed whoever had been patrolling this section had moved on.

He rushed back to the tunnel and pulled the cover aside. "Let's go," he muttered as loud as he dared.

Eldin and Harmony stood below him moments later. Eldin grabbed her around the waist and lifted her up. York reached under her arms to finish the job. Eldin hauled himself out a moment later. "Let's move. I don't like this."

"You and me both." York took Harmony's hand. "Your legs okay?"

"I think so."

He knew they would be stiff, perhaps even tingly. The kinks would work themselves out. "As quiet as possible, but fast." He took off at a slight jog, keeping Harmony's hand in his, glancing at her frequently to make sure she was keeping up.

Harmony stayed right by his side, scanning the area. She was smart. She knew the danger they were in. She didn't say a word or complain one time, and York kept up the pace for fifteen minutes before pausing in a dense section of trees.

He pulled Harmony into his arms. It was instinctive. He couldn't keep from touching her. He needed to hold her and know she was okay. He needed to feel her heartbeat and... Jeez. He didn't know why he was touching her.

She leaned into him, breathing heavily.

Eldin wasn't immune. He set a hand on her back. "You okay?"

They asked her that a lot. She nodded. "Yes."

Eldin pulled out water from his backpack and opened a bottle, handing it to her first.

Harmony leaned back a few inches and took the bottle from him. She drank sparingly and glanced around. "Do you think I could uh..."

"Yeah," Eldin said. "Let's find a spot."

Of course she needed to pee. York did too. He spun around and chose a bush. "Go right there. We'll turn around."

"Okay." She didn't hesitate. She hurried to the spot just behind a bush.

York rounded with her and faced one direction, leaving Eldin to face the other direction.

"Done. Thanks. I've needed to go for hours."

"Sorry." York winced. He hated her being uncomfortable, but there hadn't been a lot they could do in that cramped space in the tunnel except perhaps backtrack a ways and just pee in the tunnel.

Eldin used a tree next and then York. Both men took a drink of water.

"Can you keep going?"

Harmony shot him a narrow-eyed half-grin. "I'm not a wilting flower, remember?"

He smirked. "I will try not to forget. It's a ways to the location where we're supposed to meet your mom, Mykel, and

Blane. I'd like to get there as soon as possible. If they made it out before us, they have to be worried."

"Let's go then," she said.

They took off again, maintaining a good pace, half speed walking, half jogging.

"Will you teach me how to know directions so well when we get where we're going?" she asked, glancing at York.

"Absolutely." His chest tightened at the thought of her maintaining some sort of relationship with them after they arrived at the bunker. Did she really want that? Hell. Did he? He hadn't considered adding a woman to his life for a very long time.

He needed to stop thinking of her in those terms. She'd been in a fucking girls' prison for eight years. She was barely twenty. He had no business planning anything except making sure she was free to live her life and make her own choices.

"Will you teach me how to use a gun?" She pointed at the back of his jeans where he'd tucked his gun when they'd taken off.

He glanced at her again, his mouth opening to tell her *fuck, no*. But he stopped himself. Guns were a necessary part of life. Even the weakest among The Wanderers learned to shoot. It could mean the difference between life and death someday.

Harmony was by far not the weakest among any group of people. She was strong-willed and eager. It hadn't been a full day since he'd rescued her, and already she was plotting her future.

"I'll teach you anything you want to learn, Harmony. We all will."

She nodded. “Good. I know I’ve been sheltered, and there are a lot of things I don’t know, but I’m quick. I learn fast. I’ll catch up. I swear. Don’t underestimate me.”

He chuckled and grabbed her hand, bringing it to his lips.

Eldin laughed too. “We would never underestimate you.”

It took another hour through rough terrain to get where they were going. With every passing moment, York felt his body loosening. The more distance they put between them and The Republic, the better.

He slowed and stopped when they were close, holding out a hand to stop Harmony too.

Eldin held a finger to his lips. He nodded at York, silently communicating that he would stay behind with Harmony.

York returned the nod and picked his way carefully through the last of the trees and branches to get to the shack. When he could see it more clearly, he breathed a sigh of relief.

There were three rocks sitting outside the door, the sign they’d agreed on years ago to indicate three people were inside and all was well. Still, he didn’t take any chances. He stepped into the clearing and slowly moved closer.

If Mykel and Blane were inside, one of them would be on watch, looking through the cracks in the rickety shelter until they spotted the rest of them.

Suddenly the door opened. Mykel stepped outside, a grin splitting his face. “About time.” He looked past York, his smile flattening. “You’re not alone, are you?”

York finished closing the distance and slapped Mykel on the shoulder before leaning his head into the shack. What he

found made him take a huge breath of relief. A woman and Blane.

“Nope. I’m not alone.” He turned around and waved toward the tree line.

Moments later, Harmony and Eldin stepped into the clearing.

Marian had stood from where she’d been sitting in the corner. She rushed past York, paused, gasped, and then ran to her daughter. York’s heart skipped a beat as he watched the reunion.

This. This was why they did what they did.

CHAPTER 7



Blane couldn't stop smiling. He wasn't usually the sort of person who smiled all the time. The world simply wasn't a kind enough place to allow happiness to seep in very often. But he'd been smiling since Harmony had arrived.

Seeing how happy Marian was made his heart fill up for the first time in years. Sure, he and his partners rescued and helped women find safety all the time, but they'd never been a part of this sort of rescue—one where a mother and daughter had been savagely separated for eight years.

Every time he glanced at the rest of his partners, he found their faces lit up too. Marian though... He thought she might collapse from happiness. She hadn't stopped hugging Harmony since they'd arrived. She kept cupping her daughter's face and telling her how grown up she was and how tall and how proud she was of her.

It almost felt invasive to intrude on the reunion, but leaving them alone would be unsafe. In fact, they needed to keep moving. A few minutes of happy tears were all they had time for.

Keeping an eye on Marian and Harmony, Blane stepped outside of the rickety shack and joined the rest of the guys.

Eldin was pacing and running a hand through his hair as he explained what had delayed them and how lucky they were to have eventually managed to escape.

“We must have gotten through the tunnel before the guards showed up,” Mykel said. “We’ve been worried about you.”

“Understatement,” Blane added. They’d been in a near panic, trying not to freak Marian out for the past several hours. “How fast did you move getting here? Do you need to rest before we take off?” He glanced at Harmony. She was the real concern. He knew Eldin and York could run ten miles right now no matter how fast they’d hustled to get here.

York smirked and shook his head. “I know you’re not worried about *my* stamina.” He nodded toward the open shack. “And you don’t need to worry about hers either. She’s... tough.”

York’s gaze lingered on the shack.

When Blane shifted his attention to Eldin, he found him also staring at the shack.

He lifted his brows and glanced at Mykel. “Did we miss something?”

York jerked his attention to Blane. “Yes.” That was all he said. “We should get going.” He tipped his head back. “We need the daylight in our favor. We can stop at night again.”

Mykel lifted his brows too. “That’s all you’re going to say? Yes? Care to elaborate?”

“Not here, and not now, and not in front of Harmony and Marian.” This came from Eldin.

Mykel sighed. “Should we be worried?”

Eldin drew in a breath. “Probably.”

Blane glanced back and forth between Eldin and York. “What should we be worried about?”

“Your hearts.”

Blane set both hands on his head, too stunned for words as Eldin and York passed by him to lean into the shack. Blane glanced at Mykel, whose mouth was hanging open.

Lord. Apparently they’d both missed out. How had Eldin and York managed to fall half in love with a woman they met less than twenty-four hours ago? Then again, when Blane looked at Harmony with her long gorgeous hair and a smile on her face, he decided it probably hadn’t been too difficult. She radiated life.

Blane shuddered. It had been five years since they’d lost Suzanne. A long time and also a blink of an eye. He missed her every day. They all did. They didn’t discuss it very often anymore, but they mourned her loss. It had been profound and intense.

They’d loved her dearly. It wasn’t surprising they’d never looked twice at another woman since Suzanne. She’d been the light and the life force of their family. No one could replace her. They all knew it.

Was it time to move on?

Harmony wouldn’t replace anyone. She was her own person. If she was as formidable as Eldin and York seemed to believe, Blane would keep an open mind. He suspected Mykel would too.

Blane was still rooted to his spot, stunned and uncertain when York handed him his pack.

“What’s the plan?” Harmony asked. She had taken her mother’s backpack and strapped it onto her shoulders. Blane

knew it was mostly filled with things Marian had kept for Harmony over the years.

It would appear that Harmony was in pretty good physical condition. They'd be able to move faster if Marian weren't carrying the extra weight. She was also in good shape for a middle-aged woman, but she'd still be able to move faster without the added burden.

"We're heading west," York informed her. "As fast as we can. We'll stop at several outposts and private homes along the way."

Harmony nodded. "I guess we better move then."

Marian grabbed her hand. "You sure you're ready? You've been walking all morning."

Harmony hugged her mom. "Every step west is another step that loosens my lungs so I can breathe. We're not safe out here. I won't rest until I feel like we're far enough away that we can't be easily found. People are looking for us. Probably dozens of them. The family who bought me lost a lot of money yesterday when their incubator didn't show up."

Blane flinched at the way she referred to herself as an incubator. He supposed she wasn't wrong, but it was shocking how blunt she was able to be about it. She'd been full of surprises from the moment they'd picked her up, apparently more surprises than he was even aware of, judging by the way he now noticed Eldin and York watching her.



Blane continued to be impressed as they put miles behind them. They walked all day, stopping only briefly every hour or

so to relieve themselves behind a bush or grab a bite to eat from one of the packs.

Harmony and Marian spent most of that time talking, catching up, getting to know each other. It was fascinating learning what Harmony had been through, how she'd survived the last eight years.

She was definitely a beam of light. He could see that. She was unstoppable. She'd taught many people to read and write. She'd ensured she was strong by using every opportunity she had to build muscle and get cardio.

Most of what Harmony knew and the reason she'd worked hard all these years was a gift from Marian. Her mother had packed her twelve-year-old mind with every single thing she could think of before they'd been separated, arming her daughter with information that would ensure she had the grit to handle any situation.

And damn. Harmony was handling this better than any woman Blane had ever met in all his thirty-two years. The only tears she'd shed had been tears of joy. She wasn't angry or vindictive. She simply wanted what any human being wanted—a chance to live life on her own terms.

Harmony asked her mother a million questions about Braylon, Riggs, and Storm. She seemed genuinely excited to learn that the three of them had formed their own family with Rush and were having a baby together.

Marian told all of them stories about Rush's captivity in the Hanson basement and how Bray and the others had fallen in love with Haley. How they doted on her and put their own lives at risk to save her and themselves.

The continued flow of information between mother and daughter made the miles pass by quickly while providing Blane with insight into Harmony's personality. Her likes and dislikes. He had about a hundred questions about what had transpired between her and Eldin and York, but he didn't have an opportunity to ask.

He and Mykel exchanged glances now and then, both of them confused and curious. Whatever had transpired between the other three last night had occurred largely in a cramped, dark tunnel. How hard could two men fall for a woman in those conditions?

But as the day wore on, Blane began to understand. Harmony was magnetic. Who wouldn't fall under her spell?

It was chilly outside, and the temperature continued to drop throughout the day. A cold front was coming in. They didn't have time to slow down. They couldn't risk being caught outside in cold rain or snow.

Finally, as the sun was going down, Blane pointed at a farm they were approaching. "That's a safehouse. We're going to spend the night there." He tipped his head back and looked at the sky, hoping a night was all they would need to stay. If the weather turned drastically, they'd have to stay longer.

The sun was almost gone by the time they got close enough to see the farmhouse distinctly. There were no lights on inside, but a single burning candle in the upstairs window was the sign they needed to know it was safe to approach.

Blane and his partners had stayed there a night on their way toward the city. They'd met the two men who lived there. They also suspected there was a woman, but the men did a great job of keeping her out of sight, leaving no sign of her existence anywhere.

It wouldn't be surprising. If these folks had owned this land for many years and worked it for most of their lives, they were probably reluctant to leave even though they lived relatively close to the godforsaken territory that housed The Republic. If they had a woman, they would have spent the last twenty or so years ensuring she would not be taken from them.

It was a horrible way to live, always hiding, always worried, always on edge, but it was life, and people had adapted.

Before they reached the front door, it opened, and a man Blane knew as Richard stepped out onto the porch. He waved frantically. "Hurry. Get inside. Run."

They all rushed forward, getting into the front room in seconds before Richard shut the door. The other man, Eddie, was pulling a heavy table across the room.

Blane hurried forward to help him. He hadn't known for sure if there was a bunker under the house, but he wasn't surprised. The bunker the four of them had stayed in when they'd last been here had been a short distance from the house, the entrance hidden in the middle of the field of crops.

What Blane and his partners had noticed was a door on one side of the bunker. It had been locked. Eddie had told them it had been a storage closet. Blane suspected it had actually been a tunnel leading to the main house, but none of them had questioned their gracious hosts.

"Has there been trouble?" Mykel asked.

Richard nodded. "Armed members of The Republic have been here three times in the past day and a half. We've never been under such suspicion before. We assumed they were

looking for someone and whoever that was would be along eventually. I guess that's you."

Mykel sighed. "Yes. We don't want to endanger you folks. We can keep moving."

Richard shook his head. "You can't. For one thing, the area is crawling with soldiers. For another thing, the weather report we're hearing on the radio is bad. You folks don't have enough supplies to withstand the snowstorm they're predicting."

"It's so early in the year for snow," Blane commented as he continued to help Eddie. If there was a trap door under this table, by God it was well concealed. He could see no evidence of it.

"It is," Eddie agreed. "And yet, Mother Nature has her own timetable."

Harmony and Marian were huddled together, staying out of the way.

"You'll be safe here," Richard continued. "But you might want to get cozy. It could be a while. And..." He glanced at Eddie and rubbed his temples.

Eddie nodded.

Richard drew in a breath. "You'll be joining our wife in this bunker."

Blane set a hand on Eddie's shoulder. "We will never breathe a word of her existence to a living soul. You have our word."

Eddie nodded. "Let's get this door open and get you folks downstairs. It's rustic, as you know. There's a small room directly under the house. If you leave the women there with my wife, the rest of you can make your way to the larger room

you stayed in last time you were here. Neither space is large enough to accommodate six people. Richard and I will stay up here and make nice with the damn soldiers when they inevitably come again. They don't stay long. They inquire if we've seen anyone and then move on. They seem to find us trustworthy."

"We really appreciate your kindness," Blane said. "We'll never be able to thank you enough."

Richard waved a hand through the air. "No thanks needed. We understand. The horrors of The Republic are more than we can bear. We'd do anything to help even one person get to freedom." He glanced at Marian and Harmony. "It would seem we're saving two this time."

Harmony cleared her throat. "Thank you."

When Eddie brushed off a nearly unperceivable piece of wood and then pulled it out of the floor, Blane smiled. Ingenious. He uncovered a lever and lifted a large panel up into the room.

"There's enough food and water for several days down there. Blankets. Extra clothes. It might get cold," Richard said. He climbed down in front of them.

Blane was closest so he followed down the ladder next. Sure enough, there was a woman who was approximately fifty waiting at the bottom of the stairs. Richard was cupping her face and explaining the situation, tenderly kissing her several times.

Blane felt like he was intruding in a personal moment as he turned around and helped Marian to the floor. Harmony followed, and then the rest of his partners. It was tight. The room was small.

“Welcome. I’m Judy.” The woman held out a hand.

Marian stepped forward to shake hers, sandwiching Judy’s hand with her other on top. “We’re so grateful for your help.”

Judy smiled. “It’s what we do. Just knowing we helped in some way warms my heart every time.”

Harmony hugged the woman. Damn, she was amazing. Blane was quickly beginning to understand why something might have happened between Eldin, York, and this ray of sunshine.

CHAPTER 8



Harmony turned around in circles, taking in this shelter. The men had mentioned the existence of these cellars all over the country. Nearly every home had one hidden somewhere on their property. It was their only line of defense to protect their women from The Republic.

Farms like this one were isolated and lonely, but at least the occupants had each other. Men did whatever they could to protect their wives and daughters. And Harmony knew better than anyone in this room what they were being protected from.

Judy kissed her husband one last time and gripped his fingers even as he ascended the ladder. “Be safe,” she ordered.

“Always.”

Once the trap door was shut, Harmony flinched and rubbed her arms. It was cold. She’d been cold for hours. More than a day actually. And it was apparently going to get colder.

Judy had a lantern, and she held it up so they could see her. “As you’ve surely guessed, I hide down here whenever there’s a threat in the area. That threat being just about any damn person alive.”

“You’re very brave,” Marian informed her.

“If you’ve been inside the city limits, I’m certain you’ve been braver than me and seen things I don’t want to know about,” Judy responded.

No one said a word. Judy was right.

She drew in a breath. “The space is going to be cramped, but we’ll manage.” She glanced at Marian. “Would you like to stay in here with me? The others can go through the tunnel to the other bunker.”

Marian glanced at Harmony. She started to speak and then stopped herself.

Harmony reached out and hugged her mom. “That’s a great idea,” she told her. It was impulsive and odd, but Harmony couldn’t imagine staying in here instead of going with the four men who’d risked their lives to save her.

She was oddly drawn to them. She wanted to know them better.

Ever since she’d been kissed by York and Eldin last night, she’d thought of little else. Throughout the day, she’d talked and exchanged information with her mother, and she’d been beyond grateful to be reunited. But a part of her couldn’t shake the way she’d felt curled up between Eldin and York for hours, her cheek against their chests, their heartbeats in her ear.

Maybe she was immature and had a ridiculous crush on them, but she couldn’t help it. She wanted more time with them. She wanted to know if that fluttery feeling she’d had last night had been a fluke or if she could experience it again.

She knew the four of them were a package. It was crazy to consider any sort of relationship with them. Beyond absurd. Besides, no one had made such an offer.

The truth was she felt alive for the first time in years. Perhaps she was grasping the first kindness she'd known from a man—four of them. Maybe it was more. Probably it was foolish. But, she kept reminding herself, there were no guarantees for a tomorrow.

She'd wanted to know what it would be like to be kissed by someone she at least liked last night in case she never got that opportunity again. She wanted more. She didn't even know what that might look like in a room with four men, but she sure didn't want to spend the night apart from them.

Her mother looked at her, concern in her eyes. She didn't say a word. She also didn't shoot dagged glances at the men. She simply nodded and hugged Harmony again. Tight.

Harmony was grateful her mother understood. Or at least respected Harmony's decision. "I love you," her mother said.

"I love you too, Mom. So much."

When they parted, Harmony turned to find all four men looking rather stunned and sheepish. No one said a word. She'd made her decision. No one argued. She appreciated that more than words could explain. The last thing she wanted was for anyone in this room to insinuate she didn't know her own mind or that she wasn't making good choices.

Harmony wasn't a child. She wasn't ignorant either. She knew what she was asking for, and she would ask for whatever the hell she wanted. If these guys were leading her to a free society where women had equal rights to make their own choices, then that started now.

"Here. Take this lantern. I have another one," Judy said, holding it out to Harmony. The gesture didn't go unnoticed. Judy didn't give it to one of the men. She gave it to Harmony.

“Thank you.”

“There’s ventilation, but don’t burn the lantern more than you need to. You’ll want to conserve fuel. There are also a few flashlights in the bunker. Again, sparingly. There’s a room off the bunker where you can, uh, relieve yourself. It’s crude. When the sun comes up, you can go upstairs and use the bathroom to shower and clean up.”

“Thank you so much,” Harmony told her. She gave her mother’s hand a squeeze and turned toward the entrance to the tunnel. Someone had found it and opened it.

Without a word, she handed the lantern to York and followed right behind him. The tunnel was large enough for her to stand, but the men had to duck their heads. It was surprisingly long, but eventually they reached the end and York opened the door to let them all in.

Eldin set a hand on her back. “Take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with the space.”

She glanced at each of them, noticing they were all scanning the room, memorizing the details for when they extinguished the lantern. They’d done this more times than they could count, she suspected.

She did the same. There was a pallet on the floor where they would sleep. It would be tight, but she wasn’t particularly sorry about that. It would be more space than they’d had last night. The door in one corner would be the makeshift bathroom. There were supplies lined up on every wall.

Mykel held up a bag she hadn’t seen before. “Sandwiches. Eddie gave them to me.”

Blane grabbed several bottles of water from a shelf and passed them out. “Let’s eat. We haven’t had a decent meal

today. And then we need sleep. I'm sure none of us slept much last night."

York set a hand on Harmony's back and eased it up to her neck. "You okay?"

She smiled up at him and nodded. "Would any of you prefer I stayed with my mother and Judy?"

York's hand stiffened on her neck. "No." The word was sharp. Quick.

Eldin spoke at the same time. "No." He shook his head.

Blane licked his lips. "Mykel and I don't have a clue what's going on between the three of you, but if you're willing to catch us up, we won't argue. And if you'd rather we turned a blind eye, we'll do that too."

Mykel's jaw tightened. Was he displeased with the arrangement, or did he not like the idea of being cut out?

"Mykel?" she asked.

He met her gaze. "Honey, if you want to be close to one or more of us, none of us will complain. We've been a family for a long time, so it might be awkward if you have feelings for one or two of us, but we'll figure it out and adjust."

She swallowed, realizing how important this was. These four men were a unit. "I have no intentions of separating you. I have no intentions at all, to be honest. All I know is that for the first time in my life, I feel alive. I like it. I want to have every experience I would have if I were a free woman making my own choices."

Mykel stepped closer. "You *are* a free woman now. You will always make your own choices. *Always.*"

"You get to make choices too," she pointed out.

He smiled and reached out to take her hand in his. “Honey, you are a breath of fresh air. I don’t even need to consult with my partners beyond the dozens of glances we’ve exchanged all day to know we all agree that spending time with you is no hardship. I assume you had a cozy night with York and Eldin. If you want to try that again with all of us, we would be honored.”

“He’s right,” Blane said. “No one is ever going to pressure you, and we understand that you’ve been sequestered for years. We’re sensitive to that. We’re human. We’re attracted to you, but we would never rush you or pressure you in any way. It’s against our beliefs for one thing, and downright insensitive for another.”

Mykel nodded. “I don’t know what Eldin and York told you, but we haven’t had a woman in our family for five years.” He gave her a strange grin. “You want honesty?”

Harmony nodded. She wanted everything.

“My entire body has been alive and alert from the moment you took off those damn heels and ran toward the car yesterday. I nearly suffocated in the small space as you yanked that damn dress off and changed clothes. You’re feisty and fucking hot. We’re out of practice even knowing how to act, but we’re humbled by your presence, and we’ll do our best to give you what you need.”

She squeezed his hand. “I kissed Eldin and York.” Her face heated at the admission. She wanted them all on the same page. No secrets. She wouldn’t do anything to disrupt their family unit first and foremost. She certainly wouldn’t want to pit them against each other with secrets.

Blane chuckled. “You kissed them or they kissed you?”

Eldin laughed. “You heard her.”

She felt flames climbing up her face. “They kissed me, but only after I insisted.”

Everyone crowded her, and she wasn’t sorry. It felt nice. It felt right. She somehow trusted them. She might be the most inexperienced woman outside The Republic, but she knew how she felt. She liked the way her breath hitched and her pulse increased. It was invigorating, and she wanted more.

Mykel took another step closer. “Would you like to be kissed again?”

“Yes,” she breathed.

“Good. I’m going first because Blane will put us all to shame and steal your heart,” he teased, as he cupped her face and stroked her bottom lip with his thumb.

She rolled her eyes. “It’s not a contest.”

“Nope. It’s never a contest until Blane gets ahold of a woman. Then it is.”

Surely he was kidding. She’d enjoyed both kisses last night. Immensely. They’d been different, but equally earthshaking. Beyond her expectations.

The light went out.

Harmony’s breath hitched as Mykel stepped closer and slid an arm around her. He flattened his palm on her lower back between her shirt and the leather jacket. He held her face and nibbled a path to her ear. “You smell so good.”

She shivered.

“I promise you can trust us to keep our pants on. You want to be kissed, you’ve got it. If you want more, you should wait

until we get to the compound where you can relax and clear your head and make sound choices.”

“Don’t act like I don’t know my mind,” she insisted, stiffening.

He spread his fingers on her back and kissed behind her ear. “I’m well aware you know your mind, but we aren’t the kind of men who would dishonor a woman by pressuring her to take steps she’s not ready for.”

“Who gets to say what I’m ready for?” she asked defiantly, breathing heavily. She grabbed his waist and held on to his belt loops.

He groaned in her ear. “Normally you, honey, but not this time.” He kissed along her jaw until he reached her lips, and then he angled his head to one side and took her mouth.

How do three men kiss so differently?

His tongue swept along the seam of her lips, and she parted for him, loving the feeling of his lips and the way he encouraged her to open for him without words. He held her against him with his palm on her back while his other hand angled her head where he wanted it.

He was controlling, and she liked it. His words suggested all choices were hers. His body told her that only extended to consent. After that, all bets were off. It was heady, and her knees were weak.

When he released her lips, she was panting. He kissed a line to her ear again. “Damn, you’re sweet.”

Another hand slid up her arm. Blane’s. “Are you done playing around? She said she wanted to be kissed. Let me show her how it’s really done.”

Every man chuckled. Apparently this was a joke between them, but a lighthearted one. Banter.

Mykel eased to one side, but he did so deliberately passing her off to Blane. It was dark, but she had an awareness of where everyone was standing. They hadn't moved much except to come in closer.

Blane set his hands on her waist and held her against him. He put his forehead against hers, letting his nose touch hers. "They're full of shit, you know. I kiss just like anyone else."

She smiled even though no one could see it. She loved their silly banter.

He slid his face down to her neck and kissed right at the juncture of her neck and her shoulder.

She whimpered as she tipped her head to one side to give him more room. Tingles ran down her body. Her nipples tightened under the black shirt.

As he kissed a path to her ear, he eased his hands up her sides until his thumbs grazed the lower swell of her breasts.

She gasped, and he hadn't kissed her yet. Not really. Not on the mouth. She arched her chest forward, shocked by her body's reaction to such a simple touch. He wasn't cupping her breasts or anywhere near her nipples but he made her wish he would. He was good at this. No wonder the others commented.

Blane flicked her earlobe with his tongue, making her moan.

