



This Cradle Won't Fall (The American Soldier Collection 18)

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Category: Erotic, Romance, Adult, War

Description: Evonna "Vye" Colon will do whatever it takes to protect her unborn child from an abusive man heading down a path of destruction. Her only chance of keeping her baby and herself alive is to get as far away from Merdock Mullen as possible. Vye and baby Benny make a grand entrance into Salvation during a dangerous rain storm, nearly succumbing to the elements of that storm. Thank God for American soldiers and five men who never expected to deliver a baby, or instantly make a bond with Vye and Benny. Vye is set on making it as a single mom. She's not interested in this town rule of Guardianship, no matter how attracted she becomes to the McCann brothers. She's not a good judge of character when it comes to men, her self confidence and self esteem is low, nevermind these crazy postpartom hormones. It will take a little push from the towns folk, some momentous encounters, and a bit of friendly petting to get her to let down her guard and take a chance. Kind of hard when the five men fight their own denial, until jealousy kicks them in the behind and gets them to stake a claim. Salvation is achieved for all of them.

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Prologue

Evonna “Vye” Colon couldn’t stop shaking. She pressed her hand over her round belly as Murdock raged. He was high on something. Again. He was a lunatic, a monster, a manipulator, and her unborn child’s father.

He kicked her in the upper thigh, too close to the baby. She screamed out and curled into the fetal position on the floor, her back toward him.

“I’m fucked! I’m so fucking screwed. They want their money and Detrix is nowhere to be found. Fuck!” he roared and kicked her again. Her spine tingled, the aches and pains paralyzed her and she lost her breath. She lay there, her cheek to the floor, blood dripping from her lip, eye swollen, and heart hammering inside of her chest. Murdock Mullen was insane.

“Are you even listening to me, bitch!” he roared and pulled her shoulder back, causing her to fall to her back. She covered her belly—she couldn’t breathe in this position. He stared at her.

“Murdock, please. The baby,” she said, teeth chattering.

He glared at her. He looked at her with disgust, just as he had done the moment she told him she was pregnant, seven long months ago. The abuse increased instead of decreasing. At first, he seemed proud. Talked about it being a boy. Then his business expanded. He owned several dry cleaners in Pennsylvania and a vending machine company. He made great money but he got involved with bad people—loan sharks, gamblers, drug dealers, and thugs. He’d invested money in some rapper who was

supposed to make it big and just as a record deal hit, the rapper got cocky. He started celebrating with money he hadn't earned and then overdosed on LSD.

She swallowed hard.

"I should fucking beat that baby out of you already. You're fat, unappealing. I have desires, Vye."

Tears rolled down her cheeks. He was cheating on her. She knew, and last night she'd caught him screwing some woman from behind in the back room of the bar they were at. Her skirt lifted, her top undone, and his hands cupping the woman's breasts, his hips rocking hard into her from behind. Vye had wanted the floor to swallow her up as Detrix spotted her in the doorway and gazed over her body, smirking.

She didn't trust him. Never had, and she didn't care for the way he watched her even before she got pregnant. It was like he was waiting to make some kind of move. There was a time Murdock would kill any man who looked at her, aside from Detrix, who he shared everything with. And he was why Murdock had gotten in over his head. She despised all of them. She needed to get out of here. To disappear, and soon.

"Say something. Fucking respond to me. You don't say anything to me."

"You don't care about me, or this baby, Murdock. Let me go. Let me leave and move on so you can have your whores, your drugs, and whatever else you're dealing. Let me and the baby go."

He narrowed his eyes at her and she readjusted her position. He just stared at her with his hands on his hips. Those wide shoulders, the muscles from steroid use, the dark eyes and thick black hair, he was a monster. At one point a soldier, but left the service after only a two-year stint to take over his father's business. That's how he met Nuvon Perchavak, a loan shark, a business investor, and the man who owned

Murdock and had a hand in all his business earnings. He made a deal with the devil and Murdock was never getting out from Nuvon's thumb.

"I told you I didn't want that baby. I gave you the money to handle it." She gulped and tears rolled down her cheeks.