A few other hands touched her. They were probably drawn in by the sounds she couldn't contain. Someone gripped her hip. Someone's hand was on her neck. Someone's hand was in her hair.

Blane still held her torso, his thumbs tormenting her, making her want things she'd never thought of before. Making her long for sensations that were all in her imagination.

He set his lips on her ear and whispered, "We've got you, sweet girl."

She liked the way he included the others. They were a package. They were all touching her. She also liked when he finally shifted his position so his lips hovered over hers. He kissed her so lightly that she arched into him again, feeling teased.

Another light kiss, and then another. Her lips were tingling. She wanted more. She let her tongue slide out and licked his bottom lip.

He released a deep satisfied sound, but he didn't increase his pace. He seemed intent on tormenting her with not enough. Not enough pressure. Not enough touch. Hovering over her mouth, stroking her breasts, gripping her against him.

She wanted more.

She didn't even know what more would feel like, but she wanted it.

By the time he really claimed her mouth, she was panting. He still took his time, teasing her with his tongue along her teeth before sucking her tongue gently. His kiss was more like a dance. It was heady and mind blowing. Slow and teasing.

All four men could kiss. No way would she choose one as better than the other. They were different. And right now, she suspected part of the reason she was melting deeper was because all of them were touching her.

Harmony had never in her life entertained the idea of having more than one man. Hell, she'd rarely thought much

about even having *one*. Thoughts of sexual intercourse made her cringe. The only thing she'd ever visualized had been rape.

There was no other way to describe what had been intended for her. Forced sex with a stranger who most likely wouldn't treat her right. She'd been raised to spread her legs and accept her duty as a woman to gratefully continue the species without complaint.

Fuck that.

For the first time in her life, she had hope that nothing like that would ever happen to her. She felt empowered. She also felt a longing she'd never expected.

When Blane eased back, she was breathing heavily. Everyone was still crowding her, touching her, making her burn. None of them were touching her anywhere inappropriate unless she counted the edges of Blane's thumbs.

"My choice," she muttered to herself.

"Always," Blane confirmed.

"Always," York said from her left as he kissed her neck.

"I..." She swallowed. "I didn't know..."

"How could you?" Eldin asked. He was the one rubbing her back.

"My mother told me a lot of things, but she never said anything about..." She couldn't finish. She didn't have the words.

"Passion?" Mykel asked.

"Yeah..." she breathed. "I'm..." She dropped her head against Blane's chest. She was a lot of things. She didn't know how to spell them out, and it was kind of embarrassing.

“You’re aroused, sweetness,” York whispered. “It’s normal. It’s the way sex should be. In a free society, you do not give yourself to anyone you don’t choose to be with. If it’s not benefitting you, don’t do it. You will also choose whether or not you want to get pregnant. It’s your body, Harmony. Your choice.”

She pursed her lips as she listened to him. It was hard to wrap her head around all this. She supposed the reason her mother never mentioned any of this was because she hadn’t been able to foresee her daughter ever living in such a world where she had options. The information would have been a burden.

She lifted her head. She had questions. Lots of them. “Your women can say no if they don’t want to have sex?”

“Absolutely. Anything sexual is always your choice,” Mykel repeated.

“How do they keep from getting pregnant?” She understood the biology. Her mother hadn’t let her be taken to a girls’ home without explaining exactly how babies were made, but she hadn’t explained how they could be avoided.

“We have birth control options for women and condoms for men,” Eldin said.

“Uhh...” She had no idea what either of those might be.

Blane gave her sides a squeeze. “Birth control is usually in the form of a shot or pills. It’s something you take that changes your hormones so you don’t ovulate. Condoms are thin rubber sheaths a man rolls over his erection. That way when he reaches orgasm, his semen collects in the end of the condom. He can roll it off and throw it away. It doesn’t touch the woman, so it has no chance of uniting with an egg.”

She listened to every word, stunned. Apparently there were a lot of things she didn't know. "That's...ingenious."

A few of them chuckled.

"What if the two parties can't agree about having a baby?" She was still imagining a man's world. Surely men everywhere dictated when their wife got pregnant or spread her legs for him.

"Honey," Mykel began, "in our society, the woman's word is final. Within a family unit, partners might discuss having children or not among themselves and come to an agreement, but if word ever got out that a woman was coerced into having a baby she didn't want, that man would be excommunicated. It's not tolerated."

"Nor is nonconsensual sex," York added. "No one should ever pressure you to engage in any kind of sexual act with them. Not even kissing. If you don't want someone to touch you, *no* is the final answer."

Eldin kissed her cheek. She knew his scent and the feel of his lips. "That goes for us too, Harmony. We know you're curious. You have your first taste of freedom and it's intoxicating. We're happy to kiss you and let you know how it should be in a better world. We'll answer any questions you have to the best of our ability. But we also know when we arrive at the compound, you're going to enter a new world. You'll want to spend some time finding yourself, getting to know who you can be. No matter what you feel like you need from any of us today or in the coming days, you won't be expected to continue down this path of exploration with the four of us. You'll be free to do whatever feels right."

Harmony flinched. She understood what he was saying, but she wondered how much of it had to do with her and how

much of it had to do with them. Maybe they weren't interested in her. Maybe they were humoring her with their kisses and caresses and kind words.

She dropped her hands from Blane's waist, feeling foolish and immature. "I get it."

Blane stiffened, still holding her. "You get what, sweet girl? I feel like you've misunderstood."

She took a breath. "You four are already a family. I'm intruding. I'm..." *A silly young girl who's throwing herself at four men because she's curious.* What had she been thinking?

"Jesus, no." She wasn't sure who said that. Seemed like all of them. And they crowded in closer.

Blane still had a hold of her. He tugged her against him. "No." His word was firm. "No," he repeated. "Don't even go there for a moment. You're a breath of fresh air. The kindest, smartest, sweetest, most precious woman we've met in a long fucking time. We've been in a weird sequestered existence for five long years. We did that to ourselves out of fear. Fear of getting hurt. Fear of losing someone again."

"He's right," Eldin added. "We didn't anticipate meeting you like this. You've slammed into our lives unexpectedly, but I know I speak for all of us when I say your presence is delightful."

York chuckled. "Delightful? That's how you're going to describe this fierce, amazing woman?"

Mykel cupped her face, turning her head his direction. "You've cast a spell on us. We didn't see it coming. We might not have been ready. But we're here now. You will have free will to make any decision you want in this life, but if that decision involves us, we will welcome you with open arms."

Harmony was stunned. They weren't kidding. They'd either discussed this among themselves during the day, or they were so in tune they hadn't needed to.

Either way, she was speechless. "I..."

Mykel set his finger over her lips. "*You* are going to adjust, enjoy life, learn new things, spend time with your mother, reacquaint yourself with your childhood friends when we arrive. You're going to learn what all your options are. You're going to laugh and sleep and smile and embrace your new world."

"He's right." Blane nodded. "While you're doing all that, you can spend as much time as you want with us. You'll be under no obligation to do so. There's no rush. If we end up fitting into your life in a few months, then it was meant to be. If not, we'll understand that too."

She gasped and narrowed her gaze, even though no one could see her. "How can you give me a lecture about free will and making my own choices and then two seconds later tell me what timeline I should be on with regard to my feelings?"

There was a collective flinch. A flashlight came on, illuminating the room in a soft glow.

She continued. "I assume that free will extends to the men in your community too. If one or more of you feels like you need a few months to try me out, don't put that on me. Own it."

Blane groaned. No, they all did. But Blane spoke. "We will never be *trying you out*, sweet girl." He glanced at the other men, who all nodded as if they were responding to an unspoken question.

Harmony wished she spoke their silent language. Maybe someday she would. For today, she had to rely on what they verbalized.

York stood behind her. He wrapped his arms around her middle and pulled her back against his front. His lips came to her ear. “We are *in*. Totally fucking *in*. Got it? No one is trying you out. After one day with you, we have no fucking doubts. We’re wrapped around your small pinky so tight it’s hard to breathe.”

She gasped.

Mykel cupped her chin again and leaned in close so they were eye to eye. “You are rainbows and sunshine and fluffy white clouds. You take my breath away when you laugh or toss your hair or smile. It’s like I’ve been sucker punched in the gut. Forced to face the fact that I’ve been without a woman for long enough. Do not doubt our intentions or our feelings.”

Eldin was last to speak his mind on her other side. He grabbed her hand and brought it to his lips. He kissed her knuckles and rubbed them against his cheek. “I agree with my partners. What we’re trying to say is that you’re young. You aren’t obligated to jump into a relationship with four men you met yesterday for any reason. We didn’t rescue you expecting anything in return. We did it because that’s who we are. We find people. We help them.”

“Have you ever kissed any of them before?” she blurted before she could stop herself. She might not like the answer.

“Never.” All of them said that at the same time.

She bit her lip as she continued to hold Eldin’s gaze. “Okay. I get it. But don’t tell me what my timeline should be.”

He leaned in closer and kissed her lips. “Okay. But don’t rush into anything for any reason.”

She drew in a breath. “You all know better than most people how fragile life is. I’m sure you’ve seen more death than I can imagine. I’ve lived a rather sheltered existence. My first twelve years I was under the protection of a family. I rarely left the estate. It wouldn’t have been safe. I had a good life. I had food and companionship. I had my mother. I’m as educated as I could possibly be. My next eight years were not horrible. I was isolated from my mother and the only family I’ve ever known, but I wasn’t mistreated. In fact, the opposite. I was protected in a way.”

“More like preserved,” Blane growled.

Harmony chuckled. “True. But I wasn’t harmed. That would have gone against the policy of The Republic. The girls’ homes are definitely prisons of a sort. Don’t get me wrong. No one is there by choice. No one is permitted to leave. No one signs up to be groomed into becoming the wife of a stranger who bought them. But the only real stress is knowing that clock is ticking. Hell, some girls don’t even mind. They are so brainwashed into believing their job for society is so important they don’t mind the institution surrounding it.”

“Especially those who were stolen at birth, I assume,” York pointed out.

“Yes. The point is that I know there are no guarantees for tomorrow. I know those soldiers might come here in the middle of the night, find the panel in the floor, and kill all of you to take me back. So there’s no way I’m going to waste days and hours and weeks tiptoeing around finding myself

without experiencing what it will feel like to be held by a man who isn't using me."

"I understand," Eldin said softly. "We're only saying that you should have more information before you give your body to someone. You've only met four men. Maybe there are a dozen others living in the compound you'll like more than us." He winced.

She chuckled. "You are going out of your way to make sure I exercise my free will." She narrowed her gaze. "On the one hand, you tell me you're all in. On the other hand, you tell me I should step back."

"We're being altruistic, sweetness," York responded. "It's how we are. It's what we believe in."

Blane finally released her. "Let's take a breath. We need to eat. We need sleep. Let's sit. Eat. Take off our shoes. Relax. No one needs to make any life-altering decisions tonight."

Harmony stepped out of their circle. She needed space. She needed to pace a bit. When she turned to face them, they were all waiting. "You all made decisions. Either you did it together or separately or through some silent communication you seem to have. Just..." She drew in a breath. "Just don't tell me I can't make my own."

"Okay," they muttered and nodded together.

"Let's eat." Mikel sat on the pallet and opened the bag of food.

Everyone followed his lead, including Harmony. This entire discussion had been surreal. She didn't know what to do with all the information she had. But the most important detail was that she really liked it when they weren't telling her how

to feel but instead making her feel things she'd never dreamed possible.

That she could get behind. She didn't need to meet ten other men to confirm how she felt about these four. She just needed them to see her as serious enough, old enough, and mature enough to know her own mind.

CHAPTER 9



Harmony awoke to the sound of gentle snoring surrounding her. It only took her a moment to realize where she was and who she was with. The total darkness was shocking for a moment, but she took deep breaths, not moving, not wanting to disturb anyone.

In a few minutes her eyes adjusted and she realized there was some faint light coming in. As she looked around the corners of the room, she decided the light was coming through the ventilation holes. The sun must have been coming up.

She stretched her arms and legs, having gotten stiff from so many hours in one position. She'd been chilly after they'd eaten, but not during the night. Not after she lay down on the pallet under the blankets with two men on either side of her.

Mykel and Blane were both against her, probably because she'd spent the previous evening squished up against York and Eldin—though that had been in an uncomfortable tunnel.

Harmony had slept with her mother when she was young. She hadn't slept in her own bed until she was taken to the girls' home. For the last eight years she'd slept alone on a narrow bed in a room filled with all the other girls in her age range.

It should have been weird sleeping with someone else—especially a man, but doubly especially four men, two of whom gave her not one inch of space.

Blane's hand had been resting on her stomach, and it suddenly moved down to her hip, making her turn toward him. The light was still faint, but she could see him looking at her. He was smiling.

He was on his side, and he rolled closer and kissed her on the lips before dropping his head to her ear and whispering, "You okay?"

She nodded.

They were all fully dressed, but it still felt oddly intimate to wake up next to a man and have him kiss her.

Feeling brave, she rolled toward him, trying not to disturb Mykel.

Blane scooted closer to her so they were chest to chest, his hand sliding to the small of her back. His gaze searched hers. It felt like he was seeing her soul.

As he ran his fingers up and down her back, she understood why the others said he was the best kisser. It wasn't kissing exactly. It was everything about him. He was so damn sexy, and he made her feel like she was the most important person alive on Earth. It was impossible not to be affected by him.

The intensity of his stare burrowed into her, making her shiver.

"Cold?" he whispered so softly she could barely hear him. He was trying not to disturb anyone else, probably because he was enjoying this quiet moment alone with her.

She liked the idea, so she didn't want to wake anyone either. She shook her head and gave him a coy smile.

He wiggled his brows and flattened his hand on her back, drawing her even closer. His lips were so gentle when he kissed her, like last night, a slow tease. Every cell in her body came alive.

When his hand slid a few inches to one side, he let his thumb graze the edge of her breast. Just like last night. It was shocking how sensitive that skin was. Why did it feel any different than when he stroked her back?

More importantly, how would it feel if he cupped the entire globe or flicked the nipple? She wanted to know. She wanted everything.

If she had to spend days arguing with these guys about her damn virginity, she would get very frustrated. She really didn't care about her stupid hymen or whatever shit she'd been led to believe mattered to her future husband.

What she did care about was exactly what she'd told them—having every imaginable experience as often as possible because life had no guarantees. She sure as shit didn't want to get captured and forced into an arranged marriage or sent to a breeding center or put in prison or tortured or worst of all killed without having experienced what she knew these four could give her.

She wanted to *know*. She wanted to feel everything she could sense from the minimal contact she'd had with them. Even kissing each of them had awakened a lust she'd not expected and hadn't believed existed.

She was trying to control her breathing when Blane released her lips. She licked them. They were swollen and

tingly. She met his gaze and mouthed the word “more.”

He held her gaze, never glancing away, never looking at the others. He lifted both brows.

She widened her eyes and glared at him, hoping to convey her insistence.

A grin spread across his lips as he silently chuckled, shaking slightly.

When she started to push away from him, thinking he was making fun of her, he held tight and stopped laughing. He tucked her head into his shoulder and kissed her ear. “Sorry, sweet girl. Relax. Just feel.”

His hand slid down to the hem of her shirt and found its way up under, touching her bare skin. Slowly, he eased his fingers up her side until his thumb grazed her breast.

She bit her lip to keep from moaning at the contact. Once again, he wasn't really doing anything, but it felt like everything. Her nipples were hard and needy, sensitive, desperate.

“Shhh...” he whispered.

It was hard to remain quiet, but she wanted this intimacy with him, so she would do everything in her power to control herself. He might stop if she made too much noise.

His maddening thumb dragged back and forth, easing across the swell of her breast, inching toward her nipple at a painstakingly slow pace.

Restless, she arched her body toward his and tried not to protest when his hand disappeared. It wasn't gone long, just long enough to cup the back of her thigh and lift her top leg up between his.

She fought another moan when he captured her leg and held it, his hand returning to her breast.

He kissed her neck over and over, suckling her earlobe and whispering words she could hardly focus on. “Sweet girl.” “So responsive.” “Let it feel good.”

His maddening thumb resumed its torture while he held her head against his shoulder with his other hand.

“Shhh...” he repeated as he got closer to her nipple.

She held her breath, willing him to touch her there. Her eyes were squeezed shut. Her lips pursed. Her heart racing.

When he finally flicked her nipple, she came completely undone, moaning so loudly it vibrated throughout the room.

Her eyes shot open. *Shit.*

She leaned her head back but found Blane smiling at her, unfazed by her noises even though he’d encouraged her to stay quiet. Had he been testing her? Based on the look on his face, he hadn’t wanted to keep their little tryst a secret necessarily. He didn’t seem to care that everyone was stirring now.

Mykel rolled against her back and slid a hand around to her stomach, kissing her shoulder. “Mmm. I like that sound. My damn cock likes it more. Do it again.”

She wanted to say she wasn’t a trained monkey, but less than a second later, Blane flicked her nipple again, and she definitely moaned. Louder this time.

York rose up onto an elbow behind Blane and smiled down at her. She was confident Eldin was doing the same behind Mykel. It should have been embarrassing and unnerving, but she couldn’t find those emotions. All she knew was the lust in their eyes and how worshiped she felt.

No one spoke as Blane cupped her breast and gently rolled her nipple between his thumb and pointer.

Harmony gasped and arched. Her eyes rolled back. Pleasure shot through her body, seeming to gather intensely between her legs. Her instinct was to draw her knees together, but when she tried to free her leg from between Blane's, he held fast.

She trembled and panted as wetness gathered in her underwear. Her sex felt swollen and tingly. Needy.

Blane pinched her nipple and gave a tug, making her groan.

But what happened next took her breath away. Mykel slid his hand from her stomach down between her legs. He took his time, and by the time he was cupping her sex, she was gasping and writhing.

"More?" Blane asked gently, mimicking her earlier request.

"Please," she murmured. She could lie there worshiped by them for hours. Days. Why wouldn't she want more? She hardly even understood what she was asking for. What was more?

Mykel pressed his fingers against her sex through her jeans. "You are so hot, honey. I can feel your heat through the denim. Are you wet?"

She licked her lips. Did he really want her to answer that?

He pressed harder and then rubbed her sex with his middle fingers.

She writhed against him, not sure if she wanted to escape the extreme sensations or beg him to keep going. Her brain

was scrambled, but she hadn't expected anything this disarming. This was so much more intense than simply being kissed by them. Something explosive gathered inside her.

"Oh, God," she moaned as Blane twisted her nipple and then released it to flick it with his thumb again.

Mykel's fingers suddenly hit a very sensitive spot, and she nearly shot off the pallet. Between his arm pinning her and Blane's grip on her leg, she couldn't move more than a few inches, but she tipped her head back and moaned much louder while she slid her hand on top of Mykel's as if to make sure he wasn't going to stop.

"Do you want us to stop, honey?" Mykel asked.

She shook her head and thrust her hips into his palm. "Touch me."

"I'm not going to open your jeans, Harmony. That's dangerous territory."

She whimpered. Dangerous how? For whom?

"You're so responsive though I bet you can come without direct contact," he informed her.

Come? As in orgasm? Me?

She was in uncharted territory again, the gap in education making its presence known. Once again, the only things her mind could find were biological facts about sex. What her mother had taught her about being naked with a man and having him put his penis inside her vagina and thrusting in and out until his semen shot out the tip.

Something entirely different was happening here. "Me?" she whispered.

Blane cupped her breast and squeezed it. "Definitely."

“But...” She searched her knowledge base and came up empty.

Mykel continued to cup her sex, his lips on her ear. “Any decent man will always make sure you orgasm first, honey. Always.”

“And second and last,” Eldin added. He was definitely leaning over, watching.

“I...” *Don't even know what that means.* She swallowed and met Blane's gaze. “Show me. Please.”

He held her gaze for several moments, thinking. Finally he groaned. “You have no idea how damn attached we will be to you if we watch you orgasm.”

She licked her lips again. “Me? Watch me orgasm?”

“Yes, sweet girl. You.”

“Guess they didn't teach you that in prison,” York grumbled.

“No. And my mother didn't tell me either.”

“Probably to protect you,” Blane suggested. “You weren't exactly destined for a life of great sex. She didn't need to tell you anything that would cause disappointment later.”

Harmony tugged her leg free and rolled to her back so she could look at all four of them. They were hovering so closely. She searched every man's gaze. They cared about her. A lot. They meant every word. They wanted the best for her.

She cleared her throat. “You said I have choices. You said I get to decide for me.”

They all drew in breaths.

“Show me. My God, please show me.” She shoved the covers down her body, reached for the hem of her shirt, and pulled it over her head, baring her chest.

It took every ounce of waning self-confidence she had to keep from covering herself and focus on the button and zipper on her jeans next. If she’d been wearing a dress, this denim wouldn’t be in the way.

When she lifted her hips, Mykel rose onto his knees and moved down her body to tug her jeans off. Thank God. She would have been mortified if they had denied her. Humiliated.

And then she was naked and they were not. No one made a move to remove any clothing. “I will be so embarrassed if you don’t touch me,” she said, her voice trembling.

They were all staring at her, mouths in various states between open and licking their lips.

“Oh, sweetness, we’re going to touch you. Let us look for a moment.” York reached over Blane to grab her hand and hold it against Blane’s stomach.

Her chest rose and fell with her increased breathing. She shuddered. Probably she should be cold, but all she could feel was heat as if it transferred from their gazes. Maybe it did.

Her nipples were hard as rocks and wetness gathered between her legs.

Mykel dropped onto a hip and tucked a knee between her thighs.

She arched her chest and whimpered, feeling so exposed and controlled. Wasn’t that exactly what they’d told her should never happen?

“If you get uncomfortable at any time, just tell us to stop, hon,” Eldin stated. He was sitting now, and he reached for her other hand and held it. “Do not mistake our dominance for force. When we restrain you, it’s for your pleasure. Your breath hitched when Mykel stuck his knee between yours. Your chest arched when we grabbed your hands.”

“Is that weird?” she asked, panting.

“No. It’s natural. Lots of people like a bit of dominance in the bedroom,” Blane told her.

She had no idea what he was talking about. She licked her lips and met his gaze. “Touch me.” If she had to ask again, she was going to scream.

He shocked her by bending his head down and flicking his tongue over her nipple.

She cried out, writhing beneath him. *Oh. My. God.*

When he sucked her nipple into his mouth, her eyes rolled back.

A second later, Mykel set a hand on her thigh and eased it up between her legs. She bucked futilely when he finally touched her sex. She was embarrassingly wet. Everything felt swollen and sensitive. What was happening to her?

Mykel slid his fingers between her folds, parting them before he dragged his fingers through her wetness. It was when he grazed over the sensitive little ball of nerves at the front that her vision swam and she stopped breathing.

She squeezed the two hands holding hers as her body stiffened.

“So damn soft...” Mykel said. “These curls...” He gave a tug to the hair between her legs. “I want my nose here.” He

circled the nub and then flicked it.

She arched, confused and over-sensitized. She had no idea what he was talking about his nose for. She couldn't process that part. She focused instead on the feel of his fingers between her legs.

She clenched his knee with both of hers, unable to bring her legs together. There was so much sensation that she would have pushed his hand away if she could, but her hands weren't free, and that was undoubtedly by design.

Blane switched nipples, teasing the second one the same as he had the first.

Sounds filled the room. She knew they were coming from her, but she couldn't fully grasp that or stop it.

"Don't fight it, sweetness," York encouraged.

Fight what?

She knew though. Or at least she sensed that something was going to happen. She was wound so tight. Something was going to explode in a second, and she wasn't sure she would live through it. It was kind of scary. Foreign. She was a bit panicky.

No way was she going to tell them to stop though. It felt weird and different and unlike anything she'd ever imagined, but she wanted it to go on forever.

"Give it to us, hon," Eldin demanded.

Give them what?

"Let it go, honey," Mykel said as he flicked her sensitive nub over and over.

Suddenly Blane's teeth grazed her nipple and she flew out of her body. It seemed like she was separated from herself entirely as she reached some sort of pinnacle and then fell. She kept falling and falling, unable to see or breathe or talk. All she knew was the most amazing feeling in the world as her sex pulsed against Mykel's fingers.

He flattened his palm to her and held her tight, increasing the waves of pleasure that flowed through and out of her.

When it was over, he eased his hand back and Blane released her nipple.

She was panting. Dazed. Confused. And so fucking happy.

She knew she was smiling. She couldn't stop it. She finally blinked and licked her lips. "Ohhh."

Someone chuckled. "Yep. Now you know." York.

"No one told me," she murmured.

"Yeah. It's not something you can grasp without experiencing it, and why tell someone about the best part of sex if they're never going to have permission to experience it?" Mykel said as he stroked her inner thighs.

"You're so fucking sexy. I've never seen anything so sexy in my life," Eldin added. "I could watch you do that all day."

She cleared her throat. "That was an orgasm?"

Blane nodded. "A gorgeous one."

"I'd die if I did that again." She was exhausted and breathing heavily and shaking.

Mykel removed his knee and pulled the covers over her before snuggling into her side and setting one leg over both of

hers. He kissed her cheek. “You won’t die. You will want to do that again.”

“Is it like that for men?”

“I have no idea. An orgasm for men is certainly a religious experience,” Mykel joked, “but I can’t know what it feels like for a woman. All I can do is guess based on how your eyes roll back and you lose all sense of time or space. That’s certainly how I feel when I come.”

She glanced at all of them. “I’m naked.”

Eldin chuckled. “You’re beautiful.”

“So when people have sex...” She was trying to grasp the addition of a man putting his erection inside her. The idea had always made her feel a bit nauseous, but now she kind of craved it in an odd way.

York answered her. “When normal people who care about and respect each other have sex, the man should be willing to do the work to help the woman get where you just got first. After you’ve had an orgasm, you feel more relaxed and I suspect somewhere in your brain, you’re feeling like you want something more?”

She nodded. “I do. How did you know?”

He shrugged. “We’re humans. Like any other animal, there has to be a reason we *want* to have sex or why would anyone do it?”

“I never wanted it before,” she pointed out.

“That’s because you were living in a repressed society where men take what they want and don’t give anything in return. A man can spread your legs and thrust into you without helping you get to a place where you crave it. That’s barbaric,

but he can do it and empty his fucking cock inside you without caring if you enjoy it. You're never going to find that sort of selfish behavior among The Wanderers. We don't operate that way."