"It's a life. It was created when we made love," she said, hoping that it would ease his intensity, calm his anger, and make him see that he was going to be a father and that he couldn't strike her. She knew better. She knew that if he could so easily strike her, beat her, cheat on her, and hurt her, then he would hurt the baby. It was getting closer. The aches, the Braxton Hicks already starting. She wasn't going to have this baby prematurely and wind up with more problems.

She'd saved money. She'd stolen money from him without him knowing it. She'd made a plan. Although she couldn't go far, she would need to get away from Pennsylvania and get someplace safe. Her aunt Gay lived in New York. She could make that trek. Have the baby there. Maybe work while she paid her aunt to babysit. It was going to be rough. She didn't love Murdock anymore. She wasn't going to be one of those women. The ones that hung out holding a kid on their laps while their boyfriends, their baby-daddies, flirted with other women, or even fucked them in the back rooms of bars.

She felt sick. She gave up her dreams, her goals in life for him. She'd had one more college class to complete to achieve her degree in finance. One more and she would have had a college diploma. Here she was, seven months pregnant, twenty-three years old, and involved with an abusive, criminal asshole who cheated on her and beat her as she sat on the dirty floor in the back room of a club while he drank and shot up with drugs.

"Are you even fucking listening to me?" he yelled at her, then struck her in the head.

She gasped and slid under the table, grabbed onto the pole underneath, and cried.

“Stupid, fat, fucking cunt. Leave. You want to fucking leave me? You want to take my kid and leave? I’ll hunt you down, and I’ll slit your throat and kill that fucking thing. You understand me?”

He raged. The steroids, the drugs all running rampant through his system making him act and sound like a mad man.

She couldn’t even see she was crying so hard. This was the worst he had ever been—the meanest, the most despicable—and she’d had it. She hugged the bar as he tried kicking at her but couldn’t reach her. Then his cell phone rang. He answered it and she watched him, heard him carrying on, and then open the black box. He pulled out more drugs and lined the little mirror with the white powder. He spoke on the phone with one hand while he held one nostril and snorted coke with the other. He sniffed. That sound, the sight of him disgusted her.

“I thought we were getting paid more than that? We owe a hundred grand to them. This fucking job was risky. What the fuck are we going to do? Don’t tell me to calm down, asshole. You better have a plan. Chicago? Are you fucking serious? Fine. I’m here.”

He carried on over the phone, and she heard everything he was saying. Was he going to Chicago? When? She could make her move then if it were coming up this week. He fell down onto the couch. She turned, still laying on the floor like some beaten down animal. She was ashamed of herself. Of what she allowed this man to do to her in such little time. She was better than this. Her baby deserved better than this life. She watched him under the cover of the table. He ran his hand over his face, his legs were spread wide, the other hand on his lap. He closed his eyes, falling into the power of the drugs he snorted.

She hated him. Despised him. He was no longer the handsome, caring, hardworking soldier she had met one night at a club during college. He'd changed. He demanded, he commanded, and she fell for the masculinity, the sexiness, and his lies. Lies to get her into bed, to gain her trust, and then possess her in every way. This was not her life. This was not where she was meant to be. She ran her hand over her belly and rocked.

I'm going to get you out of here. We deserve better, baby. Don't you worry. Mamma's been scared and stupid, but I want a better life for you. I don't want you around this. I don't want him to hurt or kill you. I'm going to take you away from here and away from him. You deserve a chance. You deserve to be safe and to be loved. Your daddy doesn't love you or me, and that isn't right or fair. It's going to be tough, but we've got one another. I'll always protect you, baby. I've been scared stupid too long. It's time to take control back and fight for a better life. For a good life like you deserve. A chance to make it, and to succeed and be loved, not abused, neglected, or possibly killed.

Tears flowed and she waited, just waited for the opportunity to leave. She was exhausted from crying when she felt the kick to her side and the table wobble.

"I'm leaving. Got to meet up with Detrix and figure this shit out. Go to the apartment, stay there, and wait for me. Get that body ready to please me. You need to have that fucking baby soon and maybe get rid of it. Put it up for adoption or some shit. I don't need to worry about taking care of the fucking thing. I don't even know if it's mine. Get the fuck up and go," he yelled.