Harmony squeezed her legs together and pursed her lips. She did want more. And she got the impression no one was going to give it to her. She felt a sense of embarrassment and looked away.

Eldin cupped her face. "Hey. Tell us what you're thinking."

"I'm thinking it feels uneven that you all watched me unravel and aren't going to take your clothes off and finish what you started. I feel sort of foolish," she admitted.

"We don't want you to feel awkward," Mykel said. "But we're not going to take our clothes off with you today, honey. We don't have the willpower to hold on to our conviction."

"What conviction?"

"We don't want to end up following our cocks and thrusting into you. You need more time to think about it. You need to process what just happened. You need to be certain it's something you want before you offer that precious gift to us."

"My virginity? Why is it so precious? That seems barbaric."

"You can't go backward. And to be honest..." Mykel glanced around at the others before he continued, "I don't think we could easily let you go after we've been inside you, honey. We're already salivating over you. The intimacy of sex would create a bond I for one would not be able to forget. Not with you. My heart is already involved."

“So you won’t have sex with me until I’m prepared to make a permanent commitment to you?” she asked, her voice high-pitched.

“I think that’s a good plan,” Eldin agreed as if the idea had come from her and they all suddenly agreed.

She pushed to sitting, holding the blanket against her chest. She looked at all of them. They were serious. They looked nervous. She needed to be reasonable and honor their wishes.

Finally, she blew out a breath and looked down at her lap. “Okay. I’ll agree. But we can’t do that again because it affected me strongly. Not just physically but emotionally too. I understand.”

She was shivering. Her entire outlook on life had just shifted. Now she knew there was a giant component that had been missing and left out. She wanted to know what it would feel like to have a man inside her, but she could wait. She had to. If they were going to respect her free will, she had to respect their limitations.

A step back would do them all some good. After all, she also enjoyed their company. Maybe it would be wise to get to know them all better before she jumped in with both feet.

Because she understood one thing with clarity: if she let them into her body, she wouldn’t be able to walk away afterward either.

CHAPTER 10



Two days later...

Harmony set her hands on her hips and narrowed her gaze on the four men bent over the kitchen table.

It was quiet enough to hear a pin drop until her mother started chuckling. She was at the kitchen sink washing dishes with Judy. “I’m so proud of you, Harmony. Stick to your guns, dear.”

Mykel glanced at Marian, head cocked, eyes narrowed. “You too? You’re encouraging her to put her life in danger?”

Marian wiped her hands on a towel and turned to face them, leaning against the counter.

Harmony was slightly surprised but glad her mother was on her side.

Marian stopped chuckling and put on her serious face. She nodded toward Harmony. “I may not have seen my daughter for eight years, but I raised her for twelve. I packed a lot of information into those twelve years. I raised her to be strong and self-sufficient. I raised her to educate herself any way possible. I’m proud of the woman she’s become even though I

wasn't there for so long it hurts. She's amazing. I would never step between her and anything she wants. I can easily tell the four of you are smitten by her. That's fine with me as long as it's okay with Harmony. But let me warn you, if you want to push her away, the fastest way to do that is to patronize her, coddle her, or in any way insinuate she's not capable of the same things you're all capable of."

Harmony smiled. *Thanks, Mom.*

Eldin set both hands on the table and let his head hang. "She's right. We'll alienate Harmony in a heartbeat if we don't feed her mind. If I've learned anything in the past few days, it's that."

York shoved away from the table and came to Harmony. He didn't touch her. He simply squared off with her in a stare-down.

Harmony had no idea what his next move was going to be, but she suspected it would be interesting. It would likely make or break whatever relationship was forming between the five of them.

After a few seconds, he drew in a breath. "Okay. We'll let you in on one condition."

She glared at him. "We'll see if I like your condition." It felt so weird standing up to them like this. She hadn't been raised to defend herself against men. She'd been raised to be demure and quiet and mousy and compliant and a host of other things. Strong-willed wasn't among them.

The last few days had taught her many things. The most important was that these men from The Wanderers really did respect her and believe her to be their equal as a human. It was

a foreign concept, but she liked it. It was growing on her. So was her determination to be as equal as they insisted she was.

Harmony had also learned that they were potent. When she was near any of them—which was always in these cramped conditions—her knees were weak. Something inside her got mushy and she found herself lusting after them in a way she'd never imagined possible.

They'd been stuck here for two solid days because snow had fallen that first night, and they couldn't risk leaving so many footprints around the property in effort to keep moving. They would be leaving a trail behind them that would get them killed.

It was melting though. The temperature had risen. They would be leaving in a few hours. Harmony wanted to be included in the plans. Was that asking too much?

Blane chuckled.

She shot him a glare next.

He was leaning against the wall with his arms crossed over his chest, but he lifted a hand to his face and covered his mouth. He sobered at her glare though.

“Are you laughing at me? Is this funny?” she asked. Her blood was boiling.

Mykel looked toward her mother and Judy before glancing at Richard and Eddie who were also crammed in the tight space. “Would you please give us a moment?”

The four of them nodded and fled to the living room. It wasn't as if they couldn't hear. Not much space separated the two groups of people, and there wasn't a door, but it gave the five of them some small sense of privacy.

Blane shoved off the wall, came to her, grabbed her around the waist, and flattened her to the refrigerator so fast she was spinning. He set his hands on either side of her head and leaned in close to speak inches from her face in a low voice. “Sorry, sweet girl. I most definitely am not laughing at you. Nothing is funny. You are so fucking amazing and frankly sexy as fuck when you prop your hands on your hips and make demands. I love your strong will. I love your thirst for knowledge. I love that you’re never going to take *no* for an answer from anyone, including us.”

She gasped, surprised by his speech.

“I’m laughing at myself because I’m so damn attracted to you it’s scary. Got it?”

She nodded. She had no idea how to respond.

“He’s right,” Mykel said as he approached from one side. “And we won’t leave you out of anything. We got the message. I’ll show you the map and the route we’re going to take and fill in every detail.”

When Blane took a step back, she met all of their gazes. “Will you teach me to use a gun?”

There was a collective wince, but they all nodded.

York drew in a breath. “We’ll teach you anything you want to know.”

She narrowed her gaze. “What was your condition?”

“That you trust us and follow our directions without hesitation. There may be times when we need you to hide or run or keep quiet. It’s a dangerous world. At the end of the day, we’d rather you be alive and spitting angry than dead because we didn’t protect you.”

She thought about his words.

“You don’t know the terrain as well as we do, honey,” Mykel added. “You’ve never encountered a member of the militia. If you think the soldiers from The Republic are barbaric and cruel, wait until you learn more about what these various rogue militias are capable of. We will not lose you. Like it or not, you are now our top priority, and we won’t hesitate to piss you off to save your life.”

She drew in a long breath and finally nodded. “Okay.” She swallowed. “Is anyone ever going to touch me again?” she asked quietly. They’d been here three nights and after the first morning when they’d shown her what it meant to feel alive, no one had laid a hand on her again. It was like they had a collective pact. She wasn’t fond of it. She understood their insistence that none of them would have sex with her for now, but they’d essentially cut her off entirely. In the past two days, they’d done little more than touch her gently in passing. No one had kissed her again. It was maddening.

Mykel nodded. “Yep. If you want us to. After we get to the compound.”

She sighed, letting her shoulders drop. “Fine.” She pointed at the map. “Now, tell me what we’re looking at.”



Traveling with four overprotective men was intense. Their time at the farmhouse had been slightly less stressful than out in the open. It had given Harmony a chance to catch her breath, get reacquainted with her mother, and observe the four men who barely let her out of their sight even to pee.

The best part about the farmhouse was getting to take a few real showers and wash their clothes before they took off again. Harmony felt like it was surely a huge inconvenience for six people to descend upon the family of three for over two days, but the family was gracious and kind.

One benefit they got from having so many house guests was time alone. Time the three of them could spend together uninterrupted and without looming fear because Mykel, Eldin, Blane, and York took round-the-clock shifts watching for unwanted guests for forty-eight hours after the first night of sleep. The four of them also promised to send provisions the next time any of The Wanderers were in the area, and apparently they hadn't arrived emptyhanded on the way toward the city either.

The Wanderers, Harmony had learned, had extensive farmland and resources. They were a very large community with several locations. They traded fresh food for other provisions often, and in this case they had brought as much as they could carry in exchange for a safe haven coming and going from the city.

Luckily, the snow had melted and the six of them made good time moving west. Harmony had come to realize that The Wanderers also had safe havens all over the place. They were essentially moving across the land from one to the next. Some of those locations were occupied by other people. Some were simply hidden bunkers along the way.

When they stopped for the night, Harmony leaned over the map. She had a lot of questions, but the most pressing one was how long it was going to take them to arrive. It looked like it would take weeks to make their way to the main compound. They were traveling over more than half the country.

“You have bunkers like this all over the land?” she asked as her mother dropped onto a pallet exhausted. She was worried about her. Marian was in great shape considering how she’d been living with the Hansons—years inside their estate without many trips away from the house. She was also young enough and healthy, but she was significantly older than any of the rest of them, and the walking was taking its toll.

“We do. We’ve spent years scouring the land and setting up outposts,” Blane told her. “It’s not just the four of us. The Wanderers have many others like us who make it their mission to help people find their way to safety.”

Harmony nodded and asked the pressing question. “How long is it going to take to get to your compound?”

“A few more days if everything goes as planned,” Eldin told her.

She gasped. “How is that possible?”

Eldin grinned. “Because tomorrow we’ll reach an outpost with walkie-talkies we can use to get a message to our people. They will come get us in a van.”

“Seriously?” This was the best news she’d heard in days. She nearly jumped up and down.

York chuckled. “Yes, sweetness. Once we reach the compound, you can rest easy, sleep for days, eat something besides protein bars, shower ten times, and when you come up for air, figure out what you want to do with that amazing mind of yours.”

She smiled. “That’s a no-brainer. I want to learn to do what you do. Save people. Rescue them. Bring them to safety like you did for me.”

Her mother gasped softly but didn’t say a word.

None of the men looked pleased.

Harmony narrowed her eyes and glared at them. “Don’t you dare tell me you four are going to keep me from doing the kind of work you do.” She turned to her mother. “You either.”

Her mother drew in a breath. “I just want you to be happy, dear, but safe too. I just got you. The thought of you running around in dangerous parts of the country risking your life makes me very nervous.”

Harmony didn’t want to be insensitive. She could understand her mother’s feelings, but she still needed to counter. “Four people with countless backup risked their lives to rescue me. They came halfway across the country to do so and involved other people along the way. All for me. And you. I have to be the kind of person who helps with missions like that. I can feel it in my veins. The thought of living in hiding knitting stockings or some shit makes me want to crawl out of my skin. Can’t you all understand that?”

“We do,” Mykel said. “How about if you don’t make any huge decisions right now. It’s not necessary. We haven’t finished the mission you’re speaking of. When we arrive at the compound, please take a few days to decompress, and then we’ll discuss the future, okay?”

Harmony rubbed her forehead. His suggestion wasn’t unreasonable. “Yes, but will you keep teaching me how to read the map? And will you show me how to fire a weapon?”

Two things. She wanted those two things. Surely they could give her that. They’d assured her several times they would teach her to fire a gun, but it hadn’t happened yet.

“Yes.”

All of the men nodded. Marian looked resigned.

CHAPTER 11



Five days later...

Harmony's skin was crawling, and she was close to pulling her hair out. After the longest two days of her life, the van finally rumbled to a stop. "Please tell me this is over," she muttered.

"Let's hope so," her mother responded.

The two of them had spent twelve hours a day squished together in what was basically a coffin under the middle bench seat in the van. She understood the importance of remaining hidden, and she was grateful they were well hidden every time the van got stopped, the four men questioned.

Each time they'd rolled to a stop and she'd heard the voices of other people, her skin had crawled, but she'd kept her near claustrophobia to herself and bit her tongue.

The important thing was they'd made it, and she hoped she never had to ride in a box again. She shuddered as Mykel helped lift her out of the damn box and set her on her feet. She was glad he didn't let go of her because her legs were wobbly.

When she finally took a few steps, she looked around. The moon was high and the sky was clear. When she stepped out of

the tree line and into a clearing, she spun in a slow circle. There was nothing in sight in any direction. “Are you sure we’re in the right place?”

Blane chuckled. “Positive. We’ve been here thousands of times, sweet girl.” He grabbed her hand and lifted it to his lips, kissing her knuckles gently. All four of them were mildly affectionate with her, but they hadn’t come anywhere near close to giving her what she’d experienced that first morning they were all together.

Depending on where they’d slept, she’d usually ended up sandwiched between two of them. They often touched her hand or her cheek, but they hadn’t kissed her since that morning. Not on the lips. Not in front of her mother.

Harmony wasn’t certain how her mother felt about the four men and the way they doted on her daughter. She didn’t seem upset. Most of the time Harmony caught her smiling. There was no way Marian was oblivious to the affection among the group of them.

“Come on.” Eldin grabbed her other hand. Of all of them, he was the only one with skin darker than hers. The contrast always made her heart rate pick up for some reason. Though she’d never met her father, she knew he’d had dark skin. Combined with her mother’s pale skin, Harmony had ended up with skin most people envied. At least they often said as much.

Harmony was focused on her connection with Eldin when he suddenly stopped walking. “Ready?”

She looked around again. “For what?”

He pointed at the ground. “I love it when new people can’t see evidence of the entrance. It reaffirms that we are well hidden.”

Mykel bent down, brushed some dirt and debris away from a handle, and lifted a hinged door up out of the ground.

“That’s impressive,” Marian commented.

York descended the stairs first and then turned around. “Come on down.” He motioned with his hand.

Marian went second. Harmony followed her mother, finding herself standing in a small room with another door across from the ladder. It had an impressive keypad.

As soon as they were all below ground, one of the men closed the hatch, and York typed into the keypad.

Harmony had no idea what to expect, but when the door clicked open and York pulled it wide, she found herself staring down a long hallway. Gray concrete. Lights hung from the ceiling.

An older gentleman stepped through a door on the left. “I thought I heard someone coming in.” He came toward them, extending a hand to York. “Welcome back. You did it.” He smiled wide as he reached for Marian next. “Welcome to our community. I’m Barak Winther, one of the councilmembers.”

“Thank you so much,” Marian responded.

Barak shook Harmony’s hand next. “We’re so glad to see you.”

Harmony felt out of body having this man treat her as though she were someone of value. He looked her in the eye and spoke to her as though she were his equal. A fellow human being. Until her rescue, she’d never been anywhere where women were treated that way.

Until the past ten days with her saviors, she’d never witnessed such unabashed kindness. It shook her to the core.

She had a lot to learn. It would take a while for this new normal to sink in.

“You folks must be exhausted.” He waved toward the door he’d come through. “Come on into the office for a few moments, then we’ll get you settled for the night.”

Harmony glanced over her shoulder as she followed her mother into an outer office and then through to a small conference room.

Barak waved toward the seats at the table. “Please, sit. Or stand if you’d like. You probably need to stretch your legs.”

Marian pulled out a chair, so Harmony did too.

“Actually, I’m a bit unsteady from lying for so long,” Marian said.

“Understandable. You’ve had a very long journey.” He sat across from them. “I won’t keep you long. I just want to let you know that we’re happy to have you here. I know Braylon and his partners will be excited to find out you’ve arrived.”

“I can’t wait to see them,” Harmony admitted. She glanced over her shoulder to find Eldin standing in the doorway. The others waited in the outer office.

“We happen to have an empty apartment right now, so I thought you two might like to occupy it for the time being. It doesn’t have to be permanent. We can discuss other options later. But I’m sure all you can think about tonight is a soft bed and a pillow.” Barak’s smile was warm.

“We really appreciate the hospitality. Thank you,” Marian said as she grabbed Harmony’s hand.

Harmony nodded, but a lump formed in her throat. She hadn’t thought much about what would happen when they

arrived here, but the idea of separating from the four men she'd grown accustomed to didn't settle well inside her.

Barak continued, "You can stop by the cafeteria and grab something to eat. Everyone in the compound eats in a communal cafeteria. The individual apartments have small kitchenettes, but they aren't meant for cooking. Just keeping a few things handy. When you're well rested, we can reconvene in the library next door to brief you on the rules of the compound and give you an overview of where everything is."

Harmony nodded. She was kind of numb. Shocked. They'd made it. She couldn't wrap her head around that fact. It didn't seem real.

"You'll need a sponsor."

"We'll sponsor them," Eldin said from the doorway. His expression was intense when Harmony looked in his direction.

"Okay. That's settled then." Barak stood. "I won't keep you. Get some food and rest. Eldin or one of his partners can find me tomorrow, and I'll meet you in the library."

Harmony stood with Marian and shook Barak's hand again, feeling out of sorts. All she kept thinking was how quiet and lonely it would be for her and her mother to be alone in an apartment. She hadn't been that alone for eight years. There wasn't a moment of privacy in the girls' home.

As Harmony passed through the door, following her mother, Eldin grabbed her hand and stopped her. "You okay?" he asked gently.

"I don't know," she responded honestly.

He cupped her face and searched her eyes. "You will be. I promise."

She nodded and let him lead them down the long hallway that emptied into a large room. She realized it was a living space and on one side was the cafeteria. The area was filled with tables and chairs.

“You need to eat,” Eldin told her. “Grab some fruit and nuts or a sandwich. Something. You haven’t eaten well for a few days.”

She glanced at him. He hadn’t either.

The other three men were hovering. No one else was around. She was glad. She didn’t feel like meeting strangers. She felt heavy and disarmed. She went through the motions, letting Eldin pick up a few things from the cafeteria for her. An apple. A wedge of cheese. A hunk of bread. A scoop of nuts.

He wrapped it all in a piece of paper. “Come on. You’re exhausted.”

Marian had her own selections in her hand.

Blane had several bottles of water. He was waiting for them at the entrance to another hallway. There were several halls leading off this central space like spider legs. “This way,” he stated, nodding over his shoulder.

“Where do you four live?” Harmony asked as she followed Blane.

“We also live on this hallway. Our apartment is the second one from the end on the left.” He looked at her and held her gaze. Was he expecting her to remember that information? She would. She had it memorized as soon as it left his lips.

He stopped at a door on the right and typed four digits into the keypad. “The code is one, two, three, four for now,” he

informed them. "You can change it." He opened the door and let them in.

Harmony followed her mother and found herself in the middle of a small living area complete with a couch, two armchairs, a table and four kitchen chairs.

She watched as Eldin set her food on the table and pulled out a chair. "Sit, hon."

She followed his suggestion and sat across from Marian.

Marian looked at her. "You need to eat, dear."

Harmony nodded and picked up the bread, taking a bite and chewing. "What about you?" she said to the four men hovering.

"We'll get something after we get you two settled," Mykel said. He set his hands on the table and leaned closer. "You okay, honey?"

"I think so. Tired. My head is spinning." *And I don't want you to leave.*

He smiled and cupped her face.

She wasn't going to be a big baby and ask them to stay. What she wanted was to go to their apartment and be with them. It felt off separating from them after ten days in their company. But this was her life now. She needed to adjust. No one had suggested her going with them. If they wanted her with them, they would have said so. Right?

"Bathroom's through that door," York stated, pointing to a door to the right. "The other two rooms are bedrooms. The apartments in the compound are all different sizes. You're fortunate this one happens to be empty right now and you can each have your own bed. I radioed and let someone at the

clothing exchange know your approximate sizes. I'm sure Ariel left you some choices on the beds. She's amazing. You can meet her soon and pick out some more clothes." He looked nervous. He was rambling.

Blane nodded. "I'm sure you'll be glad to have a hot shower and clean clothes and a warm bed that's not made of dirt." He chuckled, but it was forced.

Harmony swallowed her bite as if it were a rock that hadn't been chewed. They were acting strange and making her nervous.

Eldin stepped closer and hesitated before finally grabbing her hand and squeezing it. "We'll go so you can get settled. Second to last door on the left," he repeated. "If you need anything."

Mykel was already at the door, and he was rocking on his feet, not looking at her.

Harmony couldn't read them. She wasn't sure what they were thinking. Were they not as interested in her now that they'd arrived back on their home turf? Her chest was tight, and she hardly moved as they left the apartment, uttering more words of encouragement and welcome.

When the door snicked shut, she jumped in her spot. Her entire body stiffened and twitched.

Her mother reached across the table and grabbed her hand. "Take a breath, dear."

Harmony looked at her. Stared. Her head was ringing. She swallowed and glanced down at the food. No way she could eat it right now.

"Why don't you take a shower?" Marian suggested. "You'll feel better if you wash your hair and put on clean

clothes.”

Harmony nodded but didn't move yet. “Right. Okay. Sure.” She finally shoved from the table and headed for the bathroom, numb. Lonely. Confused.

As soon as she shut the door, tears started falling. Sobs were going to be right on their heels, so she quickly turned on the shower to cover the sounds. She couldn't control the emotions flowing from her. She was wrecked. She should be excited. This was the best day of her life. She was finally free and in a safe spot. She had her mother back. She was healthy. She'd survived without being tortured or raped along the way.

Why was she falling apart?

She peeled off her clothes and dropped them in a basket in the corner of the small bathroom before stepping into the shower and tipping her head back to let the water run down her face.

Tears continued to fall, their salty taste filling her mouth. They fell so fast they overpowered the water. She kept her sobs to a minimum, trying not to make enough noise that her mother would hear.

She hadn't cried like this in years. She'd been so strong at the girls' home, always the optimist among her peers and even the dorm mom. She'd spent her life being upbeat for those around her, and suddenly she was drained.

She couldn't explain why she felt the way she did. It wasn't logical. She was free. *Free*. She could make her own choices now.

The problem was she *had* made choices. She'd fallen hard for four men in a few short days. It wasn't logical. It was unexpected. But it had happened. And they'd left her here. She

didn't know why. Had it been altruistic? Or had they wanted to make a clean break from her?

She was shaking as she washed her hair and her body, not wanting to waste water. Forcing herself to conserve even as she felt like she was crumbling apart.

As soon as she was clean, she wrapped herself in a towel, wiped the fog from the middle of the mirror, and stared at herself. She was a mess. There was no way she would be able to hide it from her mother. Her eyes were swollen and bloodshot, and her face was rosy.

Taking a deep breath, she finally left the bathroom.

Her mother was no longer sitting at the table. She called out from inside one of the bedrooms, "The room next to the bathroom has clothes your size on the bed, dear."

Grateful she wouldn't have to face her mother head on for the moment, she entered the other room and closed the door. There was a large bed big enough for two people. A pile of clothes sat on the mattress.

Shivering from nerves, Harmony hooked the towel on the back of the door and found a T-shirt, panties, and leggings. She quickly dressed and spun around to see a comb on the small dresser.

She couldn't hide out in here all night. She needed to be brave and return to the main room to eat and talk to her mother, but she was glad when she opened the door to find her mother was now in the bathroom, and the shower was running.

It bought her some time. She would work through the tangles in her hair while she forced herself to eat. By the time her mother came out of the bathroom, smiling and wearing

clean clothes, Harmony felt physically better, but she was emotionally drained.

Marian headed for the sofa and held out a hand. “Come here, dear.”

Harmony took a deep breath and joined her.

Marian took her hand and smiled at her. “You’re not the twelve-year-old girl who was stolen from me.”

She swallowed as tears welled up in her eyes again.

Marian smiled. “You’re the most amazing woman. So grown up. So thoughtful and strong. I’m so proud of you. You’ve surprised me every day with your strength and determination.”

“Thanks, Mom,” she muttered.

“Part of that strength means you know your own mind. I can see that. You’re not going to let anyone tell you what to do, and I’ll respect that. Those four men will too.” She lifted a brow.

Harmony glanced away. Her chest hurt.

“I know it’s unexpected. You probably had no idea people lived in family units comprised of more than two people.”

She shook her head, but didn’t respond.

“I know it seems foreign.”

“Everything is foreign,” she blurted. “Every damn thing.” She didn’t care that she was cussing. She had that prerogative now. She had the freedom to choose to do so.

Marian nodded. “I know. It’s all pretty weird to me too.”

Harmony suddenly leaned forward and hugged her mother. Tears fell down her cheeks. “I don’t know what to do, Mom.”

“Yes, you do, child.” Her mother rubbed her back. “Live your life. Do what feels right. Make your own decisions. No one is going to tell you what’s right for you, especially not me.” She leaned back and smiled at Harmony.

Harmony searched her mother’s eyes.

Marian nodded. “Go.” She pointed at the door. “I’ll be fine here. I’ll find you in the morning.”

Harmony flinched. She glanced at the door. “You think I should?”

“I think it’s what you need. Right or wrong, it doesn’t matter. You’re questioning everything. You’re wondering if what you felt for the last ten days was real. You’re wondering if their affections were real too. There’s only one way to find out.” She lifted a brow. “Go to them. Then you’ll know.”

Harmony drew in a breath. She hesitated.

“I love you. I’ll always be here for you. If it doesn’t work out, you can cry on my shoulder. If it does, I will be so happy for you and fully support you.”

Harmony rubbed her face as she stood. She leaned over and gave her mother another hug. “I love you.”

“I love you too, dear.”

CHAPTER 12



Mykel paced the living room, running a hand through his damp hair. He'd been the first one in the shower, nearly stomping there as soon as they stepped into the apartment. "What the fuck are we doing?" he asked the room at large.

"Acting like idiots?" Eldin suggested. He was sitting on the couch, head tipped back, hands behind his neck.

Blane was leaning against the wall next to the door. Mykel watched him glance at it every few seconds as if Harmony might just show up. Why would she? They'd walked away from her with hardly a word.

Blane groaned. "I know what we were doing. We were trying to give her space to follow her heart. She hasn't had a moment alone since we snagged her off the street ten days ago. That's what we were doing, but that doesn't make us less idiotic."

York slammed the door to the bathroom as he traipsed into the living space. He'd been the last one out of the shower. It hardly looked like he'd bothered with the towel. "What the fuck were we thinking?" he asked, looking around at them, hands fisted at his sides.

It was nearly comical since he'd missed the last few minutes of discussion on that very subject. He was wearing

gray sweats and nothing else. Not even shoes. Yet he stalked to the door and grabbed the handle. “Who’s going with me?”

Mykel stopped pacing to join him. Eldin stood from the couch. Blane shoved off the wall.

York opened the door and stopped dead, causing Mykel to run into the back of him.

Mykel’s breath caught in his throat.

Harmony was in the hallway. Just standing there, rubbing her hands together. She looked nervous as fuck and her eyes were red and puffy. Had they made her cry?

She flinched and took a step back. “I…”

Mykel breathed easier. Knowing she’d come to them meant the world. He also pulled his tail between his legs. She’d certainly come to them faster than any of them had pulled their heads out of their asses.

Except for the obvious signs of crying, she looked like an angel. Her hair was wet and hanging in long curls down her back, freshly combed and tucked behind her ears. She had on a T-shirt and leggings, but like two of them, no shoes.

Glancing down and seeming to just now notice that fact, she curled her toes under. “Can I come in?” she asked.

York pulled the door open farther and stepped back. “Shit. Of course.”

They all backed up a few feet, not really wanting to give her much space. Mykel knew he wasn’t the only one who felt that way. He was the one to reach out a hand and pull her into his embrace the moment the door closed.

He hauled her so tight and so close she probably couldn’t breathe. He set his chin on her head and rocked her back and

forth. "I'm sorry. We didn't handle that well."

She finally relaxed against him and sighed.

"We made you cry," Eldin murmured as he set a hand on her back.

She took a deep breath and turned in Mykel's arms to face the room. "I don't cry." Tears were sliding down her cheeks as she spoke. It might have been funny if it weren't so serious.

"That makes me feel worse," Blane muttered.

Mykel bent down, tucked a hand behind her knees, and lifted her off her feet.

She gave a slight squeal in protest as he headed for one of the armchairs and sat, situating her on his lap. It felt good to touch her again. To really hold her. He'd forced himself to keep her at arm's length for days. He was done.

In fact, he needed her lips. Cupping her face, he looked at her mouth before meeting her gaze in silent question. When she didn't pull away, he slowly lowered his mouth to hers.

Heaven had nothing on kisses from Harmony. She was so damn sweet. Her natural innocence combined with an eagerness that made his chest tight.

When she wrapped her arms around his neck and twisted her body so she was straddling him, he nearly died. She didn't fuck around. She pressed her pussy against his stiff cock and rocked forward boldly.

Mykel gripped her hips and tried to keep her from rubbing against him.

The woman was determined though. She was the one to break the kiss, and she was panting as she glanced down between them. "That feels larger than I expected."

He chuckled. He was breathing heavily. So was everyone else in the room. The other three were still standing, hovering. They were each less than a foot away.

“Show me,” she demanded, her gaze pinned to Mykel’s.

He lifted his brows. “Show you what?” He knew, but he needed a second to wrap his head around her command, plus he really wanted her to spell it out.

She rolled her eyes as if he were dense.

“My cock?” he supplied.

She cleared her throat. “That’s what you call it? A cock? I heard you say that a few times. I’ve never heard that word.”

“Well, yes, but it’s kind of crude. I doubt women refer to them as cocks when they’re in polite company.”

“What do women say?” She was so fucking curious and naïve.

Eldin cleared his throat and stroked the top of her head. “I’m not quite sure what women call our dicks when they’re alone. There are a lot of terms. I guess if they’re having a clinical discussion, just penis.”

“Whatever,” she groaned. “I’d like a bit more education on this subject in the way of a demonstration, if you don’t mind.”

Eldin nearly choked.

Blane staggered forward, setting his hands on the back of the armchair. York blew out a long breath.

“A demonstration...” Mykel said, trying to imagine what she thought she was asking for.

“Yes.” She climbed off his lap, leaving him feeling bereft. “Are you still going to insist you won’t have sex with me?”

All four of them said *yes* at the same time. At least they were in agreement.

Her shoulders slumped. “Seriously? Doesn’t anyone care what I want? I thought you said I had free will here.”

Tempting little imp, but she wasn’t going to sway them. Mykel smirked. “Honey, we have free will too, and we’ve agreed it would be inconsiderate to breach your sweet pussy if we aren’t going to be the last four people alive to do so. When you’re ready to make that lifetime commitment to us, we will gladly make sure you spend the rest of your life so damn satisfied you won’t even be able to glance at us without getting wet.”

She gasped. “You’re awfully sure of yourselves.”

“Yes.” Mykel didn’t hesitate. The rest of his partners nodded.

“So, what exactly are you willing to show me?” she inquired, eyes narrowed.

Eldin fielded that one. “Damn near anything else. It’s probably wrong of us. Getting you naked and enjoying your body is still sex even if we don’t breach your pussy, but at least we won’t have that guilt hanging around our necks.”

Harmony flinched. “Guilt?”

“Yep.” Blane nodded. “Guilt for taking something from you that wasn’t ours to take. If you’re curious and you want a bit of sex education, that’s fine. But that one part of you is off limits. Take it or leave it.”

She sighed. “I can’t believe I spent twenty years of my life worrying incessantly about my future husband causing me pain doing exactly what I’m begging for from not one but four men now.”

York chuckled. “It is ironic, but there is a difference.” He reached out and pulled her into his arms, tipping her head back so she was looking into his eyes. “We adore you. We’ve only known you for ten short days, but we know we’d like you to move in with us and be ours.”

Eldin came to one side and stroked her back. “He’s right. After five years of imposed celibacy, we’re drawn to you like a magnet. We couldn’t stop it. You slammed into our lives and into our hearts so fast none of us could see it coming.”

York came to her other side. “And we would be delighted if you decided you never wanted to take a second glance at another man for the rest of your life, but we’re realistic. You’re young. We’re the first men you’ve really had a chance to interact with. Maybe there are others living here you will prefer over us. Lord knows there are a lot of men here and—”

“Stop.” She held out a hand. “Just seriously, stop talking nonsense.”

Mykel loved her spunk so much he was smiling as he joined the group huddle. He flattened himself to her back and wrapped his arms around her between her and York. He set his lips on her ear. “We’re only asking you to slow the train down and take your time.”

What he wanted to say instead was *“I’m in love with you and I’d do anything to ensure you eventually feel the same way about me.”* He wouldn’t dare say those words of course, but damn, his emotions were right at the surface.

She sighed, tipping her head to one side, inviting him to kiss her neck.

He did. He even scraped his teeth over the tender skin. “Perhaps I’ll suck your skin right here and give you a giant

hickey so everyone who meets you tomorrow will know you were in my bed tonight.”

“What’s a hickey?” she murmured.

“It’s like a bruise,” York informed her. “We could all give you one and eliminate any public doubt about your availability,” he teased.

“Okay,” she whispered. “If it makes you stop doubting my ability to know my own mind. Do what you have to.”

Mykel groaned. His cock was so fucking hard, it was going to tear a hole in his sweats. It was going to have to chill though. It might get some sort of action but not the kind it demanded.

“No one is giving you a fucking hickey,” Blane informed her. Or perhaps he was informing all of them.

She wiggled herself free from the center of the huddle, ducked to get out, and stood a few feet away, hands on her hips. “I’m not a child. I’m a grown woman. I know you’re all older than me. I know you think I’m too innocent to know what I want, but you’re wrong. And that’s fine. I’ll prove you wrong. In the meantime, can I please stay here with you instead of alone? It didn’t feel right. I stared at that bed and couldn’t get in it.”

“Yes.” Mykel didn’t hesitate. None of them did. They had been on the same page with Harmony from the moment they all stepped into that room together under the farmhouse.

Sure, they’d discussed her in pairs throughout the last several days. They’d talked about how amazing she was and how badly they wanted to claim her. They’d also talked about how fucking innocent she was. Not just because of her lack of

sexual experience. They didn't care about that. They cared about her lack of general knowledge about the world.

She was fucking smart. She learned fast. She would know more than any of them in a matter of months. That was a given. She was like a sponge. She thrived on learning and information. It was sexy as fuck.

In Mykel's mind, she was already theirs. It would hurt like hell if she changed her mind. But she had that right. And it would certainly be easier to let her go if they hadn't had their dicks in her, so they'd agreed on that plan, and he knew they would all hold to it.

Granted, they were probably kidding themselves. Mykel's heart was in his damn hands. He'd seen her naked, touched her, watched her come apart for them. He would undoubtedly taste her and suck her pussy until she screamed by the end of the night. Would that make everything worse? Would thrusting his cock into her tight pussy really make a difference if she changed her mind?

He didn't have the answers to that, but it didn't matter. He wasn't going there.

Harmony drew in a deep breath. "Great. Now tell me, what else is there to sex than the act of putting a penis inside a vagina? You all act like there's a long list."

CHAPTER 13



Eldin groaned as that question left her lips. The woman had no trouble speaking or asking for what she wanted. It was hot. It made his cock hard. It was also a breath of fresh air.

Lord knew the four of them needed something softer in their lives. Someone who would challenge them, keep them on their toes, make them laugh. Make them feel things they hadn't let themselves feel in years.

Eldin would never forget Suzanne. None of them would. She held a place in their hearts that would forever remain close. But she wouldn't want them to spend their lives in mourning. It had been long enough. Eldin felt like it was a sign.

The moment Harmony had stepped out of that SUV, looked them in the eyes, and said, "Please tell me you're the good guys," Eldin had known they were in trouble. She'd been a fighter. She'd taken off at a dead run for the car, holding the ridiculous length of tulle from her wedding dress up to make it easier to move.

Eldin had expected to need to convince her to go with them. He'd worried they would lose precious time talking her into believing them. The fact that her mother had been able to

exchange some communication with her in the past few weeks had changed everything.

When Harmony had pulled off that stupid dress in the car and changed into reasonable clothes without hesitation, demanding to know “the plan,” Eldin had nearly swallowed his tongue. He’d been a goner. He couldn’t know when the others had fallen for her, but that had done it for him. He’d been head over heels in love with her.

That seemed like a lifetime ago. Had it only been ten days?

When no one answered her question fast enough, Eldin decided to field it. “The list is very long, hon. Sex is comprised of many things when the people involved give a damn about each other and want to make sure everyone is satisfied.”

“And that’s not what would have happened if I’d ended up on the wrong side street in the city that day, I assume.”

Eldin winced. “It could have. Maybe. It depends. Arranged marriages inside The Republic don’t usually look pretty from what I’ve heard. After all, what kind of chemistry could you possibly have with a stranger? And how could you possibly relax and enjoy the act of sex with a man who isn’t giving you a choice in the matter?”

“You said Braylon gave Haley a choice,” she pointed out.

Eldin nodded. “He did. He’s an exception. He’s one of the good guys. I’m sure it’s rare.”

“I assume so too. We certainly weren’t taught that it might be enjoyable. No one mentioned that. We weren’t taught anything really. I only knew what I know because of my mother. What we’re told leading up to the wedding day is to be demure and obedient. To do whatever our husband asks of us.

That we're expected to service him whenever he wants and not complain. That it will be painful, but it's our duty." She shuddered.

Eldin cringed. Well, all of them did.

"Is that last part at least true?" she asked.

"Yes. It can be. However, you can expect that whoever you first have sex with within this community will do everything in their power to make sure you enjoy it as much as possible. Your pussy is tight the first time. If you were ours, we would use our fingers to stretch your channel as much as possible before first entering you. It will still hurt for a moment the first time, but not for long. And after that, it won't hurt again."

"Oh." She looked surprised. "I got the impression it would always hurt."

"Only if the asshole violating you doesn't give a fuck about your feelings and doesn't make sure your pussy is wet and supple first. It would hurt if you weren't aroused and he lifted your dress and fucked you dry. That's never going to fucking happen with us. Or, uh, with anyone in this community."

"No one outside of this room is having sex with me. Stop it," she insisted, cocking out her sexy hip. Even in the leggings and T-shirt she couldn't hide her delicious body.

Eldin's heart beat faster. He sure hoped that ended up being the truth.

Harmony glanced around. "Do you all have your own rooms?"

Eldin nodded. "We do."

“So, if I were to move in with you, then what would happen? You’d take turns sleeping with me?” She bit her lower lip. It was cute when she was embarrassed.

York shook his head and beat Eldin to the response. “Not likely. More often than not, probably two of us would sleep with you. Sometimes all of us, but the largest bed we have isn’t really big enough for five people.”

“To answer your real question,” Blane added, “sex between us would be whatever we want it to be. Sometimes all of us might be present, sometimes fewer. Your feelings on that subject matter too. You might not be comfortable with so many people in the room at once. Or, on the flip side, you might not be comfortable when we’re not all in the room. Assuming, of course, you make the decision to stay,” he added.

“Oh.” She nodded. “It was kind of overwhelming when you were all touching me at once the other morning.”

“If you don’t like it, we won’t,” Eldin assured her.

“I didn’t say I didn’t *like* it. I’m pretty sure I did. I just couldn’t think while you were all touching me.”

Eldin chuckled. “Thinking is overrated when you’re supposed to be enjoying yourself.” It was surreal having this frank education discussion about sex, but it was what she needed, and they would give her whatever the fuck she wanted or needed for the rest of their damn lives.

It seemed no one was willing to make the suggestion that they move to a bed instead of standing there awkwardly in the living room.

Finally, Harmony broke the ice on that one. Not surprising. The rest of them had their dicks in their hands, figuratively.

“Show me the biggest bed,” she said, standing her full five foot three inches.

Eldin nodded toward his room. “This way.”

As they all stepped into the room, Harmony dragged her hand along the edge of the mattress and then climbed up into the middle. She lifted her gaze. “I don’t like the idea of you all worshiping me like I’m some kind of princess without me being permitted to reciprocate. I know I’m not knowledgeable about damn near anything, but tell me. Show me. Teach me. Don’t climb up here and strip my clothes off if you’re not going to get naked too. I want to explore you also.”

Eldin drew in a breath as he came to the side of the bed. They all did. Mykel was across from him. Blane and York kneeled on the end of the mattress and crawled up to sit in front of her.

Harmony let her gaze roam around at each of them. “Why is this so awkward? It’s like you’re afraid to touch me or you don’t want to.”

“Oh, we want to,” Mykel informed her. “We’re afraid we’ll lose control. We’re also afraid we’ll overwhelm you.”

“I know you’re not going to lose control. None of you is that weak.”

Eldin took her hand. “He doesn’t mean we’ll accidentally turn into animals and drag you under us, hon. He means we’re going to come at any moment, and frankly, that’s a bit embarrassing.”

Her eyes widened. “*You’re* embarrassed? Why? How the hell do you think I feel right now?”

He flipped her hand over and kissed her palm. “It’s been a long damn time since we were in this position. We’re crazy for

you. You're sitting here in the middle of our bed in our apartment, and we're hoping you're not an apparition."

Mykel slid behind her and cupped her neck. "My cock is damn hard. If you look at it, I will come. If you touch it, I'll probably come again." He was half kidding, but Eldin knew he was mostly serious.

"Isn't that the objective?" she asked.

Blane chuckled and scooted closer so he could set a hand on her knee. "It is, but we'd rather last longer. It's embarrassing to a man when they come so fast no one has a chance to enjoy it."

She stared at him. "Okay. Well, since I'm not aware of those fun facts, maybe just act like it's normal?"

York laughed this time. "Sure. We'll try." He had moved closer too, and he reached to tuck a lock of her hair behind her ear. "We don't want to overwhelm you."

"You're not. Or if you do, it can't be helped."

York nodded before kneeling in front of her and kissing her. He was gentle. It was hot to watch. When he released her lips, he said, "I'd much rather pull your clothes off, flatten you to the bed, and bury my face between your legs. I can press my insistent cock into the mattress while I do so, and when I come in my pants from eating you, you'll never know."

She gasped and shook her head. "That's not what's going to happen."

York kissed her again, grinning. "I didn't think so."

"How about we all take our own clothes off at the same time and then you all keep your hands to yourselves and let me look at you?"

Eldin swallowed his tongue. She was going to kill them. There was no doubt. They were all going to die tonight right here in this bed from being so aroused their hearts stopped.

CHAPTER 14



Blane slid off the end of the bed before anyone else moved. If Harmony wanted nudity, she would get nudity. If he came without touching himself from looking at her, so be it. Who cared?

It wasn't as if his cock would be less hard after he came, nor would his chest stop beating so fast. He certainly wasn't going to fall asleep.

Blane hadn't been with a woman in five years. As far as he knew, none of them had. Not that he would blame them if they'd found someone to fuck along the way. He simply found it unlikely. They were an odd family made of four men whose wife had died. They were rarely separated from each other.

Part of what kept Blane and his partners alive was the fact that they were so in tune with each other. They always had each other's backs. They worked as a team in every dangerous situation, extracting people from tight spots like a well-oiled machine.

What the fuck were they going to do if Harmony insisted on joining them in the field? Because fuck that. It made his skin crawl just thinking about it. He'd already watched one woman he'd loved die in front of his eyes. He couldn't go through that again.

Shaking the morbid thoughts from his head, he pulled off his shirt and then shrugged out of his sweatpants. In seconds, he was naked, and he climbed back onto the bed in all his glory, letting her look her fill.

Harmony's eyes were wide, and her mouth hung open. She also scooted back until she was against the headboard. She pulled her legs in tight so her thighs were against her chest and set her chin on her knees.

She looked like she might panic. She swallowed.

Blane felt kind of bad, but shit, she was eventually going to have to see cocks and learn that indeed they do fit. In fact, she'd learn a lot more than that soon.

Mykel, Eldin, and York shed their clothes and joined Blane on the bed once more.

"Jesus," she muttered. "That looks...painful."

Blane chuckled and wrapped his palm around his shaft, squeezing it slightly before sliding his hand off the tip. "It's not. It's more like a pressure that wants release. Like the pressure you felt right before you came."

She pursed her lips and stared for a moment before shifting her attention to the other men, one at a time. Eldin and Mykel had dropped onto their sides near her, facing her. They were trying to look casual. Blane knew better.

York was next to Blane, leaning on a hip.

Harmony drew in a breath and sat taller, still holding her folded legs against her. She was fully dressed. That was okay. She had that right. She could remain dressed if she wanted. She didn't have to do a damn thing she didn't want to do.

She cleared her throat. “Okay, so I get the concept. I didn’t realize erections were that big, but whatever.” She waved a dismissive hand in front of her as if their sizes were immaterial. It was cute. “Somehow I get the impression from what you’ve said that there’s more to sex than just pushing that into me and emptying it. Pardon my ignorance, but would someone elaborate, please?”

Blane gripped his cock again. He was the only one touching himself, but he didn’t care. “It can be that simple. What you described is all that’s necessary to impregnate someone. Most men can orgasm without much difficulty. They can do it in their hand or inside a woman whether she’s willing or not.”

He winced and shook his head. “Let me take that back. Most men would not want to have sex with an unwilling woman, and my cock would not be hard if I didn’t think you wanted to be near it.”

Her gaze was on his dick. At least she didn’t look quite as horrified.

Blane was relieved when Mykel took over. Blane was doing a piss-poor job explaining.

Mykel flattened his hand on the mattress in front of him, not touching her, but making it so he was slightly closer. “Our main goal will always be to ensure you’re so fucking sexually satisfied your head is spinning. That means we will touch you everywhere, kiss you everywhere, until you can’t think straight. There are a million ways we intend to touch you. A million positions we will arrange your body. And...more than one hole we’ll breach.”

She leaned back and bit her lip before her jaw dropped, but then she clamped it shut without saying a word for a minute.

“Why, exactly, would someone want to do that?”

Blane loved how fucking open she was. How inquisitive. He loved that she wanted a play-by-play and would settle for nothing less. They would show her the answers to all her questions over time, but talking about it didn't bother him a bit. He knew it didn't bother the others either.

Eldin reached out his hand, but he didn't leave it on the bed. He held it aloft between them. “Give me your hand, hon,” he requested gently.

She tentatively did as he asked, though she looked as though she was afraid touching him would cause her to incinerate.

Eldin slid closer and dragged her knuckles against his cheek. “The euphoria from having sex is amazing. You got a taste of it that first morning.”

She nodded slowly and blew out a breath. “That's a fact. I haven't forgotten.” She shuddered adorably and loosened up, releasing her legs to let them lower in front of her.

“Would you like a reminder?” York asked. His voice was serious. He wasn't joking with her. He rolled onto all fours and crawled toward her before kissing her toes.

She met his gaze and smiled, tugging her foot back. “That tickles. And it's weird. Maybe don't include my feet in whatever you have planned.”

York returned her smile. “Noted.” He grabbed her ankles and eased her toward him, right into Blane's path too. “Lie back.”

She looked a bit like she'd been told she was about to get a tooth extracted as she stiffly complied.

Blane was confident they would have her relaxed and begging in no time. In fact, a second later when Mykel slipped his hand under her shirt and rested it on her stomach, she arched, a soft whimper escaping her lips.

She was so responsive. They'd learned that the first time they were with her. It would be so much better here on a real bed where they weren't in danger and no one could hear her.

Blane turned to crawl up her body and hooked his fingers in her waistband, watching her as he eased the leggings over her hips. Her breathing was heavy, and the moment he cleared her butt to drag the cotton over her thighs, he could smell her arousal.

While Blane yanked her pants off and tossed them aside, Mykel pushed her shirt up and over her head.

Her breasts were so fucking sexy. Blane hadn't been able to see her as well that first morning in the dim lighting. Tonight, he could see every delectable inch, including the freckles scattered on her chest. "You have no idea how gorgeous you are," he breathed before he dropped a kiss on one of her nipples.

She moaned and arched her chest clear off the bed as if he'd thrust into her.

York set his hands on her legs and slid them up, nudging Blane to move a few inches to one side so he could part her thighs.

"It feels weird having you look at me like that," she whispered. She wasn't making eye contact with anyone. Her head was tipped back and her gaze was on the ceiling.

"Like what?" Mykel murmured as he lowered his mouth to her other nipple.

“Like you want to eat me.”

Eldin chuckled. “We are so totally going to eat you, Harmony. Every inch of you.”

She gasped and lowered her head. “Wha—”

She didn’t get a chance to finish her question before York lowered his mouth to her inner thigh. He held her leg open and nibbled a path toward her pussy, licking and sucking and dragging his teeth over her skin.

“Oh. Oh, God.” She tossed her head back again.

Eldin leaned over to kiss her lips.

Blane wanted to watch. He wanted to see her reactions. He dropped onto his hip, trying not to get in York’s or Eldin’s way. He cupped her breast and played with her nipple while he took in the entire picture. He wanted to embed this in his memory.

When York bent her knee and pushed it wide, she writhed. She must have sensed what he intended to do next because she wiggled a hand between them and pushed against his head. “What... York...”

York was undaunted. He kissed her pussy and then blew on it.

Harmony gasped against Eldin’s mouth.

York flattened his tongue against her glistening sex and dragged it through her folds and over her clit.

Blane’s cock was suddenly several times harder. Her scent was so sweet. The way she wiggled and squirmed made him want to taste her. All he could do at the moment was watch. He certainly wasn’t going to shove York out of the way. They

had their entire lives to worship her body. Blane would get his turn. He would get many turns.

She was panting as Eldin released her lips.

Blane watched her face. He was in love with her. He knew it in his bones. He prayed this was the beginning of something that would last a lifetime.

Damn, she was...*young* wasn't really the excuse. Inexperienced. New to the world. She hadn't met any other people. It was hard for Blane to grasp, but he needed to face the fact that although she insisted otherwise, she might meet and enjoy the company of other men in the coming days.

He cringed and banished the thought. He also grabbed her leg and held it steady when she grew restless.

York had his palm on her other thigh. He lowered his face closer, most likely to suck.

And...yep. Because Harmony's body arched off the bed as she cried out. Her hands fisted in York's hair. Her body trembled from her obvious release. She was gasping and writhing.

She was fucking beautiful.

CHAPTER 15



York couldn't stop smiling as he kissed Harmony's sweet pussy several more times and then lifted his face. He wiped his lips on the back of his hand and watched her chest rise and fall.

Everyone else had leaned back, giving her space. Every inch of her was gloriously displayed in front of him. When she released his hair and let her hands fall to her sides, sated, his heart swelled.

"You are so fucking sexy," he stated. Her own hair was spread out around her like a halo. *So sexy.*

She finally licked her lips and closed her mouth. "Wow." Her body started trembling.

York turned to glance at the foot of the bed, saw a blanket, and tugged it up over her body.

"Too hot," she murmured, pushing it back down to expose her chest. "You did that to me again."

"Was it as good as the first time?" York asked.

"Better. Your mouth..."

He chuckled. "Yeah. I'm glad you enjoyed it."

She rose up onto her elbows and stared at him. “Can I put my mouth on you too?”

York drew in a breath. Hell, they all did. “Yes. I mean... yes.” What else was there to say?

“Now?” She glanced around. “Can I touch you all the way you’ve touched me?”

Mykel groaned and hung his head so his hair dragged over her breast. “She’s going to kill us.”

She giggled. The sound was delightful. Light. Playful. Sweet. Mesmerizing.

“No one is ever going to tell you no to such a request,” Eldin informed her, his voice deep. He was gripping his cock absently.

Harmony pushed to sitting and took a deep breath.

York loved that she didn’t seem self-conscious about her body. She didn’t try to hide herself. In fact, she shoved the blanket completely away toward her feet. “So, what do I do?” She looked nervous, chewed on her bottom lip again.

York smiled. “Anything you want. Touch, lick, suck, fondle. Drag your hand up and down. The only part that’s sensitive is our balls. Scrotum, I mean. Be gentle with those. Oh, and don’t use your teeth.”

“Hey...” Blane argued. “I like teeth.”

York chuckled. It was mind boggling how frank this discussion was as if they were telling someone how to make a cake. “Except Blane. He likes teeth.”

Blane smirked. “Not biting, mind you. Grazing them across my cock feels good.”

Mykel shuddered. “When teeth touch my cock, I get nervous. Save that for Blane.”

“Uhh... Okay.” Harmony rubbed a hand down her face before glancing at Blane. She opened her mouth and then closed it. A small shudder shook her frame.

York figured she was trying to catch up, probably hadn’t grasped putting her mouth on them at all let alone her teeth.

Harmony glanced around. “How do I avoid hurting anyone’s feelings? I’m one person you’re all hovering over. I can’t be responsible for choosing who I touch first and what it might mean to you.”

Mykel sat up and stroked her hair back, running his fingers through it before kissing her gently. “Watching is hot, almost as good as experiencing. We’re all going to enjoy whatever you do. While you touch one of us, the rest of us are going to touch ourselves.”