A strike to her heart. Not yours? Who else's would it be, you asshole. I've always been faithful, but not you. Not you. I hate you. I'm not giving this baby up. I'm giving you up. I'm outta here, and you can go to hell.

Chapter One

Brady held Donata in his arms and against his chest in bed. He ran his hand along her ass and then up her back. She clung to him, kissed his bare skin, and snuggled close. That uneasy feeling had just about disappeared until the discussion a week ago about going back to New York and him, Bailey, and Slogan working for Mateus and Major Fiorre after meeting them months ago. The Fiores had a special project, a new club and restaurant opening up called Bella Amore. Of course named after their woman, who was going to manage the club with her friend's assistance and Donata's.

He, Slogan, and Bailey were struggling with giving up their military missions and taking chances. They wouldn't risk being hurt or killed now that Donata was in their lives. The last several months had been tough, with her recovering from her injuries and the attack, never mind how she killed those men to survive. She could have died out there in that truck if they hadn't had so many people searching, and their good friend Ford, his men, and the people of Salvation all looking for her.

He swallowed hard and kissed the top of her head. He eased his fingers along the scar on her side from the knife wound. Twenty-seven stitches, three visits to a plastic surgeon, and lots of ointment and cream, but a scar would remain there. A faint reminder of her near-death experience and the men wanting to make her theirs by raping her.

Would she be safe in New York? Could they protect her while working? He talked with his brothers and his cousins to work out a schedule. Mateus and Major were on board, too, and Donata would be working at the club helping Bella to get things started. She'd help with hiring people and training them. Him and his brothers would help with security and setting things up, then with monitoring the business transactions that took place in the back offices. Their jokes about being made men and being pussies were proving to be bullshit. Made men had clout, got respect, and their jobs somewhat dangerous.

"I guess we should get up. There's still a bunch to do before we leave for the airport,"

she said rolled to her back before climbing off the bed. Brady gripped her and rolled her back toward him, pressing between her legs. She smiled up at him and cupped his cheek, those smoky green eyes holding his gaze.

“I love you, baby,” he whispered.

“I love you, too,” she said and stared into his eyes as if trying to read his mind. She stroked his cheek and squinted.

“It will be okay. We’ll all be there together. We’ll work out plans to always be in sight of one another. I mean, come on, Brady, there are seven of you. Certainly there won’t be a time when none of you are near me.”

“Oh really? You’re so sure? I mean, it’s a club and restaurant. It will get crowded and we could lose sight of you momentarily. What if some guy hits on you, or someone tries to grab your ass?”

She chuckled.

“I’ll use that move Slogan taught me.”

He smirked as he thought about how each of them gave her self-defense techniques and she really took to certain ones.

He rocked his hips against her mound, his cock once again hard and ready to make love to her again. He never got enough of her. None of them did.

“Which move would you use?”

She gave him a funny face as if he were silly for asking.

He chuckled and brushed her hair from her cheek.

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“A strike to the throat? Damn, woman, you are fierce, liking that move the most.”

“It will debilitate an attacker. Total shock and awe like Bailey and Harley like to say.” He chuckled.

He stared at her, smirking, feeling a mix of emotions.

“You’re going to like New York. It’s only temporary. We can come back to Salvation during the week for a few days, and in a few months, we can come back and stay for a while. You know I love it here. I love how friendly everyone is, and so supportive. It’s a great place to feel safe and protected. Plus, your good friends Kendrick, Pierce, Frankie, Lou, and Tex are all here. They’ll want to see you guys and hang out.”

“Those guys are fucking crazy. Still doing missions and not wanting to settle down or take a break from that life. Believe me, they wouldn’t care if we didn’t see them for months. They’re hard men. No hearts, really,” he said and stroked over her breast. She caressed his hair and squinted.

“I don’t believe that. You were just like them until I came along,” she said and winked.

He cupped her breast and rocked his hips against her mound.

“There’s something to be said about a sexy woman and her loins.”

“Oh really?” she asked and gave his arm a slap. He chuckled and just stared down into her gorgeous eyes. He loved her so much his heart ached when he thought about

it.