“Oh. Okay.”

“That being said,” Mykel shifted his gaze to York. “Touch York first.”

“Agreed,” Eldin and Blane said in unison.

York’s eyes went wide. “Seriously?” He was stunned. “Why me?”

Mykel slid off the edge of the bed and patted the spot where he’d been to Harmony’s left. “Because you have the best self-control of all of us, and we know it.”

York stared at them all. “I do?” *Is that true?*

“Yes,” they said at once.

“You always have. You were always the best one when...” Mykel cleared his throat and lowered his voice, “...when Suzanne needed soft and slow and gentle.”

No one spoke for a long time.

Harmony swallowed hard. “It’s okay to talk about her, you know. She was important to you. I’m so sorry you lost her. I would never pretend to take her place.”

How did Harmony know exactly the right words to say?

York couldn’t speak. He was choked up. He was growing more in love with this woman by the hour. Did she have any idea? She brought him to his knees.

Mykel patted the spot on the bed next to Harmony again and stepped back.

York was humbled beyond belief as he slid up next to her and dropped onto his side. “Lie down, sweetness,” he whispered. “Face me.”

She aligned herself with him, and he slid a hand up her back to cup her neck. He kissed her, gently at first, keeping his gaze on hers. He didn’t want to miss a single look, a single sigh, a single gasp.

After a few minutes, she softened against him and leaned into him, pushing him to his back. When their lips parted, she smiled. “Kissing scrambles my brain.”

“That’s the general idea,” he told her. He slid his arm under her and cupped her bottom.

She surprised him by swatting at his hand. “Stop touching me. It’s my turn. Put your hands above your head.”

York chuckled as he obeyed her. She never ceased to amaze him. Would she ever? How could she be so innocent

and demure one second and on fire with orders the next? He didn't care. He liked it.

The rest of his partners were watching, hovering but giving her space.

Harmony glanced around at all of them. "You know each other pretty well, don't you?"

"Better than blood brothers, yes," Eldin told her.

"Okay, somebody besides York tell me what to do, please."

York smiled. It was funny how polite she was in bed. *"Pass the salt, please. Hand me that book, please. Talk me through a blowjob, please."*

"Do what feels natural, honey," Mykel said. "You can't do it wrong. It's just not a thing."

She tentatively stroked a finger along the edge of his shaft. "Seems like it would be a thing for *me*," she pointed out.

"That's true," Blane agreed. "It's different for women. They have sweet spots that need attention. The zone for a man is much broader. It's basically the entire cock."

When she swirled her finger through the precome on the tip of his dick, he fisted the blankets above his head. *Jesus. Holy mother.* How had the other three thought he had self-control? He didn't feel like he did. He felt like he was going to explode any moment.

The feel of her soft fingers on his cock... It had been so long... But he knew that wasn't the only reason. He could have been with ten women in the past month and they wouldn't have compared to Harmony. It was her. It was the entire package.

The way she tossed her hair back. The way she bit the lower corner of her lip. The way she stared at his dick. The way she glanced at him as if asking for approval.

“Feels amazing, sweetness,” he reassured her.

She turned back to her task, stroking up and down his shaft several more times before leaning over to kiss the tip. A second later, she swirled her tongue around the head.

York held his breath and gritted his teeth. *Fuck me*. If he didn't come like a teenager any second, it would be a miracle.

“If you want to suck his cock into your mouth, you can,” Eldin informed her. “Only if it appeals to you.”

“Mmm.” She did as he suggested, wrapping her lips around the head and lowering her mouth over him several inches.

York moaned. He couldn't stop it. He held his breath afterward, trying not to move. Or come.

Harmony rose up slowly and then took him deeper.

Blane's voice was deep when he spoke. “You can suck or just move. You can take him all the way into your throat, or use your hand around the base to stroke the bottom half of his cock while you suck the top half.”

She made a sound that might have been understanding, but from York's perspective vibrated all the way to his balls. He closed his eyes. He really didn't want to come in her mouth right now. She wasn't ready for that.

She lifted her mouth off and used her hand over her saliva to glide up and down his erection, staring at it. “I want to watch you come,” she murmured. “Okay?” She glanced at him.

He swallowed and nodded. “It’s about to be unavoidable, sweetness.”

“It’s salty,” she commented. “Am I salty?”

“No,” Blane told her. “Not like we are. You’re sweeter.”

She looked back at York. “More pressure or less?”

He moaned. It really didn’t matter. What mattered was having the willpower to stay still and let her explore through the banter. He’d never talked as much during sex as he had since they’d met her. He liked it. It was real.

He couldn’t keep his hands fisted above his head another moment. He needed to touch her. He reached down and stroked her hair. So fucking soft like the rest of her. “Look at me, Harmony.”

She glanced at him again.

He smiled. “You’re like an angel.” He ran his fingers through her hair. “I’m gonna come now. If you don’t want to get hit in the face—”

He was cut off when her fist tightened on his shaft. She jerked her attention back to the object of her focus too.

A second later, his balls drew up and he couldn’t hold back another moment. He came, long streaks of his semen shooting straight into the air with more force than he ever remembered. Jet after jet of his release landed all over his torso and ran down her hands.

She didn’t flinch or move away. She watched.

He watched her. He could watch her do just about anything for hours, but this was a fucking important moment, and he didn’t want to miss it. She even slowed her hands and eased back on the pressure as the waves of release ended.

When she dragged a finger through the come on his stomach and brought it to her mouth to taste, he might have died. Someone was going to need to resuscitate him.

Mykel tossed a shirt at York, and he used it to wipe himself off.

Harmony rose onto her knees and leaned over York's face, hovering before kissing him. "Thank you."

He chuckled. "My pleasure, sweetness."

She sat back and twisted to face the other three, her gaze landing on Blane last. "Will you do it to yourself while I watch?"

Blane groaned.

York propped his head up with his forearm behind his neck.

Blane already had his hand wrapped around his cock. He rose onto his knees at her side and stroked. He set his free hand on her shoulder, probably to steady himself. It took about ten strokes for him to come, his semen shooting out with such force that it hit her breasts.

She didn't flinch. She watched.

Damn, she was amazing.

CHAPTER 16



Harmony was restless. For one thing, she was too hot lying between Mykel and Eldin. They didn't give her an inch of space. They were both snoring lightly, sound asleep, but Mykel had a hand around her waist, and Eldin had a leg over the top of one of hers, pinning her, keeping her thighs open too.

She wasn't sure how long they'd been asleep. They'd been up late. There was no outside light source in this underground bunker. A light was on in the main room, and the door was open, so she could see well enough, but she had zero concept of time.

Blane and York had eventually left to sleep in other rooms, but not until after she'd shifted her attention from Blane to Mykel and finally Eldin.

They were each different. All four erections were different sizes. Some longer, some wider. After they came, their shafts got slightly softer, but not fully. They didn't look quite as... intense, but she suspected they did sometimes exist in a more fully softened state.

Now?

She lifted her head to glance down where both men's erections were pressing against her thighs. Apparently not

now.

“You okay?” Mykel murmured, his hand sliding up to cup her breast.

She shivered and looked at him.

His eyes were heavy lidded, but he was watching her. “Did we freak you out entirely?”

She shook her head. “No.” *Maybe. Yes. But also no.*

Mykel pinched her nipple, making her gasp, instantly arousing her. “You’re so responsive.”

She watched his face, breathing heavily while he played with her nipple. She drew her hands up to her belly and smoothed her palms over her flat stomach.

Mykel switched his attention to the other nipple as he rose up a few inches to rest his cheek on his other palm. “You like that,” he observed.

She nodded. She liked it a lot. Her breath hitched when he twisted the swollen bud slightly.

Mykel’s gaze was on her eyes as he spoke. “Is she wet against your thigh, Eldin?”

“Very,” he responded in a gravelly voice.

Harmony hadn’t known he was also awake, and she arched when he pushed his thigh against her sex.

“Mmm. Don’t get her off, El,” he said gently.

Harmony swallowed. *What? Why?*

He stared at her for a long time, still tormenting her nipples. Finally, he clarified. “Slide your hand down to your pussy. Touch yourself.”

Her breath hitched. She didn't know what to do. She shook her head.

Mykel leaned closer, kissed her briefly, and then repeated himself. "Touch your pussy, honey. Use your fingers to get yourself off. Slide them through your folds, circle your clit, pinch it, press against it, flick it. Find out what you like."

"I...can't."

He drew in a breath through his nose. "You were told not to, weren't you?"

She nodded. Her face heated. They hadn't been allowed to touch themselves any more than absolutely necessary to wash in the shower or wipe on the toilet.

When Mykel blew out the same breath through his nose, it flared. "Those fuckers were wrong, Harmony. There's nothing wrong with finding pleasure with yourself or with others. It's human nature. It's natural. It feels good. They kept you so fucking repressed so you wouldn't know pleasure. It's easier to control people when they don't know what they're missing. But you're not there anymore. You're never going to be under the thumb of that fucked-up regime again."

"He's right," Eldin agreed. "The best way to know what you like is to figure it out for yourself. If you decide to stay with us, you won't need to masturbate to stay satisfied because there are four of us, and we're insatiable. But you should know how to give yourself pleasure. We do it. You watched us last night."

True. She had asked them to touch themselves in fact. Why should it be different for her? She didn't live by a different set of rules. Not anymore.

Emboldened, she slid a hand down between her legs as Eldin pulled his knee back to give her space. Her thighs were wide. She was already wet when she set her fingers on her... pussy.

She blushed at the thought of that word they liked to use. It sounded dirty, and she liked it.

While Mykel played with her nipples, switching back and forth, she closed her eyes and parted her folds. She dragged a finger through her arousal and used it to circle her clit.

She held her breath, her lips pursed. That bundle of nerves was where most of her sensation came from. She had that figured out. When she slid her finger back between her folds, she found her entrance, so wet and tight and swollen. Nothing had been inside her before. She wasn't sure what might have happened if she'd been caught with her fingers in her panties at the girls' home, but she didn't want to know either.

"Push it inside if you want, hon," Eldin encouraged. "There are no rules here. It will feel good."

She glanced at him, realizing he was watching her sex with an intensity that made her tremble. "Will it hurt?"

"No. Not one finger. Not likely."

She took a breath and eased her middle finger inside her.

Holy shit.

She dug her heels into the bed and tried to arch her hips off the mattress, but Eldin had her pinned.

It felt so good. There were different nerve endings inside her.

"Reach deeper," Eldin whispered. He set his palm on her opposite thigh and held it wider. "Curl your finger so that it

grazes the top of your channel.”

She slid her finger in as far as she could until her palm was flattened against her clit. That only made her arousal shoot higher.

She couldn't believe this was happening. She'd never dreamed of touching herself. It wasn't even a side thought. Not even after realizing men did it. Why shouldn't she?

She gasped.

“That's a girl,” Mykel praised. “Add another finger if you want.”

She did want. She wanted everything. She added her pointer and reached in again. When she bent her knuckles and stroked the front of her channel, she found a rough spot that caused her to nearly shoot off the bed.

“Jesus,” Eldin whispered. His hand was trembling against her thigh. “Keep going, hon. Rub that spot where it feels so good. Play with your clit with your other hand.”

Her other hand? She'd forgotten she had another hand. She quickly slid it down to reach under her palm, zero in on her clit, and flick it rapidly. She already knew she liked it when the men did that. Mykel had done exactly this with his fingers that morning several days ago. And holy shit, but York had done this with his mouth last night.

She went into her head, focusing on the intense pleasure instead of the eyes watching her. That part was unnerving. As she thrust her fingers in as deep as she could, she rubbed her clit hard.

Finally, she gasped. Her entire body shook violently as tremors of her release shook her frame. It was the best feeling in the world. Floating. Pure bliss.

She was panting when she finally grew too sensitive to touch herself. A grin spread across her face.

She startled when Mykel took one hand and Eldin took the other. They brought her fingers to their lips and sucked them clean one at a time.

When she finally had enough sense to blink, she noticed they were not alone. Blane and York had entered the room at some point. They each set a knee on the bed and leaned in closer.

Blane ran a hand up her leg and gripped her thigh. “You are the sexiest woman alive.”

Her cheeks heated again. How was she supposed to respond to that?

“How much did you watch?” she asked before swallowing.

“All of it,” York admitted.

“I’m embarrassed.” She was doubly so now that she thought more about what she’d just done for an audience of four.

“Don’t be.” Mykel leaned over and kissed her. “Never apologize for your sexuality. You’re not captive anymore. Embrace the good parts of life and make them yours.”

“*Good* parts?” She chuckled. “*Good* is an awfully mild word for how you four make me feel.” She stretched out and took a deep breath. It was hard to believe she was here.

Safe.

Was that really a thing?

“You can’t guarantee my safety forever, you know. It’s precarious. I could go outside, get captured, and be dragged

back to The Republic before anyone could blink. You should probably have sex with me just in case.” She was sort of teasing. Mostly. Kind of.

The looks on their faces told her they weren't listening to a joke. In fact they glanced at each other several times, exchanging the silent communication she often saw between them.

“That can't happen if you don't go outside,” Mykel stated.

She jerked her gaze to him. “True. But a ridiculous argument. I can't very well help the four of you in your missions from inside the bunker.”

Silence.

Harmony switched her attention to Eldin and then Blane and then York. Finally, she pushed to sitting and glared at them all one at a time. No one's face softened.

She shoved Blane and Eldin out of the way and dragged herself off the end of the bed. As soon as she was standing, she turned around and set her hands on her hips.

She didn't even care she was naked. Fuck that. It wasn't important. “You were never planning to let me help, were you?”

Winces. Four of them. They might have even looked chagrined. They did not refute her question.

She stood taller, twisting around to find her clothes. The room was filled with shirts and sweatpants. Surely something would fit her. She didn't really care whose they were.

The first thing she snagged was a shirt. Not hers. Didn't matter. She pulled it over her head. “I can't believe you guys,” she shouted. “All this talk about me being your equal, and you

think you're going to keep me down here in your apartment for the next eighty years while you go out and risk your lives saving the world? Fuck that."

She found her own leggings. Thank God. But it took her a minute to straighten out the legs and shove her feet into them.

"Harmony..." Mykel.

She jerked her gaze up. "No. Don't talk. Don't say a word." She lifted a finger and pointed at him. "I'm not some fragile little girl who can't take care of herself. I want to help. I want to join the cause. Be part of the mission. I know shit. Hell, I know how those girls' homes work. I know their weaknesses. I can *help*. I got out. Do you think I'm going to become the docile little wifey and stay here tidying up after you four every day? No. Never. Not a chance."

"No one is saying that," Eldin interrupted.

She rolled her eyes. "You don't have to say it in words. It's what you're thinking." She took a step back. Her hair was wild and hanging all over the place. She tried to drag it back, but she didn't have a band to hold it with.

Finally, she gave up and dropped it. "You talk to me about freedom and choices and equality for days on end, and then as soon as you get me to safety, you switch your plan. No." She shook her head. Actually, her entire body was shaking.

"No," she repeated again. "I get that your wife died during a mission. I know it was devastating. I hurt for you and for what you went through. But I bet she was doing what she loved, and if she hadn't been, she would have been unhappy. That's how I would feel too. Restless and useless. I may be ignorant about a lot of topics, but I'm a smart girl. I'll catch up. I'll learn. Fast. I know it scares you. You're afraid you'll

lose me too. And I can't promise you I won't get captured or killed any more than you can guarantee that about yourselves."

Harmony dragged in a breath. She needed to finish. She had more to say. "If you lock me up, you'll destroy my soul. That's not what you want. I know it's not. You can't pamper me. You wouldn't even like who I would become if you tried. The woman you're attracted to jumped out of that fucking SUV and ran for her life. She kicked off her shoes and climbed into the back of a car with perfect strangers because she wanted to *live*. Don't destroy that. It will backfire on you and alienate me."

"Harmony." Blane took a step closer but stopped when she shot him a glare. "We can't tell you what to do. It's against everything we believe in. It's literally against the rules. If the council thought we were holding you back, we'd be kicked out of The Wanderers."

Her chest was rising and falling. She stared at him.

"He's right," York added. "Every decision we make as a family has to be consensual to all of us, including you. We're just..."

"Hoping I'll bend to your will," she provided, cocking a hip out. "I won't. So think about that. It's not going to happen." She spun around and fled the room. She needed space. She needed to be alone. She needed to think.

After darting through the living room, she yanked open the door to the apartment and stepped out into the hallway. Luckily, no one was around. The last thing she wanted was to face anyone, stranger or otherwise. She ran down the hall toward the room she'd spent less than an hour in last night, quickly entered the code, and stepped inside.

Her mother was sitting on the couch with a book. She dropped it and sat upright. Her eyes went wide. “What happened? You look fit to kill.”

Harmony stomped past her and into the bathroom without shutting the door. “I am.”

Her mother followed and leaned on the doorframe. “Want to talk about it?”

“No.” She turned on the shower and started stripping out of her clothes. For some reason, it felt necessary to wash their scent off her body.

As she stepped under the spray, she didn’t shut that door either. “Can you believe they want me to stay here underground and become everything I just fought to escape?”

Her mother didn’t respond.

Harmony grabbed the shampoo. She’d just washed her hair last night, but she didn’t care. It smelled like men. Specific men.

“Yep,” she continued. “They’ve spent days telling me about freedom and choices, and the moment they get me here they change their story. Now they want a submissive little wife who will stay underground where she can’t get into any trouble. Fuck that.”

Her mother flinched.

Harmony glanced her way. “Sorry.”

“Cuss all you want, dear. I don’t mind.” Was she smiling?

“Mom! Are you listening to me?”

“I am.”

“They want to *control* me,” she shouted.

“They love you, Harmony,” she said gently. “They want to keep you alive.”

“Well, that’s not fair.” She squeezed her eyes shut when soap ran into them. “I want to help with their mission. I want to rescue people. I want to go back and free the rest of the girls. I want to feel useful.”

“You’re so passionate. So strong. I like to think I instilled a lot of that in you. I tried.”

“You did, Mom. You made me who I am.” Harmony turned off the shower and grabbed her towel. “You were the best mom in the world. I’m the luckiest woman alive to have had a mother with the insight to teach me damn near everything a person should learn in eighteen years but pack it into twelve.”

Harmony hung up the towel and reached for a comb.

Her mother had tears in her eyes, and she wiped them with her fingers.

Harmony leaned forward and hugged her tight. “I’m sorry, Mom. I’m sorry I’m shouting. I’m sorry you spent eight years worrying about me. I’m okay. I promise.”

“I know you are, dear. You’re better than okay.” Marian leaned back and held Harmony by the shoulders. “You’re amazing. Brilliant. Stunningly gorgeous. So grown up. Wise beyond your years. Braylon and Riggs and Storm aren’t going to believe it when they see you.”

Harmony smiled and inhaled deeply. “Forgot about them. Are they here? I should go see them.”

Marian chuckled. “Forgot about them, huh?” Her expression was mischievous. “Wonder how that happened.”

Harmony continued combing her hair. “Not for the reasons you’re thinking. I haven’t had sex. Those four Neanderthals won’t touch me that way until I agree to be theirs. Probably going to make me sign a fucking document agreeing to stay underground for the rest of my life too,” she muttered at the end.

Her mother laughed. “I don’t think they can do that. There are rules here. I had a long chat with a very nice woman from the council this morning. Willa Schama. She came to the apartment. Brought me breakfast and coffee. I’m quite sure no one can tell you what to do in this community, especially not men. I’m also certain your men won’t really dictate your life either. They’re just scared, Harmony. They lost their first wife in a mission. That’s making them panic.”

Harmony sighed. “I know. I get it. But I don’t want to be held back. They’ll destroy my spirit if they don’t let me help.”

“You have to admit you’re not prepared to do what they do yet. It would take time to learn the things they know. You’d need to be stronger. Know how to use a variety of weapons. You’d have to be willing to kill people, Harmony. Could you do that?”

Harmony winced. They hadn’t gotten around to teaching her how to shoot a gun yet, and that was partly because after she’d watched them cleaning their weapons and double-checking the chambers for bullets, she’d lost her nerve.

Marian set a hand on Harmony’s shoulder. “You have so many strengths. You’re smarter than anyone I’ve ever met. Do you know how old you were when you learned to read and started doing math?”

Harmony smiled.

“I bet you had all those girls and even the women reading like they’d been to school to do so by the time you left that damn home.”

“Yeah.” She was pretty proud of that.

“But you loved it too,” Marian suggested as she nodded over her shoulder and turned toward the bedroom Harmony had not slept in last night. She grabbed some clothes off the bed and handed them to Harmony.

Harmony pulled a shirt over her head and then stepped into panties and added jeans, thinking about what her mother had said. “I did love it. It was invigorating. There’s nothing more gratifying than the look on someone’s face when they learn something new.”

Marian lifted her eyebrows. “See? You have important skills. Lots of them. I’m not sure killing people is in your wheelhouse. I bet you could easily describe every detail about that girls’ home to a team of people and let them go do the hard work. Trained people who know how to protect themselves. If your men took you along with them, they’d get themselves killed worrying about you.”

“Yeah. You’re right.” She sighed. *Damn.*

“Grab some shoes. Let’s go eat lunch. You have to be starving.”

“Is it that late?” Harmony asked.

“Yes.” Her mother snickered.

“Hey. By the way...” she said as her mother turned to head back to the living room.

Marian glanced back over her shoulder. “What, dear?”

“You left out a hell of a lot of information when you taught me about sex.”

Her mother laughed. “Some things are better discovered on your own, dear.”

Harmony smiled genuinely. “Or did you do that to protect me in case I never had the chance to experience real love?”

Marian shrugged. “That too.”

“Did you, Mom? Experience love? With anyone? With my father? You never spoke of him except to say he was gone.”

Marian swallowed and then nodded. “I did. He was a wonderful man. Someday I’ll tell you about him.” She sighed. “Let’s go eat.”

CHAPTER 17



The cafeteria was crowded. Harmony looked around but didn't see any of her men in the room. She felt bad for how she'd left them and the things she'd said. They were undoubtedly giving her space. That's the kind of men they were.

She followed her mother into the line, smiling at people as they passed. She wasn't sure how many people lived here or how well they knew each other. Did everyone immediately know she was new?

After putting several selections of food on her plate, she headed toward an empty table with Marian.

"Shoot. Drinks," Marian said. "You start. I'll go get some water."

Before Harmony had a chance to sit, someone called her name.

"Harmony?"

She spun around to find Braylon standing not two yards away. He looked...broader, wiser. He had been nearly an adult when she'd been taken from the family, but not as filled in as he was now.

She dropped her plate on the table and faced him fully, staring before she finally gave in to her instincts and ran

toward him, throwing herself into his arms.

He hugged her tightly. “Hey, kid,” he murmured. “You grew up.”

When she finally let go to get a better look at him, she found two more men standing at his sides. Riggs and Storm.

She let go of Bray to hug Storm next. “Jesus, Storm. You’re so huge. Did you grow another foot?”

He laughed and hugged her tight.

She twisted to hug Riggs next. “You too. I can’t believe I’m seeing you again. I never thought I’d have the chance.” She started to choke up and swallowed back her emotions. She didn’t want to cry. Not right now. Not again.

A woman came up alongside Storm, wrapping herself against his side as he put a protective arm around her. She was very pregnant.

Harmony lifted her gaze as she recognized her. “Haley.”

Haley grinned, her eyes going wide. “Harmony?”

Harmony nodded, and the hugging continued.

When Haley finally stood back, she clasped Harmony’s hands. “I can’t believe they did it. I can’t believe they found you and rescued you. I’m so happy.”

Another shadow made Harmony look up. A man with dark hair and eyes smiled at her. “You must be Harmony.” He held out a hand.

“You must be Rush,” Harmony said as she released Haley to shake his hand. It was still weird shaking men’s hands and looking them in the eye. Not so weird with Storm or Riggs or Bray, but with a stranger it was awkward.

“You made it,” Rush said as he pulled Haley’s back against his front and set a protective hand on her large belly. He glanced around. “Where’s your rescue team? Did you ditch those jokers as soon as you arrived?”

Harmony’s cheeks heated.

Haley elbowed her partner. “Rush, stop it. Leave her alone.”

Rush looked chagrined. “Sorry. I’ll find them later. I’m glad you’re here. I’m sure Haley will want to spend a lot of time with you. She can give you a tour of the facility and catch you up on all things to know about The Wanderers. Assuming no one has done so yet?”

Harmony shook her head. “Not yet. I’d love that.”

Riggs reached around and took Haley’s hand. “Could you just make sure she doesn’t overdo it? We can’t keep her from rushing around as if she weren’t almost seven months pregnant.”

Harmony laughed. “I’ll do my best.”

Haley pointed at the table. “Eat. We interrupted you. If you feel like it after you eat, I’ll take you around.”

Just then Marian returned with two glasses of water in her hands. She stopped dead and nearly dropped them.

Rush was quick to release Haley and take the drinks from her. “You must be Marian.”

Harmony’s mother started crying as she entered a group hug with Storm, Riggs, and Braylon. “It’s so good to see you.” She finally leaned back. “Look at you. Six months ago you were more like boys. Now you’re men.” She wiped her eyes. “And you saved my daughter.”

Bray smiled. “All we did was pass along the information. The rescue team saved her. They’re good guys. I assume everyone made it here safely?”

“Yes,” Marian confirmed. She glanced at Harmony who looked down and fidgeted her hands.

“I should eat,” Harmony muttered though she couldn’t quite picture chewing or swallowing. Both were necessary.

Haley pulled out the chair next to Harmony’s and sat with her. “They have amazing selections of food here. Wait until you visit the agriculture department and see how complex it is. You’re going to be so surprised.”

Harmony smiled at her. “It’s weird that we didn’t really know each other except in passing and yet I feel like we should. We came from the same home.”

“Yeah.” Haley nodded. “It’s like we know things no one will ever fully understand. I wish we’d been the same age and in the same dorm room. But the moment I found out about you, I knew someone had to try to save you. When I met your mother...” Haley reached across the table to take Marian’s hand in hers.

The two women exchanged a long, silent look.

Haley wiped tears from her eyes. “Your mother saved us. She’s so wonderful. I owe her my life.”

Harmony hadn’t fully realized how instrumental her mother had been in Haley and the men’s escape. Apparently Marian’s part had been significant.

“The Hansons must be out of their minds,” Haley commented.

Marian nodded. “I suppose they probably are. They never had a clue I helped with your escape. They must suspect me now.”

Harmony set her hand on top of Haley’s over her mother’s. “It’s hard to believe. I need to pinch myself every so often to trust I’m really here.” She glanced around. Part of her hoped to see one or more of the guys, but they weren’t here.

Would they have left the compound? What if they went out on another mission this morning?

“I’m sure they’re in their apartment,” Marian said softly. “Giving you space.”

Harmony pulled her hand back and looked down at her plate. She hated being so transparent.

“Who?” Haley asked. “The rescue team?”

Harmony nodded and picked up a grape to pop it in her mouth. She really did need to eat. “We spent so much time together. It’s weird not having them around,” she explained as if it were simple.

Haley reached for Harmony’s hand and gave it a squeeze. She didn’t say a word. Harmony got the impression she understood.

A loud crash behind Harmony made her jump in her seat and twist around to see what the commotion was about.

A tall dark-skinned man stood a few feet behind her. He’d dropped his plate on the floor, but his gaze traveled over Harmony’s head. He blinked several times. His mouth fell open. “Marian?”

Harmony’s mother gasped. “Theo...”

Harmony turned back to face her mother. She was white as a sheet. She looked like she might faint. She dropped her fork. Her hands were shaking. And then tears started running down her eyes.

“Oh, my God,” the man said. He rushed around the table to Marian’s side and pulled her out of the chair, wrapping her in a huge hug. He held her so tight and rocked back and forth before grabbing her shoulders and leaning back to look her in the eyes.

His thumbs reached to wipe her tears. “I can’t believe this. How? Where?” He started chuckling. “I have a million questions. How are you here? I didn’t even know you were alive.”

A tight ball formed in Harmony’s throat. Something about this moment was so very emotional. She had no idea who this man was or why he knew her mother, but they apparently had history.

The man kept talking. “I heard two women were rescued from The Republic and brought in last night. Were you one of them?”

Marian nodded. A sob escaped. She reached up and touched the man’s face. “I never thought I’d see you again.”

He set his forehead against hers, stared for a moment, and then hugged her tight all over again. “I don’t even know what to say or where to begin. Do you have some time? Can we go somewhere and talk? Where are you staying?”

Marian chuckled lightly. “I’d like that. There was an open apartment. I’m staying in it temporarily with my daughter. We could go there?” she suggested.

He jerked his gaze toward Harmony and Haley, his attention focusing on Harmony. “Oh, wow. The other woman you came in with is your daughter?”

“Yes.”

Harmony smiled at him. He was obviously important to her mother. She’d never known her mother to be so emotional. She’d never known her to have any friends. She didn’t know much about her past. Marian had spent every opportunity of Harmony’s first twelve years arming her for the future, not dwelling on the past.

The man released Marian, turned, and held out a hand toward Harmony. “Pleased to meet you. I’m Theo. I knew your mother years ago. We taught together at the same high school.”

Harmony shook his hand. “Nice to meet you. I’m Harmony.”

His smile was infectious. He had dimples on both cheeks that made her smile. He glanced at the table. “I interrupted your lunch.” He pulled the chair out for Marian. “Please, sit. Eat. I’ll go let a few people know I need the afternoon off and meet you in your apartment? If that’s okay?” He looked hopeful, but he was polite about it too.

Marian sat once more. “Yes.” She gave him the apartment number and stared at him as he walked toward the mess from dropping his plate. Several other people had already cleaned it up though.

Harmony watched as he looked at Marian again, hesitated, and then gave her one of those dimpled smiles. “See you in a few.” He waved and took off at a jog.

Marian lowered her gaze to her plate and stared at it, not likely seeing the food. She was shaking. She lifted a hand to her lips and touched them as if he'd just kissed her. Or perhaps remembering a time in the past when he had.

Was it possible Harmony's mother had been romantically involved with Theo?

CHAPTER 18



When they returned to the apartment, Marian started pacing and wringing her hands together.

Harmony had taken a raincheck with Haley so she could be with her mother. Now she sat on one of the armchairs and pulled her legs under her. Part of her wanted to go find Mykel, Eldin, Blane, and York, but this seemed important.

“Are you sure you want me to be here, Mom? I can give you some privacy if you’d like.”

Marian shook her head. “No. There are so many things I’ve never told you. I want you to hear them.”

“Now?”

Marian nodded and continued pacing. She jumped when a knock sounded at the door and rushed over to open it.

Theo filled the space, wiping his palms on his thighs. He slowly smiled again. “You’re really here.”

Marian returned the smile and stepped back. “Please. Come in.”

He took her hand on the way by and brought it to his cheek. “I never once forgot about you.”

Marian wiped new tears from her face.

Harmony had no idea who this man was to her mother. Marian had never mentioned a coworker named Theo. She'd never spoken much about the high school she'd worked at. Plus, they seemed a bit closer than friends or acquaintances.

Theo kept Marian's hand in his as he headed for the couch, but his gaze was on Harmony as he lowered onto the cushions.

For a moment, she felt like she was intruding. Maybe he would prefer she not be here so the two of them could catch up.

He pulled Marian's hand onto his thigh as she sat. These two definitely had a history that was more than friendship. He swallowed hard. His mouth fell open. He was still staring at Harmony.

Finally, he cleared his throat. "How old are you?" he asked so softly she could barely hear him.

She was kind of surprised by that question. "Twenty."

He squeezed Marian's hand harder and swiped his other palm down his face before facing her.

Harmony's mother sucked back a sob and nodded. Nodded?

Theo jerked his attention back to Harmony. "She doesn't know?"

Marian shook her head.

"Know what?" Harmony asked.

"Theo is your father," Marian finally stated with a shaky voice.

Harmony gasped and glanced back and forth between the two of them. *My father?* Her shock was severe. She couldn't

breathe. There wasn't enough oxygen in the room.

It didn't look like Theo could either. He rubbed his chin. His gaze roamed all over her.

She couldn't blame him. She was doing the same to him. *My father*. She slowly leaned forward, setting her elbows on her knees.

"You're so incredibly beautiful," Theo whispered. Tears fell. He let them. He didn't let go of Marian.

"Thank you." Harmony choked up yet again. She was so bombarded with emotions it was difficult to process any of them.

"I have so many questions." He glanced at Marian. "Please. Tell me everything."

Marian nodded. She looked down at their combined hands. "Are you...married?"

He shook his head. "No. You?"

She shook her head too. "There was..." She drew in a deep breath. "No one after you."

He flinched. "How..."

Marian glanced at Harmony. "I never told her any of this."

"Why, Mom?" Harmony asked. She'd never seen her mother so flustered, and the woman obviously had loved this man. Why had they been separated?

Marian looked down. "It was too hard to talk about. I had to put it out of my mind. I couldn't fix it, and it seemed easier." She hiccupped through a sob.

Theo released her hand and wrapped his arm around her instead. He pulled her in close to his body and held her tight

again. He kissed the top of her head.

Harmony swiped at her own tears. They were silent, but they wouldn't stop. This man was her father.

"I'll start. You take over," he suggested.

Marian nodded, leaning into him.

Theo drew in a breath. "Your mother and I taught together at the same high school. We were both in the English department. I started a few years before her. The first day she showed up, I knew I wanted her in my life. She was sunshine and happiness. She was also the best damn teacher in the world."

Harmony smiled. She certainly knew those facts.

"It took me six months to convince her to go out with me, but after that, I never gave her a chance to look at other men. I monopolized her time until she admitted she was mine." Theo closed his eyes and buried his face in her neck, inhaling deeply. "I've missed you so much," he whispered.

Harmony couldn't stop smiling, but she was crying at the same time. Her parents had been separated for twenty years. She could imagine why, but she would remain quiet and let them tell her.

Theo sniffled. "Six months after that, she disappeared."

Harmony gasped. *Just like that?*

"There was a raid," he continued. "Most of the female teachers from the school were taken in the middle of the night. Just gone. All of the younger ones at least." He closed his eyes and tipped his head down again on top of Marian's, holding her so damn close while he cried. Deep, soul-wrecking sobs.

“I tried to find you... I did everything I could.” He sobbed some more.

Marian wrapped both arms around him and held him just as close. It felt as if no time had passed between them. Harmony could feel their love. It hadn't changed. It hadn't faltered for a moment. She hated that her mother had lived all these years with this pain and never spoke of it.

Theo sucked in deep breaths and tipped his head back. He was looking at Marian. “You were just gone. The school was livid. They lost half their teachers that day. They filed a complaint, but it took months for someone to respond from The Republic. The letter the school received was bone-chilling. We had no way of knowing if it was even true or just bullshit.”

“What did it say?” Marian asked weakly.

“That child-bearing women belonged to the state and that all of you had been sent to serve the country.” He was gasping through his sobs. “We were told you'd been sent to a breeding center and there was nothing anyone could do to change things.”

Marian nodded. “We were,” she whispered. “But when they ran tests, they discovered I was already pregnant.”

“Then what happened?”

“I sat in a prison cell for half a year while my stomach grew. It was the worst six months of my life. I knew they would take the baby from me. I was alone and scared out of my mind. I thought I would surely hit rock bottom when she was born. I considered taking my own life.”

Theo nodded. His face was tight. His brows furrowed. He was breathing heavily and stroking Marian's arm.

“When I went into labor, a nurse came and did very little for me. They didn’t even remove me from the cell. I labored for twelve hours mostly alone in that fucking prison cell. The doctor didn’t come until the nurse advised him I was close. A man in a suit from the state entered the cell with him. He stood by the door and waited. As soon as Harmony was born, the doctor handed her to the man. I wanted to die. They didn’t even let me see her.” Marian sobbed again.

Harmony’s stomach hurt. Why had her mother never told her any of this? Apparently it was simply too painful.

“And then there was a commotion,” Marian continued. “Two more men in suits came into the room. I was delirious from profound grief and giving birth with no drugs. The men were angry and arguing. The doctor and the nurse were tight-lipped. They said nothing. Suddenly, they handed the baby back to the doctor and stormed out of the room. I’ll never forget the sound of that door slamming shut.”

Theo looked confused. He was searching Marian’s face, but he didn’t interrupt her.

Harmony knew exactly what her mother was going to say next. It brought chills to her skin.

“For the first time in months, someone smiled at me. The nurse. ‘It’s your lucky day,’ she said. The doctor set Harmony on a blanket on the floor and returned to deliver the afterbirth. Harmony was screaming the entire time. When the doctor left the room, the nurse did her best to clean me up before she finally picked up the baby and gently handed her to me. ‘She’s cold and probably hungry. Try to feed her. If you can keep her alive, they might let you...’ The woman paused. She met my gaze and drew in a breath. ‘I don’t know what they’ll let you do, to be honest. Just...do your best to lie low, feed her, keep

her quiet.’ When she headed for the door, I called out to her. ‘Why?’ I asked in a whisper. I was trembling and confused and so very weak. I hadn’t even known she was a girl until that moment. The nurse smiled at me one more time. ‘Whoever intended to adopt her doesn’t want a black baby.’”

Theo simply stared at Marian.

Harmony had seen that coming. She wiped the tears from her cheeks again. They wouldn’t stop falling though. Thank God her mother fell in love with a darker skinned man.

“What...” Theo cleared his throat. “What happened next?”

“I was on my own again. Solitary confinement isn’t nearly as horrifying when you have a baby to take care of though. I couldn’t know for sure how long they would let me have her, so I cherished every damn moment. I was lucky they brought me plenty of food. Apparently they didn’t want me to die. I doubt anyone cared about Harmony, but they did care about me. I suspect it was because now they knew they could return me to the breeding center and have me bred by a white man. I worried constantly about when that might happen, hoping I had at least six weeks or so before they eventually took her away from me. My greatest fear was that they might...kill her.” Marian murmured the last words with a shudder.

Harmony was too choked up to move a muscle. She couldn’t believe everything her mother had gone through. It was a horror she couldn’t fathom. She loved her more than ever.

Marian drew in a deep breath and continued. She smiled now. The next part wouldn’t be as sad. “They ignored me for two months. I figured out how to take care of a baby completely on my own. I nursed her every time she made a single tiny noise so that we wouldn’t draw attention to

ourselves. The poor child never got a chance to cry. I often wondered if I was doing her harm by not letting her cry. But I just couldn't. My only task was to keep us both alive. So I did just that. The only way anyone even acknowledged there was a baby in my cell was to bring me a pile of cloth diapers on the first night. I washed them by hand and hung them on the metal frame of the bed every day. She had no clothes. Nothing. I wrapped her in blankets and hardly put her down."

Marian smiled warmly at Harmony. "Those were honestly two of the most precious months of my life. I would have gladly stayed there indefinitely if it meant we both got to live and be together." She turned toward Theo. "I thought about you every day. I missed you so much it hurt. I cried silent tears every time I tried to sleep. I knew I would never see you again, and you would never know we'd had a child together. I knew you would never meet her..." Another gut-wrenching sob.

Harmony swallowed over the tightness in her throat again. She was screaming inside for the younger version of her mother who was left alone in a prison cell to care for a baby, scared and hopeless. She was screaming for the man who'd been searching for his girlfriend, fruitlessly. She was screaming for the baby who never got to meet her father.

Theo continued to stroke Marian's arm. He seemed to scoot closer to her with every passing minute.

"I didn't name her for a few weeks. I couldn't. I was afraid it would hurt more when I lost her. Eventually, one day I was holding her and she was cooing at me with her big brown eyes, and I just knew. She was the most harmonious child I'd ever seen. It was as if she knew what she needed to do to stay alive from the moment she was born, and she got right in line with the plan. So I called her Harmony."

“I love that,” Theo said in a gravelly voice.

“Me too,” Harmony said. She hated that her mother never breathed a word of this, but at the same time she understood.

“Tell me more,” Theo insisted.

“Harmony was two months old when another man in a suit entered my cell one day. I thought I might die. I wanted to. I’d considered ways to kill both of us. Lots of them. Drowning was at the top of the list, but I only had a sink and a showerhead.”

Harmony gasped. Her mother had considered murder-suicide.

Theo closed his eyes and nodded. “I understand.”

To be honest, so did Harmony.

“The man told me we were leaving. Immediately. I was scared out of my mind, but all I could think was how grateful I was that he took both of us together. I figured if he was going to have us killed, at least we’d be together. Instead, he packed us in a fancy car and the driver took off. I was holding Harmony in my arms. Rocking her. I kept telling her it would be okay.”

Marian looked over at her daughter. “On some level I think you were so smart you already understood. You looked at me with wide knowing eyes. And you were so quiet. You didn’t make a sound.”

Theo smiled at Harmony. “You were born brave.”

Harmony couldn’t even respond. She’d been a newborn. It was probably more of a coincidence than anything. Brave? Maybe she’d been brave later, but how could she have been born brave?

Marian continued. “Eventually I found the courage to ask the driver where we were going. He looked at me in the rearview mirror and frowned. ‘No one told you?’ I shook my head. He said, ‘A family has hired you to be their tutor. I suggest you don’t fuck it up. This is your lucky day.’ I’d heard that before, from the nurse when they let me keep Harmony. Here I was again, wondering if I was going to be permitted to keep her.”

“The Hansons,” Harmony murmured. She knew she’d been a baby when she and her mother had moved there.

“Yes. They had heard that I had a master’s degree in education, and they wanted someone to homeschool their son, his friend, and his future bodyguard. They cut a deal with me. I could keep Harmony for twelve years in exchange for receiving no salary. Just room and board for the two of us. It wasn’t exactly a deal I could pass up. And besides, I wasn’t even free to make deals. It was kind of a joke. More like a demand. I was an indentured servant. Not a free woman in a salary negotiation.”

Theo winced. “So you stayed?”

“Yes. Not that I had choices.”

Harmony smiled. “And she taught me more in twelve years than most kids learn in twenty. Or thirty. She was the best mom in the world. I was the luckiest child alive as far as I’m concerned.”

Theo pursed his lips, tearing up again. “And then?”

Harmony swallowed. “And then I was taken to a girls’ home to prepare me to be sold into an arranged marriage at the age of twenty.”

Theo nodded as he drew in a breath. “And then it was a coincidence that Rush was kidnapped and sent to the Hansons and forced to impregnate a woman who happened to have been from the same home,” he finished. He knew the ending. Probably everyone in the compound knew the ending.

“Yes.”

“I had no idea it was you.” He looked back at Marian. “I never asked who the two women were they went to rescue.” He cupped her face again. “I’m still in shock.”

“Me too,” Marian whispered. “You’re here?”

He cupped her face and smiled. “Right here. Touching you. Holding you.”

Marian started crying again. “And you don’t have a family?”

He shook his head. “I’ve only ever loved one woman. And now I have her back.” He twisted to face Harmony again before releasing Marian and standing. He straightened his shirt and smoothed his hands down the front. “I have a daughter.”

Harmony pursed her lips and nodded.

He held out his arms. “Can I hug you?”

She jumped up from her seat and came to him, wrapping her arms around him tightly. This man was her father. How had she gotten so lucky yet again in less than a week?

“I know we just met,” he said, “but I love you so much.”

There was a knock at the door while Harmony was still holding on to her father, making up for lost time, as if that were possible.

Marian must have answered it. Harmony was buried against her father's chest.

"Come in," Harmony heard Marian say.

The shuffling of several feet drew Harmony's attention, and when she released her father to look toward the door, she found all four of her men entering the apartment.

They looked chagrined. Hands in their pockets. Brows furrowed. All of their gazes landed on Theo.

Mykel was the first to enter and the first to speak. "Theo?"

Theo grinned wide. He took two steps toward Mykel and pulled him into a manly hug. "I can never thank you enough." He reached for Eldin next.

All four men looked confused.

"For what?" Blane asked when he was pulled into the third hug.

"For finding my wife and bringing her to safety. For rescuing my daughter."

Mykel's gaze jerked toward Harmony. "Theo is your father?"

Harmony nodded vigorously, so overwhelmed it was hard to speak. She kept wiping away more tears. "Apparently."

Marian's eyes were wide. Theo had just called her his wife. Harmony knew they had never been married, but Theo placed a hard claim on her now. They were obviously as good as married, and he intended to rectify that immediately. The angels were looking down on all of them today.

"You didn't know?" York asked.

Harmony shook her head. "No."

Eldin rubbed his chin. “Wow. You must be in shock.”

“Very much so.”

Blane glanced at York and then back toward Harmony. “We were hoping to talk to you, but now’s a horrible time. We’ll leave you to get acquainted with your father and spend time with your mother.”

Harmony turned toward her mother and exchanged a look. Her mother was going to be fine. More than fine. She was reunited with the man she’d apparently loved for all these years.

“No.” Harmony drew in a breath. “You’re right. We should talk. Can we do it in your apartment?” She wanted to give her mother space.

Even though she was emotionally drained, she needed to face her men anyway. It wouldn’t be right to leave them hanging. Nor did she want to. She couldn’t. She wanted to figure things out with them and knock their heads together until they saw reason.

There was no other option because she was half in love with them. She needed to set a few things straight. Establish some ground rules.

She stepped around the coffee table and hugged her father again. “We’ll talk more later, yeah?”

“Hours and hours. I want to know everything about you.” He held her shoulders and kissed her forehead. “Every single detail.”

Harmony couldn’t keep from smiling again. She’d done a lot of smiling while crying today.

Marian rubbed her back. “Will you be okay? Please don’t feel like you can’t be here in this apartment.”

Harmony turned to hug her mother. “You need some time with Theo.” She lifted her gaze to him. “With Dad.”

His breath hitched. His eyes closed as he swept a hand down his face. He was overwhelmed too. They all were.

“I love you so much,” Marian murmured.

“I know you do. You showed me every single day of my first twelve years and you never gave up on me. Because of you, I’m here. Because of your bravery, Braylon, Riggs, Storm, and Haley are here. Because of you, you’ve found Theo. You’re the best mom in the world.” Harmony hugged her mother yet again and then released her and turned toward the door.

She would be back. She would cultivate a relationship with her dad and reestablish one with her mother. They had time. All the time. They were safe now.

But first, Harmony needed to focus on her future, and her future included the four nervous men anxiously waiting to claim her as their own.

CHAPTER 19



“I can’t believe Theo is your father,” York said as soon as they were inside the men’s apartment. “I never knew he had a family he’d lost.”

“He didn’t know either,” she informed them as she took a seat in one of the armchairs and tucked her legs under her. She didn’t want to sit on the couch, flanked by two men, leaving two out. She needed space so she could think without them touching her.

“How?” Blane asked.

“It’s a long story. I’m too exhausted to tell it, but my mother was kidnapped by The Republic in the night when she was newly pregnant with me. She hadn’t known she was pregnant. Theo never knew, nor did he know where she’d been taken. He never found her.”

Mykel was shaking his head. “My God. He must have shit his pants when he saw her.”

Harmony chuckled. “He dropped his lunch plate in the middle of the cafeteria.”

“He’s a great guy,” Eldin informed her. “We’ve known him for years. He’s one of the best. He’s also never been in a family unit. I always figured he was more of a loner.”

Blane shook his head. “Apparently he’d already met the love of his life and didn’t intend to move on without her.”

“What about you?” Harmony asked, fisting her hands in her lap. This was the million-dollar question. “Can you guys move on without Suzanne?”

Mykel dropped onto a knee in front of Harmony and grabbed her hand to pull it against his heart. “Yes, honey. We can, and we are. It’s not the same. Suzanne is dead. We all saw her die. We haven’t spent the last five years wondering where she was or if she was alive. We have closure. Your father did not.”

Harmony sniffled. He was right. She pulled her hand free of his light grip and cupped his face. “I know we just got here and you’re worried about me needing to meet more people, but you’re wrong. We formed a bond—the five of us. It can’t be broken. It happened out of necessity, but it’s strong and solid.”

Mykel slid her palm to his lips and kissed her.

“I shouldn’t have walked out of here like that this morning. It was childish and cowardly. I won’t do it again. When we have a disagreement, we need to talk it out. Fix it. Come to a truce.”

“You had every right to be frustrated with us,” Eldin said.

Harmony shook her head. “That may be, but I should have handled it better. I know I’m young. I know I’m naïve. But I’m smart. I’ll learn anything you teach me. I don’t want you all to look at me as if I’m some stupid young girl who needs to be coddled. If that’s how you see me or that’s how you want me because you’re looking for a demure life partner, this won’t work out.”

“It’s not, sweet girl,” Blane said as he sat on the coffee table near Mykel’s knee.

Her plan to put some distance between them blew out of the water. Eldin perched his hip on the arm of her chair. York leaned both hands on the other arm.

She didn’t mind. The idea of avoiding their touch had been ludicrous. It wouldn’t have lasted long. She drew in a deep breath. “I thought about a few things this morning before running into my father. Or, well, maybe it was more like I entered the apartment with my mother and started ranting like a deranged lunatic.”

They all smiled.

She chuckled. “My mother gets a gold star for listening to me with hardly any interruption while I spoke a mile a minute. All the while I was in the shower and then still ranting while I dried off and worked a comb through my hair. As if I had no modesty at all, which I suppose is the case, at least with my mother. In some ways I feel like we were never separated. There are moments when we pick up right where we left off.” Harmony winced. “I’m rambling.”

“It’s okay, sweetness,” York said. “Ramble all you want. She listened to you this morning, and we will listen to you any time you feel the need for the rest of our lives. If you’ll have us.”

Harmony blew out a long breath. “I’m not used to having choices. I’m not used to having anyone genuinely care about me. I’m not even used to men looking me in the eye. Do you have any idea how weird that is? And shaking my hand? Weirder.”

They all smiled at her.

“However... While I was rambling, I realized a few things. Or maybe my mom did. I don't know your world. I don't have any experience sneaking around rescuing people. If I were out on a mission with you, I'd be a liability. Your lives would be endangered from having to babysit me too.”

Mykel squeezed her hand. “If it's what you want, we'll teach you. Just give us time. That's all we ask.”

She smiled at him, grateful they were willing to bend. “Thank you, but there's another problem that will always exist. I don't know how to use a gun. I don't want to know how. And most importantly, I could never shoot someone.” She swallowed. “I could never do what you do. I was crazy to even think so. I was blinded by the fact that I so badly want to change the world. I want to rescue the other girls in that damn home. The dorm moms too. Everyone. I'm so lucky you saved me, and I want to pay it forward. But I can do that in other ways. I'll just have to figure out what's more reasonable for me. I have many strengths. I'm sure I can help without endangering the people I love.”

Mykel gave her a tug and pulled her forward so she fell into his arms. He cupped her face and tipped her head back. “We're in love with you, Harmony. We'll do everything in our power to make sure you're happy and healthy. It's all we care about. You need time to find yourself. We will support that in every way we can.”

“Thank you.”

He kissed her sweetly before Blane tugged her out of Mykel's hands and did the same. Before she could catch her breath, Eldin and York tipped her backward and took their turns kissing her too.

“Let's get out of here,” Mykel said, rising to his feet.

Harmony was shocked. “What? Where are we going?” She’d pictured them heading for the bedroom, not the hallway.

“You haven’t had a tour of the compound yet, and I know Braylon and his family want to spend more time with you. Or maybe you want to go spend more time with your father?”

Harmony wrapped her arms around Mykel. “I’m sure I’ll get to spend hours and hours with my father in the coming days, but I think he and my mom need some alone time.”

Eldin cupped the back of her head. “I’m sure you’re right. Let’s start with a tour.”

She glanced at the bedroom. “You don’t want to start with the bedroom?”

York groaned. “We can end with the bedroom.”

CHAPTER 20



A week later...

Harmony was exhausted. Her life was a whirlwind of activity. She hadn't slept enough since she'd arrived, mostly because her days were packed. She'd spent hours with her father who was the most amazing man she'd ever met.

Most importantly, he loved her mother, and that warmed Harmony's heart. Marian hadn't stopped grinning since she'd seen him. It was as if the woman had been living like a robot for twenty years, going through the motions of what it meant to be alive for the sake of Harmony and the other children she'd raised, but not fully living.

Marian had never gotten over Theo in twenty years, and it was obvious he hadn't gotten over her either. They seemed to pick up where they'd left off—assuming they'd been unapologetically smitten back then.

Theo never stopped watching her. He rarely stopped touching her. He was always either holding her hand or his palm was planted on her back, or his lips were hovering near hers or whispering in her ear.