“Salvation is a great place. A good place to settle down. To start a family,” he said, caressing her hair. She gulped. She wasn’t ready yet. He understood that. Her fears, her anxiety still in the way of doing certain things.

“Okay. Let’s move this ass before I make love to you again and make us all miss the plane.” She lifted up and kissed his lips. Brady deepened the kiss, and he felt her press her thighs against his hips and thrust upward. Apparently, she was game for making love one more time before showers, getting dressed, and heading to the airport.

He was game, too. Donata was his everything.

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Vye huddled against the building. She was so exhausted. She didn’t think she could work at the diner much longer. The contractions were coming every few days. The baby was due any time really. Thank God she was looking up and not daydreaming, or she wouldn’t have seen the dark sedan outside of her aunt’s apartment building.

He’d found her. The son of a bitch had somehow found her. She couldn’t let him see her, but she worried about her aunt. She didn’t know what to do, or how long Murdock and his crew of shit had been there. She watched as he emerged with them from the building. He looked pissed off. She waited until she saw him and his buddies leave and debated about going inside. Could one of them be watching the building? She didn’t know, and that terrified her. If Murdock got his hands on her, she was going to get a beating. He would kill the baby. Tears rolled down her cheeks and she felt sick.

Think, Vye. Think like he would. Like someone on the run from death. Take no

chances. Trust no one. Do whatever is necessary to protect the baby. Whatever is necessary.

She took a deep breath and then exhaled and rubbed her stomach.

“Okay, baby. We got this. We can’t stay here. We have to go far, far away from here,” she whispered aloud, and then backtracked behind the apartment building and waited a little longer before she entered through the back-exit door. She was shaking so hard, worried that one of the men remained with her aunt to catch Vye, but as she unlocked the door and entered the dark apartment, fear struck her insides, and her heart pounded inside her chest. Where was her aunt?

She heard a noise and then gasped, turned, and saw her aunt with a bag of ice against her cheek. She ran to her.

“Oh God, he struck you? He hurt you?” She cried, tears spilling from her eyes. Her aunt looked pissed.

“He’s an evil man, Vye. He will stop at nothing to find you and to hurt you. You can’t stay here.”

She cried and covered her mouth with her hand. Where would she go? What was she going to do? Her aunt reached out and touched her arm.

“I’ve got a plan. The place I told you about. My cousin?” she said.

They talked about her heading to Texas to her aunt’s cousin’s farm. Ella Brazos was her name and the town called Salvation supposedly was some sort of storybook place.

“It will be a new start for you. You’ll be safe there with my cousin, her sons, her husbands, and their friends. All good people.”

“But what if he follows? If he somehow finds me? He struck you, threatened you. He could kill you, and anyone who helps me.”

“I’ll take the proper precautions, and when it’s safe, when he gives up, I’ll come out there and see my great nephew,” she said and covered Vye’s belly with her hand. Tears continued to flow.

“Will I ever be free from him? From the abuse, from his desire to own me in every way?”

“I pray he won’t ever find you and the baby, ever. My cousin Ella will know what to do and how to handle things. You trust her. You get to the farm, no matter what. She’ll explain how things work out there. About the rules, the security they have in place to protect women like you, women in predicaments with nowhere else to turn.”

“I don’t understand. Is it like some sort of women’s shelter or something?”

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“No. You’re family. She’ll take you in. She’ll help you deliver that baby. She’ll have her sons, her husbands, and others watch over you.” Her aunt cupped Vye’s cheek.

“You are a beautiful, strong woman. I don’t want you to have the life my other aunt has and is stuck with. That’s one of Ella’s sisters. You’re twenty-four years old. You have this baby to protect and to raise right. You’ll do that as long as we can keep Murdock from finding you. Don’t let your guard down. Be smart from here on out.”

“Are you sure this is going to work?”

“It’s going to work. You just need to get there.”

Aunt Gay hugged Vye tight and Vye prayed she would survive this ordeal. She was scared to travel to Texas alone. Terrified that Murdock would continue to hunt her down, yet determined to somehow make it and have a real life, a safe life, and make the baby her focus.