Often Theo threaded his fingers in Marian's hair at the nape of her neck and held her against him. Marian had started wearing her hair down. It hung in long waves almost to her waist. Harmony had rarely seen it down. Her mother had always tucked it up in a bun.

Harmony's heart was overflowing. Her parents were together. Neither of them had known the other was even alive. They hadn't expected to find each other again. Marian had given up hope of ever escaping The Republic, and Theo had given up hope of ever being able to track her down. He had to believe she'd been married off to someone or sent to a breeding facility.

Other than the few times Theo had parted from Marian to get some work done, he hadn't left her side. After the first night, Marian had spent over an hour pacing in their borrowed apartment, explaining to Harmony that she was eventually going to move in with him.

It was adorable and so sweet, and Harmony had let her mother fidget for a while before laughing and telling her to please, for the sake of everyone else around, move in with the man. Harmony would be fine. She hadn't slept in the borrowed apartment either night herself. She never intended to.

So, they'd begun a new normal, one in which Marian moved in with Harmony's father and Harmony moved in with four men who...wouldn't have sex with her.

It was like their traveling days all over again. One night of sexual exploration followed by night after night of snuggling. The four of them dragged her around the compound during the day until she was so exhausted she wouldn't even argue with them. At the end of the day, they tucked her in, stuffing

blankets in around her body before two of them settled next to her.

Sex? Poof. None. They kissed her and stared into her eyes, but no one would take their clothes off, and no one took *her* clothes off.

Harmony started showering without fully closing the door. She wasn't quite brave enough to walk naked through the apartment, but she never took her clothes to the bathroom, so she had no choice but to stroll back through the living space in a towel.

She knew what their game was. They wanted a verbal commitment from her. They'd made that clear on more than one occasion. They refused to hear it though. Every time she tried to tell them she was all in, they covered her mouth, distracted her, or interrupted her to redirect the conversation.

Why? She knew why. It was kind of cute. They wanted her to meet every damn person in the compound first, as if she might change her mind about them if only she met two hundred other men. Would four hundred be enough? A thousand?

By the end of the week, Harmony decided to pretend they weren't frustrating her and simply wait them out. How long could they go on ignoring the sexual tension? How long was long enough for them to be satisfied she really did love them and didn't need to sample every man in the damn compound to know that? Weeks? Months? A year?

They were in a standoff, and Harmony wasn't going to beg. She was tired, and she could out-wait them.

This morning she was with Haley. She'd had breakfast with Haley's entire family unit in the cafeteria, but now she'd

gone to Haley's apartment with her while the men went to their respective jobs.

Haley groaned as she lowered herself awkwardly into an armchair. Her belly was huge.

"I bet you're ready for that baby to be born," Harmony commented.

Haley tipped her head back and forth noncommittally. "Yes and no. I'm ready for the four of them to stop hovering. They worry about me all the time. I don't have a moment's peace."

"They left you alone this morning," Harmony pointed out.

Haley chuckled. "No, they didn't. They carefully orchestrated it so that you would be with me."

Harmony laughed. That was true. "Are you excited though? To have the baby, I mean. I can't imagine being responsible for another human."

"I'm scared. That's the truth. I don't have a clue what I'm doing. Luckily this baby will have four other parents who are hopefully reasonable. I doubt they'll let the little guy's feet touch the floor. They'll probably fight over him."

Harmony kept smiling. It was kind of exciting knowing her childhood friends were about to become fathers.

"If you don't want to do this immediately," Haley pointed at her belly, "you better ask Julie to put you on some form of birth control. Have you met with her yet?"

"I *met* her, but no. Not like for an appointment." Harmony picked at imaginary lint on her jeans. Wearing pants was still awkward, but she did it every day because something about dresses made her feel like she wasn't equal.

Harmony had heard about Julie. She knew she was the resident midwife and all-around expert on the subject in the compound. Harmony was so young. Twenty. However, if she hadn't been rescued, there was a good chance she would already be pregnant with a stranger's baby from what would have basically been a rape.

She was lucky. Really lucky. She woke up every day between two men and counted her blessings.

"You okay?" Haley asked. "You got distant on me when I mentioned birth control. Please tell me no one is pressuring you to get pregnant. If they are, I'll personally kick their asses. Your body. Your decision."

Harmony sighed. "No one is pressuring me to get pregnant." She met Haley's gaze. "That would be hard since no one has had sex with me."

Haley's eyes bugged out. "Seriously?" A slow smile spread across her face. "I knew I liked those guys, but my esteem for them just went up ten notches."

Harmony rolled her eyes and groaned. "I'm kind of over the whole chivalry thing. But now it's a battle of wills. They wanted me to be certain I would stay with them, but they won't even let me entertain the subject in order to confirm my intentions. So, I'm just going to wait and see how long it takes them to decide they've had enough."

Haley giggled. "I love it. I'm also not incredibly surprised. The men in this compound have it drilled into their heads that they must get consent. Ten layers of consent. From what I've heard, they are far more reserved about taking a woman to bed than the average population. The last thing they want is to ever be accused of pressuring a woman."

Harmony sighed. "I get that. It's more than that. These guys lost their first wife five years ago. I think they're scared to let me in. It's kind of sweet in a way. They're afraid I'm making a hasty decision about committing to them, and that I'll change my mind, and when I do and leave them, they'll be devastated."

"Awww. That's so sweet."

"Whose side are you on?" Harmony joked, laughing again.

"Yours. Always yours. I've noticed they've dragged you to every single department in the compound too. Have you found a job you find interesting?"

"That was always a no-brainer. But they won't listen to me, so I humor them and follow them around."

"What is it you want to do?" Haley asked, rubbing her belly.

"Teach."

"I can see that." Haley nodded. "Have you met Grecia? She's the one with the baby girl. She works in the daycare. She loves it. Did you visit the daycare?"

Harmony nodded. "Yeah, but I don't think I'm interested in people that young."

"What about the older kids? They always need more teachers at every age."

Harmony nodded slowly. "Maybe."

"You have something else in mind. I can tell."

Harmony bit her lip. She did, but she hadn't told anyone yet. Mostly because it was so comical watching her men fall all over themselves trying to help her find herself. Since they

wouldn't let her get a word in edgewise, she stopped trying. It was all a part of her weird game.

"Tell me." Haley leaned forward as far as her belly would allow. "I'm curious now."

"I'm still mulling it over. I'll tell you soon. I should probably tell my partners first, if they ever get their heads out of their asses."

Both of them giggled.

After a few minutes, Haley stared at Harmony and asked again, "You avoided my question. Do you want to get pregnant?"

Harmony licked her lips and thought for a minute. "Maybe?"

Another slow smile spread across Haley's face. "Really?"

"If you'd had the option, would you have not chosen this path?" Harmony knew most of the details about how Haley had ended up pregnant against her will. Hell, she hadn't even had sex.

Haley took a deep breath. "No. I wouldn't, not at this age. I would have been too scared. I *am* scared. But I wouldn't have it any other way now. My partners are over the moon. They dote on me constantly. I've never seen anyone as excited about something in my life. So, from that perspective, I wouldn't change a thing."

Harmony stared into space. "That makes sense." She met Haley's gaze again. "A week ago I would have said hell, no. I'm twenty. I just escaped a prison sentence that would have destroyed me. I'm free to do anything I want, and that includes birth control. My partners have introduced me to darn near every person living here, including Julie and Rush and anyone

else in the clinic. They made my options clear and left it at that.”

“But...” Haley lifted a brow.

“But that also means they took me to the daycare. They took me to the nursery. They’ve introduced me to several women with babies and young kids. And you know what I noticed every time?”

“What?” Haley’s brows furrowed.

“They stare at babies longingly. And mothers with babies. They aren’t as young as me. Eldin is twenty-seven. Blane is the oldest at thirty-two.”

“They’re still young,” Haley suggested softly.

“Yeah. I know. But they’ve lived a lot of life. They never had a baby with their first wife. Partner. Whatever you want to call her. I guess they weren’t technically married.”

“Doesn’t matter. No one cares about pieces of paper in this world. Love is what matters. Do you love them?”

“I do.” Harmony didn’t hesitate. “And I want them to be the happiest they can be. They deserve happiness. They’ve denied themselves for so long. I suspect they’ve been living in a state of limbo, not letting themselves think about any future possibilities. They were scared. They still are. But then they met me. And their hearts are opening up. They have hope. And with that hope comes longings they haven’t let themselves consider.”

Haley dabbed at her eyes. “You should be a poet,” she murmured.

Harmony shrugged. “I’m just observant. I know they want a baby. And life is short. There are no guarantees. Everyone

has experienced more than their fair share of grief and suffering. Why wait for things you want? If you can have them, grasp them now. There might not be a tomorrow.”

Haley waved a hand through the air and wiped her eyes again. “Stop. You’re making me cry.”

Harmony smiled warmly. “I’m sure you’re scared about the birth and whether or not you’ll be the best mom and a dozen other things, but doesn’t it comfort you to know you are not alone? Besides four fathers who won’t put that baby down even to sleep, you have a village here. You’ll never have to worry about putting food on the table or getting up ten times a night. Things like that.”

Haley nodded slowly. “Yes. You’re right.” She rubbed her belly. “This little guy—or girl—is going to be so very loved.”

“He or she really is,” Harmony agreed. “I don’t think I can deprive my partners of this kind of joy and excitement. Why would I? We could wait a month or a year or two years, but my gut tells me not to put things off. Grasp onto life. Take its offerings.”

“You’re so wise. You sound like someone twice your age. And you’ve been here a week.” Haley chuckled. “I’m humbled by your outlook on life.”

“The past two weeks have seemed like a year in some ways. I’ve changed so much. I feel like I’m ten years older than I was two weeks ago. It’s hard to imagine one wrong turn from my driver the day of my wedding could have meant I would now be living as a concubine, probably already pregnant with a baby I would not want. Now I’m seriously considering having a baby with four men who haven’t even made it possible yet.”

Haley smiled. “Life is crazy. I know what you mean though. My life flipped upside down in a few short weeks too. I can’t tell you how scared and panicked and devastated I was when I found out I was pregnant with a stranger’s baby. A man I hadn’t met while three men I was in love with hadn’t touched me. I wanted to curl up and die. And then in a heartbeat, everything changed, and look where I am.” She rubbed her tummy again and shifted her weight, wincing. “If only he or she would cut back on the gymnastics.”

“Oh. That must feel so weird.”

“Want to feel?” Haley offered.

“You don’t mind?”

“Not at all. Do you know how often people touch my stomach in a given day?” She laughed. “Hell, my partners rarely stop touching me. Not even at night. Two of them sleep with a hand on my belly to make sure both of us are alive in our sleep.”

Harmony rose and came closer to Haley. She kneeled in front of her and set a hand on her huge belly. “Oh, wow. He really is kicking, isn’t he? That’s so incredible. There’s a human inside you.”

Haley was smiling and staring at Harmony when Harmony lifted her gaze. “Maybe you are ready.”

Maybe.

CHAPTER 21



One week later...

The standoff was growing more comical and frustrating. No matter what Harmony did, none of her partners complained. If she left early in the morning without saying goodbye, they said nothing. If she came back late at night like it was no big deal, they said nothing.

It was maddening, and she was beginning to doubt her decision to outlast them. They showed no signs of breaking down.

Tonight she'd had dinner with her parents and was spending a few hours in their apartment listening to them tell her tales about their time together before Marian was kidnapped. Their teaching jobs. Their dating. Their love story. They left out all the details a daughter wouldn't want to hear, but she could see it in their eyes.

They loved each other so much, and she was so happy for them. Her father had really taken on the role of Dad too. He'd met with Harmony often for a few hours alone, asking her a million questions, wanting to know everything about her while telling her about his childhood too. Things a father would have

told his daughter over the last twenty years. He was making up for lost time.

It was late when she glanced at the clock on the wall, knowing she should go back to her own apartment.

“Talk to us,” Theo said, growing serious. He was sitting next to her mother on the couch, but he leaned forward, setting his elbows on his knees and rubbing his palms together. “You’re avoiding your family unit. This is the third night this week you’ve been here with us. And don’t get me wrong. We love having you. You’re welcome here any time. You’re welcome to move into this apartment if you’d like. What’s going on?”

“It’s stupid.” Harmony lowered her head to stare absently at the floor.

“Nothing is stupid, especially not your feelings,” Theo insisted.

“I’ve been trying to get them to trust me, and it’s backfiring.”

“Trust you?” Theo frowned. So did Marian.

“Trust my feelings, I guess. Not my actions. They don’t trust me to know my mind. So we’re in a standoff. I’m not winning.”

Theo winced. “I don’t like the sound of that. There shouldn’t be winning in a relationship, Harmony.”

“He’s right, dear,” her mother said as she leaned her cheek on Theo’s shoulder. “It sounds like you’re not communicating with them. Or vice versa. Or both.”

“That’s an understatement. I’m starting to think they’ll never trust me, and I’m wasting my time.”

“Why don’t you think they trust you?” Marian asked.

Harmony inhaled deeply. “They’ve basically told me so. They think I’m too young to know what I want. They’re worried I shouldn’t be in love with the first men who stepped in front of me. They’ve introduced me to every single man in the compound in order to make sure I won’t like someone else more. It’s gotten out of hand. Part of me thinks my best bet is to pretend I actually do prefer someone else just to get a rise out of them.”

Theo frowned. “They’re scared.”

“Yeah. I know that. So am I. But I’m not a child. I’m a grown woman. I may be twenty, but I’ve had life experiences that forced me to feel older. I was nearly an adult when I was twelve. I had no choice. I spent eight years locked down in a guarded home for girls where I was taught to obey a man who was going to purchase me and essentially breed me. I’m not ignorant. I do know my mind. I don’t care that they were the first men I met. I love them, and they won’t listen to me.”

Theo rubbed his hands together. His expression was intense. “I know they love you. It’s written on their faces. They follow you around a room with their eyes. They always look stressed and kind of nervous.”

“Yeah, because they’re waiting for me to leave them. It’s maddening.”

“I could talk to them...”

“God, no.” I shook my head.

“Yeah, I didn’t think you’d like that idea.” Theo chuckled. “Maybe *you* should try talking to them?”

“I should.” She knew that, but she really didn’t like it. She felt like a broken record.

Marian cleared her throat. “I know I taught you the basics about everything you would need to know when you first found yourself with a man, but I never spoke to you about intimacy and—”

Harmony held up a hand. “I’m good, Mom.” She cringed.

Her mother didn’t look convinced.

“Seriously. I’m fine. I have four attentive men giving me a crash course. I get it.” Her face was heating more by the second. This wasn’t the sort of subject she wanted to discuss with her parents.

“Okay. I should have said more when we arrived. Have you met with Julie?”

Harmony rolled her eyes.

Theo’s brows were furrowed again. He was taking this Dad job very seriously. “Your mother just wants to make sure you know you have options. If you don’t want to get pregnant, that’s your choice. No one is pressuring you to get pregnant, are they?”

Harmony rubbed a hand down her face.

“Harmony?” Her mother’s voice was higher pitched.

Harmony sighed. She really, really didn’t want to expand on this subject, but they wouldn’t stop. And their concerns were headed in the wrong direction. There was nothing she could do but be blunt with them. “We haven’t had sex.”

Theo’s eyes switched from furrowed to wide. He was fighting a grin. “I knew I liked those men.”

Harmony groaned and pushed to standing. She had no interest in hiding out at her parents’ apartment if they were going to grill her about sex. “I’m going to go now.”

Her parents stood. Marian hugged her. “Talk to them.”

“Yeah. Yeah. I will.” Before she released her mother, there was a knock at the door.

Theo headed over to answer it.

As Harmony faced the door, she wasn’t surprised to find Mykel standing in the hallway. He was running a hand through his hair. He nodded at Theo and then looked at Harmony. “Can we talk?”

Theo pulled the door open wider. “Come on in.”

Mykel stiffened. “Uh...”

Harmony rushed toward the door and shoved her father out of the way. “Dad...”

He chuckled and pulled her in for a hug. “I was kidding. Go.” But he didn’t release her. “I love it when you call me Dad.” He kissed her forehead. “I love you. Be good to yourself.”

“I will, Dad.” She smiled at him and then shoved away again to turn toward her future.

CHAPTER 22



“Are we talking alone?” she asked Mykel as soon as the door shut.

“If you want.” He took her hand and brought it between them, facing her. “Do we overwhelm you when we’re all together?”

“No. I think *I* overwhelm *you*,” she teased. She squeezed his fingers. “Did you four do rock, paper, scissors and you lost and were sent to find me?”

He smirked. His eyes were dancing. “Something like that.”

“Let’s go home.” She turned to head down the hallway, giving his hand a tug.

“Sounds like you and Theo have really bonded. I’m glad for you. He’s taken on his Dad role seriously,” Mykel said as they walked.

“Yeah.” She grinned up at him. “Your face when he invited you into the apartment was priceless.”

“I would have done it, you know. I don’t care where we talk or who knows how I feel about you. I have nothing to hide.”

“I know.” She bit the inside of her cheek to keep from grinning wider. Mykel was flustered and kind of sweet. He

was also nervous. She assumed all of them were. They should be.

When they reached the apartment, Mykel punched in the code to let them in. The other three were caught pacing the living room, though they stopped in their tracks as soon as she and Mykel entered.

Harmony leaned against the door and crossed her arms. “Are we done with the weird caveman dance?”

“Caveman dance?” York asked, though he smiled at the same time.

“What else would you call what you’ve been doing for the past two weeks? Martyring yourselves? Testing me? Testing *yourselves*? Sabotaging a great thing because you’re scared?” She laid it all out for them to see.

There were a few seconds of silence before Eldin spoke. “Probably some of all of that.”

“Well, are you done? Because I’m tired. Tired of you parading me around to see if I’ll fall in love with some other group of men. Tired of watching all of you fidget and hope I’ll decide to stay with you. Tired of sleeping with clothes on. If you four are done testing me to make sure my feelings are legit, can we please move forward? I’m not interested in other men. I’m not going anywhere. I’d really like all five of us to get naked and consummate this relationship. And most importantly, I love you all. Deeply. I know you feel the same about me. I also know you’re scared, but you can’t live your lives in fear of losing me. Life is too fragile for that. I’ve said this before, and I’ll say it again. People die. I might. It happens, but I’m alive now, and every day that you withhold your affection from me is another day we lose of happiness.”

Blane took the first step forward. “You’re right. We’re idiots.”

She shook her head. “You’re not idiots. I understand where your concerns come from, but how long do you intend to test me?”

“I think we were testing ourselves more than you,” Mykel said. “But we’re miserable, and we love you so much.” He reached out a hand.

She pushed away from the door, dropped her arms, and went to him.

All four of them pulled her into a giant hug. They held her so tight she couldn’t move or breathe. She started squirming. “Maybe don’t squish me to death,” she suggested.

The men parted and two of them took her hands and drew her toward the room with the biggest bed. The room she’d been sleeping in every night since she’d arrived, always flanked by a different pair of them.

As soon as they were through the door, Blane and York started pulling her clothes off while Eldin and Mykel removed their own. Two seconds later, Eldin tugged her toward the bed while Blane and York stripped. She was pretty sure they broke a disrobing record.

Harmony felt slightly self-conscious. After all, she hadn’t been totally naked with them for two weeks. Before that, she’d had one amazing sexual experience with them here and one in the near darkness when they’d first met.

She shivered, knowing things were about to change. Finally, someone was going to have sex with her. Or perhaps more than one someone.

Eldin lifted her onto the bed and dragged her to the middle. He came over her, straddling her, not touching her. The only noise in the room was heavy breathing as he let his gaze slide down her body. “You’re so fucking beautiful.” He bent and kissed her lips reverently but then moved his head lower to kiss both her nipples.

She arched her chest and grabbed his hips, trying not to stare at his erection between them.

Mykel dropped onto his side next to her and kissed her shoulder. “We’ll do everything in our power to make this perfect for you, honey.”

She swallowed. She knew they would, but she was still nervous.

Eldin slid down her body and nudged her knees open so he could kneel between them. Blane dropped down opposite Mykel and palmed her breast, making her arch.

York surprised her when he climbed up behind her, lifted her head, and settled it on one of his thighs. His shaft was next to her cheek. She could smell his heady musk. Or perhaps she was smelling everyone’s musk.

Eldin slid his hands up her inner thighs, holding her gaze, stroking his thumbs alongside her folds.

Her arms were restless and trapped at her sides, but Mykel and Blane lifted them both over her head and York trapped both wrists in one of his.

Harmony moaned as soon as he restrained her. They’d held her hands away from her before, and she’d gotten incredibly aroused from the action. That was true again tonight. Her nipples were stiff and needy. Wetness leaked from her sex.

Eldin parted her folds, making her whimper.

No one seemed to be in a hurry. They were all staring at her. Mykel and Blane each teased a nipple. Gently. Circling the buds and tapping them without enough pressure.

Eldin leaned closer to her core and then lifted his head again. “Did you talk to Julie about birth control, hon?”

“No,” she murmured.

“I’ll grab condoms then.” He started to move away.

Harmony shook her head. “No. Don’t.”

The four of them stared at her again in confusion.

She licked her lips. “Unless you want to.” She felt confident they wouldn’t, but they had choices too. Maybe she’d misread them.

York leaned over her face. “You could get pregnant, sweetness.”

“Yep. That might happen,” she agreed.

Mykel groaned softly. “That’s a huge decision. You sure you want to make it today?”

“Yes.” She met his gaze. “I’ve watched you four stare at babies. You want one.”

Blane stiffened. “It doesn’t matter what we want. We care more about what you want.”

Harmony drew in a breath. “I want what Haley has. I want the four of you to look at me the way her men look at her. I want to give you something you didn’t get with your first wife.”

Mykel bent to kiss her. “We already look at you that way. We will never stop looking at you that way, even if you never want to have a child. We will love you the same for the rest of

our lives no matter if we have babies together or not. We will never feel like we're missing out on something if getting pregnant isn't your preference. Your choice."

"You should think about this some more, sweet girl," Blane said. "No need to make a hasty decision."

"I've thought about it. It's not hasty. I've done nothing but think about a million things for the last few weeks while the four of you kept your pants on. Will someone please make love to me now?"

Eldin hesitated and then lowered his face to kiss her sex. "Sweetest pussy in the world," he muttered. He kissed her again and again, too softly, reverently.

When she started to squirm, Blane grabbed her thigh and held it open and steady. Mykel did the same on the other side.

"I'm going to make you come so hard your eyes roll back," Eldin informed her. "You're going to get out of your head and enjoy it."

Enjoy it? There was no way she wouldn't enjoy it. She enjoyed every moment with them, alone or all together. Each of them held a special place in her heart. She was about to explode at the moment.

Harmony cried out the moment Eldin finally sucked her clit into his mouth. He thrust his tongue into her tight channel a second later. If the other three hadn't been holding her down, she would have jumped into the air.

Already her eyes were rolling back.

York stroked her face with one hand while his erection teased her other cheek with its soft smooth skin over the hard length.

Eldin held her folds parted again before finally teasing her entrance with a finger. His lips never left her swollen clit as he eased one long finger into her.

Harmony gasped. It felt so good. She wanted more, and she knew she was going to get a lot more before the night was over. After all, his one finger wasn't nearly as wide as any of their erections.

Eldin slid his finger in and out, adding a second at the same time he flicked his tongue over her clit.

“Let it go,” Mykel encouraged. “Come for us. It will help you relax if you have an orgasm before we enter your sweet pussy.”

Harmony whimpered as Eldin added a third finger. He seemed to bend them and drag them along the front of her channel as he pulled them out.

Harmony's body was shaking as she reached that amazing state of euphoria and cried out her release. It felt different this time with his fingers inside her. It helped her understand the craving to be filled. It was like a need. Like water in the desert.

She pulsed around his fingers and against his mouth, not relaxing her body until the last of the tremors passed, leaving her slightly sensitive and trembling.

“She's so fucking tight,” Eldin informed the room.

“Trade places with me.” This was Blane.

Harmony was panting as the two men switched spots. As soon as he climbed between her legs, Blane set his hands on either side of her waist and leaned over to kiss her.

No one had kissed her thoroughly yet tonight. She fell under his spell instantly, ravenous to be devoured, and Blane never disappointed with his mouth. The man didn't just kiss. He consumed.

By the time he released her lips, she was breathing even heavier. York was still holding her hands, and he didn't release them when she tugged. His insistence caused her to buck and arch, needing more contact.

She had no idea how she could crave more so soon after an orgasm, but she did. There was an intensity in the air, filling the room, making her want like never before. "Please..."

Blane wrapped his palms around her inner thighs and parted them farther before sliding his thumbs together between her folds. "So wet..." he murmured. "I'm going to stretch you, sweet girl."

Stretch me? How could he stretch her more than what Eldin had done with three fingers?

"Look at me, Harmony," Blane ordered as he stroked her folds.

She blinked, trying to focus on him. And then she held his gaze while he pushed both thumbs slowly into her. Her mouth fell open. The stretch was tremendous. It shocked her, but it didn't hurt.

When he pulled his thumbs apart a little at a time, she whimpered and tried to jerk free. He had her though, gripping her thighs and holding her down. "You okay, sweet girl?"

She nodded. It was intense, but not painful. "Do it." She licked her lips. "Please... I need..." She wasn't sure what it was she needed, but she knew she needed something.

She needed to be filled.

Blane glanced at the other men one at a time.

Harmony didn't turn her gaze away from his, but she thought they all nodded. Consent? For Blane to be the one to enter her first?

Blane rose onto his knees and gripped his thick erection, looking her in the eye. "I have to know how you feel around me, sweet girl. But we all do."

She swallowed. She didn't care what their arrangement was as long as they did *something*.

Blane released his shaft to lower himself over her, wedging his body between her thighs. His erection sat heavy against her entrance, nudging.

She squirmed, trying to wiggle her way down the bed to force him to enter her. It was futile, but he slid his hands under her shoulder blades and held her gaze. "One quick thrust will stun you and hurt for a few moments, but then it would be over."

She nodded. "Do it." She didn't want to drag this out any longer. She wanted him to fill her even if it hurt.

Blane braced himself and surged forward, filling her so full she lost her breath. It felt like he'd torn her in half. Her eyes glazed over, and she couldn't move.

"Take a breath, honey," Mykel encouraged. He'd slid a hand over to cup her breast.