“I’m going to make the call. Pack your things, not too much, and the cash you have saved. You’ll need some of it for your travels. It’s going to take a long time traveling by bus. Maybe rent a car a few states away, just in case Murdock has a way of tracking you somehow. Remember to not take any chances trusting anyone but Ella. She’ll be expecting you. You just get to the address I give you, and it will be just fine. You’ll see.”

Vye nodded as more tears fell and then she gulped, straightened out her shoulders, and quickly started packing.

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“Where the hell is she? Her aunt was fucking lying. I know she was.”

“Maybe not, Murdock. She was scared of you. Took that hit and looked terrified. I think, if she knew anything, she would have said something,” Detrix said to him.

“I can’t take this. I’m under too much stress, man.”

“Calm down, Murdock. Does she really matter? I mean, we made a shit load of money in one hit. One fucking hit. You can have all the women you want now.”

“That’s if we don’t get fucking caught. It was risky ripping made men off.”

“Shhh, no one fucking knows that but us. We got this. Just keep your mouth shut and let it ride. I’ll have another hit, an even better one, the biggest one all set up shortly. Mark my words, you don’t need that preg-

nant bitch, a fucking baby, and responsibility like that in your life. Not when you can live like a fucking king with pussy at every corner,” Detrix said and smiled wide.

They got into the car and Murdock eased back into the seat. He looked at the apartment as they pulled away. He wasn’t giving Vye up just yet. She was special, had been a virgin until he bagged her. The thought of another man one day being able to touch her, possess her, hell, fuck her, made him see red. If he couldn’t have her, then no other man would. He’d end her life and that baby’s life. Then, he would move on.

Chapter Two

“I’m fucking tired. Thank God that was the last fucking job for a while. Holy shit,”

Lou said and collapsed into the chair in the living room.

“It felt good to take a shower. To get all the grime, the days of sweat and death from my clothes. What a fucking messed up situation out there,” Frankie stated and ran his fingers through his hair, then rubbed his black beard before leaning back into the chair. His hair was still wet from his shower, but he was happy to be home in Salvation and back on their ranch.

“Beers?” Tex called out from the kitchen.

“Fuck yeah,” Pierce stated, joining them in the living room next.

Kendrick walked into the room dressed and looking ready for a fight or something.

“Where the fuck are you going?” Lou asked him.

“To get some fucking action. Three damn fucking weeks in the jungle, gotta make sure the dick still works,” Kendrick said, and smoothed his hands down his shoulder-length blond hair. He looked untamed and women were drawn to him.

“You’re out of your fucking mind, and would be lucky to even get it up, never mind find a woman ready to jump right into bed,” Frankie said to him in disgust. That was his brother’s way of handling the shit they saw, experienced, and were exposed to—dead bodies...women, children killed for no fucking reason other than to make a statement against the government and as retaliation against these rogue terrorist groups. Keep them all fucking over there, and not here in the U.S., Frankie thought, then accepted the cold beer from Tex.

“You aren’t going anywhere until we debrief. I allowed the showers, but now we need to sit down and go over shit. Then if you still want to go get laid you can do that,” Tex ordered and Kendrick accepted the beer and sat down, moaning about this

being bullshit, but he knew the routine. They all did and the others chuckled.

As they went over the details of their latest mission, the taste of smoke, and bad memories came to Frankie in flashbacks. One look at Lou, and he knew his brother was pondering over the same moment as him—Lou holding a dying child in his arms comforting him in his final moments of life. Scarred for life more than likely. This shit was tiresome. There was just too much witnessing of inhumanity, one tragedy after the next. What was this fucking world coming to? Why couldn't people just get the fuck along? He'd be happy to be out of work. But no, instead, they went out to these fucking places and tried to save lives, and if they were too late then they took out the ones responsible, or at least the ones they were ordered to. That was another thing. The orders, the commands to stand down when they could eliminate threats entirely. It was frustrating and he was at his wit's end.

Once they were done going over shit, recapping what they saw and witnessed and expressing frustrations, Tex just nodded. He was so desensitized to feelings and emotions, just like the rest of them.

Lou stood up when they were done, just as thunder began to rumble and rain started again. A shitty, fucking night.

"I'm going out with Kendrick. I could use a little distraction, and I'm kind of wired now," Lou said, and Kendrick slapped him on the shoulder.