She tried, but she couldn't figure out how. All her focus was on the stretch. It was too much. Why did people do this?

"Breathe, sweetness," York ordered as he stroked her wrists with his thumbs.

She finally managed to drag in a ragged breath.

Blane was biting his lower lip as if he were in as much discomfort as her. He released it and licked his lips. “Talk to me, sweet girl. Try to relax and let yourself adjust.”

She nodded. The pain eased and left her feeling just full. When he eased back a few inches and then pushed in again, she gasped. That time it didn’t hurt. In a heartbeat it switched to something far different. Pleasure.

Blane groaned as he pulled all the way out.

“No...” she whimpered. “Why...”

She understood why a few moments later when Blane traded places with Mykel. Mykel lowered his body to kiss a path up her inner thigh before he crawled up to hover over her, his erection poised at her entrance. He was shaking as if it took a lot of effort to hold back.

Harmony tugged on her hands, tipping her head back to silently beg York.

York lifted her wrists up and kissed both palms before releasing her.

Harmony grabbed Mykel’s hips. “I want all of you. I want to see your faces as you enter me. Don’t hold back.”

Mykel gave a quick nod and then slid into her. Not as fast as Blane, but just as deeply. The pain was significantly less this time, and it switched to feeling more like an itch that needed to be scratched in seconds.

“Jesus.” Mykel lowered to kiss her. “You are so fucking amazing. Do you have any idea how much I love you?”

She wiggled her hips, wanting him to move.

He shook his head. “Uh uh. Stay still. I’m going to switch with York.”

She nodded. She wanted that. Maybe this was odd and unconventional. She doubted they would swap around like this in the future, but for tonight, it felt right that they all feel her, that they all take a turn staring into her eyes while they entered her, no matter how briefly.

York eased her head off his thigh and slid a pillow into its place before crawling around Blane and taking Mykel's spot.

Harmony was panting from the experience of Mykel sliding out of her. She was beginning to understand what all the fuss was about.

York kneeled between her thighs first, his fingers reverently stroking her swollen labia. "Glistening wet for me."

She could feel the arousal. She had no doubt he was right. Did he have any idea how empty she felt between each of them? As if they were giving her just a tease and then denying her more.

"York..."

"Okay, sweetness. Okay." He lifted her knees and tipped her legs forward, exposing her more, creating another angle. And then he thrust into her.

Harmony gasped. He felt deeper. Was that possible?

He did it again, and she grabbed his shoulders futilely because he immediately disappeared.

"No," she cried out. *Not again.* But as she watched Eldin and York slide past each other, she knew it was the right thing to do.

And Eldin didn't make her wait. He grabbed her bent knees, pushed them wider, and drove into her.

Harmony grabbed the sheets at her sides, fisting them, her breath hitched, her body humming. “Don’t stop,” she begged as her head lolled back and forth.

“He’s got you, sweet girl,” Blane said from her side as he slid a hand down over her stomach and found her clit.

Harmony stiffened, her hands fisted, her legs wide, her head tipped back to expose her neck. Someone was finally making love to her. Sliding in and out instead of abandoning her. Eldin didn’t stop, and Blane played with her clit exactly the way she needed.

York leaned over her chest and suckled a nipple.

Lips landed on hers in a sweet kiss. She had no idea when Mykel had shifted up to her head. It was nearly impossible to return the kiss, but he didn’t stay in one place. He kissed a path to her neck and nibbled behind her ear. “Come for us, honey.”

Those words were enough to tip her over the edge, and then she was falling. The sensation was so real that she gripped the sheets harder as if to ground herself.

The orgasm didn’t stop. Her body continued to pulse because Eldin was still pumping in and out of her. It wasn’t until he finally slid home one last time on a long groan that she managed to focus on his face. The ecstasy was worth every moment. A delirious ecstasy she not only felt but watched on Eldin’s face.

When she glanced at the other men in turn, they were each blissfully floating with her. They must have stroked themselves to completion while Eldin came inside her.

Eldin took her lips and kissed her passionately, conveying every ounce of his feelings for her with his mouth.

Harmony was a sated pile of putty, but she was so damn happy. She knew they still had details to work out, and they always would, but she would never regret this decision.

CHAPTER 23



When Harmony woke up the next morning, she could sense all four men in the room before she opened her eyes. She'd gone to sleep flanked by Blane and York, so she imagined they were still next to her, but she blinked her eyes open to find Eldin and Mykel dressed and sitting on the end of the bed.

They each stroked one of her feet over the covers.

She could sense something was up. "What's wrong?"

Eldin smiled, but it wasn't believable. "We have to go do a job, hon."

She rose onto her elbows, realizing that Blane and York were both awake and looking at her.

"We'll go out two at a time for a while," Mykel told her.

She swallowed as nerves made her skin crawl. They'd been home for two weeks though. They couldn't hide out underground with her forever. They had jobs. Responsibilities.

"How long will you be gone?" she asked even though she knew they couldn't answer that.

"Not sure," Eldin said. "One of our scouts, Maya, called in that a group of women with small children are hiding in a bunker and running low on provisions. They went

underground a week ago, but their men disappeared and never returned.”

Harmony pursed her lips. She understood. She nodded. “Of course. You have to go get them.” She felt a tug in her soul for those women and children. Part of her wanted to jump out of bed and go help, but the reasonable side of her realized she wasn’t equipped to do so. She would be a hindrance. Besides, she had a new goal.

York must have misread her frustration because he reached for her hand and held it in his. “We won’t deny you the right to follow your heart, sweetness. If you want to join us in our rescue missions, we’ll teach you everything you need to know. We promise not to hold you back. All we ask is that you give us a chance to train you properly. The two of us who are here with you will work with you every day.”

She shook her head. “That’s not what I want to do. I know I’m not suited for it. Like I said before, at the end of the day, there’s no way I could shoot someone. That would make me a liability. I’m sure you sometimes have no choice but to eliminate a few bad guys in order to save people.”

Blane set a hand on her thigh. “Okay, sweet girl. There’s no rush. You can take your time figuring out what you want to do.”

She smiled. “I already know.”

Mykel’s brows were lifted as she glanced around at the men.

“I want to teach.”

Eldin nodded. “You’d make an excellent teacher. I’m sure all the girls you worked with at the girls’ home would agree. We can see it’s a passion for you. They can always use more

teachers at every level in the compound. More and more children are being born among The Wanderers.”

She shook her head. “I’m sure that would be gratifying, but that’s not who I want to teach. I want to work with the women you bring in. Many of them arrive without any education at all. They’ve spent their entire lives on the run or in hiding or living under the repression of The Republic. They need a different kind of tutor. They need someone who understands what it’s like to be starting with the basic alphabet and numbers even as teenagers or young adults. I want to help the people you return with.” She heard the passion in her voice, and it reinforced everything she’d been pondering for the past two weeks. She knew that was exactly what she was destined to do.

Mykel crawled up the bed and kissed her. “You’re an amazing woman. You can do anything you set your mind to. We’ll support whatever that is.” He cupped her face. “I love you.”

She wrapped her arms around his neck. “I love you too.”

After a similar exchange with Eldin, the two men left.

Harmony felt partially empty and nervous as the door to the apartment snicked shut. She dropped down on her back and stared at the ceiling. Even though the five of them had been in a weird standoff for the past few weeks, they’d been together every day. Not more than a few hours had passed at a time without her seeing them.

And now two of them would be gone for a while. Days? Weeks? Depended on the distance and how difficult it would be to extricate the group in hiding from their bunker.

“You okay?” York asked after a few minutes. “Can we get you anything? Do you want us to leave you alone?”

She shook her head and reached for both of them. “No. I’m good. I’ll learn to keep my chin up when any of you are out of the compound. Besides, it will give me a chance to spend more time with one or two of you, getting to know you individually and maybe not feeling as overwhelmed as I do when eight hands and four mouths are on me.” She tried to sound lighthearted. She wasn’t sure she succeeded.

“We’ll give you all the two-on-one or one-on-one you want, sweet girl,” Blane assured her.

York slid off the side of the bed and grabbed a pair of jeans. “How about we start now. I’ll go get some breakfast and bring it back here while you two snuggle under the covers. Blane can tell you about the time he nearly froze his balls off when he thought it would be smarter to carry his clothes over his head while we were crossing a creek in the winter. He ended up dropping them, and they floated away, leaving him with no clothes, naked, wet, and very fucking cold.” York chuckled.

Blane groaned. “I guess I don’t need to tell that story at all now.”

Harmony grinned. “I bet there was more to it you could tell.” She rolled toward him so she was facing him, their bodies lined up. She wrapped her arm around his middle, flattening her bare chest to his.

Blane eased one leg between hers and cupped her butt. He kissed her neck and then her lips. “I’ll tell you anything you want to hear. But first I want to make you scream my name while my cock is inside you.”

She smiled against his mouth, feeling the evidence of his arousal nudging her. “I like this plan,” she whispered.

York leaned over and kissed her shoulder. “Okay then. Well, I’ll eat breakfast in the cafeteria and wait a while before I return with sustenance for the two of you.”

Blane glanced past Harmony to smile at his friend. “I’ll do the same at lunch.”

Harmony giggled. “So what happens to me? I just stay in bed all day while you take turns keeping my heart rate up?”

“Yes,” they both said at once.

She certainly wasn’t inclined to argue with the plan. It would keep her mind off Eldin and Mykel and give her a chance to experience a different kind of love. The kind that didn’t involve four men hovering at once. She loved the way they took care of her, but something smaller and tender would be nice too.

CHAPTER 24



Two months later...

Harmony paced in her parents' apartment. She reached up to run a hand through her hair, but was reminded it was in a tight braid down her back. She'd been so stressed that she'd been pulling it too hard for days, causing strands to get stuck in her fingers and tugged out. Finally, Marian had forced her to sit down on the floor in front of her, and she'd braided it like she'd done when Harmony was a young girl.

Marian came out of her bedroom, followed by Theo. She stopped when she saw Harmony. "How long have you been up?"

Harmony shrugged. "No idea. I couldn't sleep."

"How about if the three of us go to breakfast and then you and I can work on the lesson plans you started the other day?"

As soon as Harmony had shared her idea about teaching incoming adults and older teens, her mother had jumped on the plan and joined her in creating this new education system. The council had agreed it was a wonderful idea. It kept grown adults from having to sit next to five-year-old children to learn their letters.

Marian and Harmony had secured a space and had been working on an adult education program for several weeks. They were almost ready to officially open for business. Several women and even a few men had already signed up to start classes.

Harmony could work on lesson plans all day and into the night, but nothing would change the fact that she hadn't seen a single member of her family unit for over a week.

Two months ago, Mykel and Eldin had gone out and returned emptyhanded. They'd been unable to convince the group in hiding to come back with them. The women were still holding out hope that their men would return. Eldin and Mykel had left them provisions and promised to send people to check on them again soon.

Blane and York had gone the second time. The situation had gotten more dire, but they too had returned unsuccessful. It was frustrating, but Harmony understood why the women would want to hold out hope. If they left that spot and then the men returned, they would have no idea where to look for their families. They might even assume the entire group had been captured by militia or The Republic.

It was a tense situation. Last week, the council and several other members of the community met and agreed to send all four of Harmony's partners for one final attempt to rescue the group. There were six women in total and eight children. It would be safer for all of them if four men went to get them and split the group into smaller numbers for the journey back to the compound.

It was taking too long. Harmony had expected them to return two days ago, and they'd received no word.

Theo and Marian had been amazing, encouraging Harmony to stay with them in the spare room so she wouldn't be alone. In addition, they never tossed platitudes at her. They never said ridiculous things like, "I'm sure they're fine." "They'll be back any day now." "They're strong. They've done this before." "Don't you worry."

No one could guarantee any of those things, and saying them out loud was useless and frustrating. Harmony's parents never spoke those words. Instead they hugged her when she needed it and let her rant when she felt like venting.

Theo clapped his hands together. "Breakfast is an excellent plan. Shall we?"

At the thought of food, Harmony's stomach revolted, and she darted for the bathroom. She barely made it, dropping onto her knees and grabbing the sides of the toilet seat just in time for her stomach to clench and what little she'd had to drink this morning to come back up.

When she was finally done purging nothing, Marian handed her a wet washcloth.

Harmony dropped onto her butt and leaned against the wall to wipe her face. This was the fourth morning in a row she'd done this. The fourth morning Marian had taken care of her. The fourth morning neither of her parents had said a single word about her vomiting.

Today was different. Harmony could feel it. Theo leaned in the doorway while Marian sat on the toilet set.

"Have you told them yet?" Marian asked gently.

Harmony stared at the floor and shook her head.

"How long have you known?"

Harmony licked her lips. “A few weeks. I was waiting for all of them to be home at the same time. I didn’t want to tell just one or two. It didn’t seem fair.”

Theo squatted down to her level and met her gaze. He was truly the most amazing father she could ask for. He reached for her hand and held it. “Understandable. And we won’t say a word to anyone. I’ll try to school my face too. I know you’re nervous and stressed with all of them being gone, but I want you to know how damn excited I am as your father.” He smiled at her as if he might break in half from happiness.

She knew he would be over the moon. After all, he’d missed twenty years of her life. This grandchild would be the first baby he would get to nurture and care for, someone of his own blood, someone he would love to pieces and spoil rotten.

Knowing how happy her parents were made Harmony force a smile and shove her concerns to the back of her brain. She didn’t even mind the morning sickness that had taken hold of her and wouldn’t let go. Every time she rushed to the bathroom confirmed there really was a small human inside her.

Her partners were going to be ecstatic. If only they would come home.

She hated them all being gone. She hated when any two of them were also, but this was worse. She’d seen Julie several times, and Julie had assured her that her hormones were out of balance and running crazy, which was adding to her stress and nervousness. It was normal. Nothing was wrong with her. Except her heart was hurting.

She squeezed her father’s hand. “I know I won’t have any trouble getting babysitters,” she teased.

“Never. You leave that sweet baby with us any time you want,” he promised.

Marian was smiling from ear to ear too. She rose and stepped around Theo. “Let me get you some water.”

Theo moved to take a seat next to Harmony in the small bathroom, leaning against the wall and wrapping an arm around her.

Harmony leaned her head against her father’s shoulder and took deep breaths. She’d been through a lot in her twenty years. She would get through this too. One day, one hour, one minute at a time. She just needed to keep her mind busy so she wouldn’t spend all her time worrying.

A knock sounded at the door, but neither Harmony nor Theo moved.

“I’ve got it,” Marian called out.

It could be anyone. People came by all the time to check on them.

It wasn’t until someone too large to be Marian filled the doorway that Harmony noticed male legs in front of her and lifted her gaze.

Her heart nearly stopped as she found Mykel leaning into the bathroom. Eldin was next to him, but judging from the shuffling and legs she could see past them, Blane and York were behind them.

Harmony jumped to her feet with no grace whatsoever. In fact, Theo had to grab her arm to steady her as she stood or she might have fallen on her face.

She flung herself forward, caught by Eldin and Mykel, who pulled her into a tight hug. “You’re back,” she murmured.

Other hands reached around to touch her.

“We’re back,” Blane responded from somewhere. “Sorry it took so long. A few of the children were too young to walk. We had to carry them. And we had to walk most of the way in rough terrain to avoid detection.”

Harmony leaned back, eyes wide. “You brought them all back? They’re here? They’re safe?”

“Yes.” Mykel smiled broadly. “And there’s better news. We got the men too.”

Harmony gasped. “Seriously?”

Theo cleared his throat. “Anyone want to move out of the bathroom?” he joked. They were all blocking him.

In an awkward collective hug, they somehow managed to move into the living room.

“All of the men? Where had they been?” Harmony asked.

Eldin nodded. “They had gotten captured by the militia who were holding them hostage, demanding to know the whereabouts of the women, insisting they would only free them in exchange for their women.”

Harmony gasped. “I can imagine how that went over.”

“Exactly,” York added. “By sheer chance of fate, the morning we finally convinced the women to come with us, as we were lifting all of the children out of the bunker, the men showed up.”

“There was a tense standoff because the men feared we were militia,” Blane continued. “Luckily no one was injured, mostly because the men were weak and unarmed. We talked them down with the help of the women, regrouped, assessed

the injuries they'd sustained from their escape, and then began the long journey back to the compound."

Harmony pushed past Mykel and Eldin to throw her weight against Blane and York next. "I was so nervous."

"I'm sure you were, sweetness." York kissed her all over her face. "We were worried about you stressing the entire time. We got here as fast as we could."

"The important thing is you're all safe and you saved several more lives in the process. I love you all so much." Harmony couldn't let go of them. She stood in their circle, spinning from one to the next, touching each of them over and over. Their cheeks, their chests, their hands. Reminding herself that once again all was right in her world.

Theo waved toward her from over their heads. "Your mom and I are going to head to the cafeteria for breakfast. Take your time."

As soon as the door shut, leaving her alone with her men, she hugged them all one at a time yet again.

"Why on earth were you sitting on the bathroom floor with Theo when we got here?" Mykel asked.

Her cheeks flushed as she tipped her head back and bit her lip, meeting each of their gazes before replying. "I was vomiting. He was comforting me. Actually, he's probably struggling to care if I throw up. After the last four days, I'm pretty sure he's started to look forward to me vomiting first thing every morning. It pleases him," she joked.

All of them were frowning.

Eldin swallowed. "I'm confused. Are you sick? And why on earth would your father find that enjoyable?"

She shook her head and laughed. “I’m not sick.”

An imaginary light bulb lit up above their heads as Mykel’s expression turned from concern to excitement. “Oh, my God. You’re pregnant.”

She giggled and nodded. “It would seem so.”

“I’m so sorry we weren’t here with you when you found out. How long have you known?” York asked.

“A few weeks,” she admitted.

“And you didn’t tell any of us?” Blane questioned.

“No, because I wanted to tell *all* of you. You haven’t all been here at once since I confirmed I’m pregnant.”

The excitement in the room went up several decibels as the men passed her around, hugging and kissing her all over again while they all spoke excitedly at once.

Harmony felt like she floated out of her body as their excitement grew. She’d never seen four people as happy as she’d made them, and in spite of the nausea, she was happier than she’d ever been in her life too.

Everything was perfect. If anyone had ever told her at any point in her twenty years that she would experience a day like this, she never would have believed them. And she was grateful no one had ever suggested it was a possibility. It would have been harder to endure what she’d been through if she’d thought there was something better out there.

The kind of love she felt for these four men and already for the tiny nugget inside her was impossible to describe. She wouldn’t even try. She’d simply hold it tight and never take it for granted.

This was her family. Her life. Her future.

Her safe haven.

EPILOGUE



Seven months later...

“Oh, my God, thank you so much,” Harmony muttered through gritted teeth as she tried to catch her breath. “I was about to start shouting things I know I wouldn’t mean on a normal day.” She was gripping her mother’s hand on one side and Haley’s hand on the other.

The two women had just chased Mykel, Eldin, Blane, and York out of the room to give her a few moments of peace.

The only other person left in the room was Julie, and she was a godsend.

Both her mother and her best friend smiled at her knowingly. They’d been in this position before, giving birth at least.

Haley understood completely. She’d given birth to an adorable baby boy just months ago with four hovering men around her. She remembered all too well.

Marian had been in a prison cell mostly alone during the birthing process. She’d had no one, but she clearly

remembered the experience in a way that made Harmony love her even more.

“You’ll be ready to push soon,” Julie informed her. “Just a few more contractions. We’ll let the men back in when you’re ready. I think you needed a break from the intensity.” She smiled.

“Yes. I just need a minute.” It was all she would get before the next contraction. She looked over at her mother first. “Thank you for everything you’ve ever done for me and for getting me here to a safe place.”

Marian leaned over and kissed her forehead. “I love you, dear.”

“And you too, Haley,” Harmony added, shifting her attention to her friend. “I wouldn’t be here without you either. I’m so glad we’re together in this and our kids will grow up like cousins with ten thousand aunts and uncles.”

“Me too, Harmony. Me too.” Haley kissed Harmony’s other temple.

Another contraction made Harmony grit her teeth and hold her breath. No matter how many times someone told her to breathe through the contractions, she couldn’t do it. At some point, she’d told them all to go fuck themselves in language more colorful than one simple *fuck*.

“You’re doing great, Harmony,” Julie said. “I can see the head. You can start pushing on the next contraction. Want me to let the men back in?”

Harmony nodded as she panted. She was ready. Well, she wasn’t sure she was entirely ready to have a baby. The responsibility felt daunting. But she had so many people surrounding her. She would never be alone.

As soon as Julie opened the door, the room filled with excitement and love. Concern too. All four men were a bit more subdued and calm as if they'd had a powwow in the hallway and agreed to chill when they returned.

Hands were all over her seconds later. Somehow, a calmness consumed her. Instead of feeling like telling them all to take a step back, she absorbed their love.

There was no way she would leave any of her partners out of this experience. They'd been the most loving, doting men alive for the past several months. Harmony was convinced no one on Earth was as loved as she was.

She knew they were also scared. Things sometimes went wrong in childbirth, and they all felt that tension even though they never mentioned it.

Harmony was at peace. There were angels all around her. She could feel the presence of them as if they were part of the actual humans in the room. She knew she was going to be fine. So would the baby. They just needed to get through the next few minutes.

Another contraction hit, and Harmony pursed her lips and bore down instinctively.

"That's it, Harmony," Julie praised. "Push. You're doing great... The head is out. Give me another hard push."

It seemed like time stood still and the room went very quiet. Suddenly the intense pressure subsided a moment before loud, glorious screams filled the room.

Marian and Haley released Harmony to step out of the way, and all four men slid closer, kissing her everywhere and telling her how damn proud they were of her.

“It’s a boy,” Julie declared as she held the screaming infant up for everyone to see. “Let me get a blanket around him.”

Marian held out a small soft blanket and helped Julie wrap the screaming bundle before passing him through to Harmony’s outstretched arms.

Tears slid down her face followed by sobs of happiness and release. He was finally here. And he was perfect. “I need to see him,” she said, tugging on the blanket.

The men helped uncover him so she could lean over and count his toes and fingers. She lifted his little fist to her mouth and kissed it. “You are so loved, little man, so very loved.”

She wished she had a way to commemorate this moment and freeze it for eternity, but cameras were a luxury they didn’t have in the compound. Instead, Harmony glanced around at all their faces and forced herself to take a moment to remember this instant in time.

So much perfection.

So much love.

So much to be grateful for.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I hope you've enjoyed The Wanderers series. Below are the six titles in the series in case you haven't read them all!

The Wanderers:

[Sanctuary](#)

[Refuge](#)

[Harbor](#)

[Shelter](#)

[Hideout](#)

[Haven](#)

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Jasmine

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Blossom Ridge Box Set Two

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Haven

Surrender:

Raising Lucy

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Leaving Roman

Choosing Kellen

Pleasing Josie

Honoring Hudson

Nurturing Britney

Charming Colton

Convincing Leah

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Surrender Box Set One

Surrender Box Set Two

Surrender Box Set Three

Open Skies:

Layover

Redeye

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Standby

Takeoff

Jetway

Open Skies Box Set One

Open Skies Box Set Two

Shadow SEALs:

Shadow in the Desert

Shadow in the Darkness

Holt Agency:

Rescued by Becca Jameson

Unchained by KaLyn Cooper

Protected by Becca Jameson

Liberated by KaLyn Cooper

Defended by Becca Jameson

Unrestrained by KaLyn Cooper

Delta Team Three (Special Forces: Operation Alpha):

Destiny's Delta

Canyon Springs:

Caleb's Mate

Hunter's Mate

Corked and Tapped:

Volume One: Friday Night

Volume Two: Company Party

Volume Three: The Holidays

Project DEEP:

Reviving Emily

Reviving Trish

Reviving Dade

Reviving Zeke

Reviving Graham

Reviving Bianca

Reviving Olivia

Project DEEP Box Set One

Project DEEP Box Set Two

SEALs in Paradise:

Hot SEAL, Red Wine

Hot SEAL, Australian Nights

Hot SEAL, Cold Feet

Hot SEAL, April's Fool
Hot SEAL, Brown-Eyed Girl

Dark Falls:

Dark Nightmares

Club Zodiac:

Training Sasha

Obeying Rowen

Collaring Brooke

Mastering Rayne

Trusting Aaron

Claiming London

Sharing Charlotte

Taming Rex

Tempting Elizabeth

Club Zodiac Box Set One

Club Zodiac Box Set Two

Club Zodiac Box Set Three

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Pose

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Arcadian Bears:

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Grizzly Beginning

Grizzly Secret

Grizzly Promise

Grizzly Survival

Grizzly Perfection

Arcadian Bears Box Set One

Arcadian Bears Box Set Two

Sleeper SEALs:

Saving Zola

Spring Training:

Catching Zia

Catching Lily

Catching Ava

Spring Training Box Set

The Underground series:

Force

Clinch

Guard

Submit

Thrust

Torque

The Underground Box Set One

The Underground Box Set Two

Wolf Masters series:

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Lindsey's Wolves

Jessica's Wolves

Alyssa's Wolves

Tessa's Wolf

Rebecca's Wolves

Melinda's Wolves

Laurie's Wolves

Amanda's Wolves

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Wolf Masters Box Set One

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Wolf Gatherings series:

Tarnished

Dominated

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Redeemed

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Wolf Gathering Box Set Two

Durham Wolves series:

Rescue in the Smokies

Fire in the Smokies

Freedom in the Smokies

Durham Wolves Box Set

Stand Alone Books:

Blind with Love

Guarding the Truth

Out of the Smoke

Abducting His Mate

Wolf Trinity

Frostbitten

A Princess for Cale/A Princess for Cain

Severed Dreams

Where Alphas Dominate

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Becca Jameson is a USA Today best-selling author of over 125 books. She is well-known for her Wolf Masters series, her Fight Club series, and her Surrender series. She currently lives in Houston, Texas, with her husband and her Goldendoodle. Two grown kids pop in every once in a while too! She is loving this journey and has dabbled in a variety of genres, including paranormal, sports romance, military, and BDSM.

A total night owl, Becca writes late at night, sequestering herself in her office with a glass of red wine and a bar of dark chocolate, her fingers flying across the keyboard as her characters weave their own stories.

During the day—which never starts before ten in the morning!—she can be found jogging, running errands, or reading in her favorite hammock chair!

...where Alphas dominate...

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