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“Let’s go get some action, bro,” Kendrick said, and he and Lou headed out of the house.

“You’re going to have to sit him down, Tex. You know that,” Frankie said to him.

Tex leaned back in the chair, took a slug from his beer, and nodded.

“Let them burn off some steam. I’ll talk to them tomorrow or whenever they show back up here and are sober,” he said and Pierce chuckled.

“I’m going to bed. Don’t sign us up for anything for a few weeks. This one did me in and I need recovery time,” Pierce said and Tex nodded, then left the room leaving Frankie and Tex alone.

“I don’t know, Frankie. Things are changing. Pierce could have taken a hit to his neck if that shot was just a hair off and the vest didn’t catch it.”

“We all took fucking hits this time. It could’ve ended for all of us there. Maybe taking more time and choosing the fucking missions we want, and having more intel on them would be better. We ain’t getting any younger.” Tex swallowed a slug of beer and then exhaled. “I remember when thirty was knocking at my door. Now I’m two years from forty,” Tex said.

“I’m right fucking behind you. You don’t need to tell me. Things are aching that never ached before.”

Tex chuckled.

He leaned back and exhaled, then rubbed his face.

“Changes are coming, Tex. It just ain’t the same anymore. Maybe we should consider doing the side work for Brady, Slogan, Harley, and their friends from New York?”

“I don’t know if that’s my thing. It isn’t like we need to work. We got a lot of fucking money,” Tex added.

“We need to do something or we’ll lose our fucking minds and become fucking weak. Maybe we can expand that security detail for Ford and the sheriff’s department. It won’t take us too far and definitely not out of the fucking country. The money isn’t bad and we can wear plain clothes. No fucking uniforms. We could all train the men and women involved in the programs?” Tex said to him.

“We should consider it. Maybe talk about it more this weekend.” Thunder struck loudly and rain began to pour down.

“Damn, I think it’s going to be a bad one.”

“And those two jackasses went out driving in it. Hope the bridge doesn’t flood out again.”

“Those crazy bastards would find a way to cross it.”

Tex laughed.

“One more beer?” he asked Frankie.

“Two more and then bed.”

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“Come on, baby, don’t come now. Please just wait until we get to Aunt Ella’s place. It isn’t too far,” Vye said aloud and tried breathing through the contractions. They were bad. They were close together. She panicked as she rounded the corner just as lightning struck, and a tree fell down in front of her, slamming against the windshield. She screamed and jerked the wheel before hitting her head on the steering wheel. She was stunned a moment. She reached up, touched her fingers to her forehead, and felt the blood as water started to come into the car.

The car was moving sideways. She was going to be taken away and pulled into the water below. “Oh, God, no!” she cried out to the darkness. She undid her seatbelt and pulled the shoulder bag with her money inside over her head, but as she went to move, she felt dizzy and the contractions intensified.

“I’m going to die out here and so is my baby. Oh, God, help me. Help me,” she cried out. Suddenly she saw headlights, and then men getting out of a truck. The tree was over the hood of her car and glass was all over her lap and the coat she wore.

She was petrified. When the man with the brown crew cut hair approached, along with another one with long blond hair, she felt lightheaded. He got the door open.

“What in God’s name are you doing out here this time of night?” the blond yelled out, then squinted at her, apparently seeing the blood on her forehead.

“Help her, Kendrick. She’s hurt, and the bridge is flooding out. It’s going to take the damn car,” the other one yelled.

“Come on, honey,” the other one said as more lightning struck and thunder rolled. The blond reached for her as the car rocked, water splashed up onto them, and she felt her water break. Her eyes widened and she tightened her hold on him. He lifted her out like nothing and then carried her across the deep water and to their truck. They got her inside.

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Lou stared at the gorgeous blonde in the back seat of their truck. As Kendrick got into the driver's side, Lou got in the back with her and reached for the first aid kit.

"Where the hell are you heading this time of night and in a storm like this?" Lou asked as Kendrick turned in his seat and looked at her, too.

She had gorgeous baby blue eyes, blonde hair, and full, pink lips. She was so strikingly beautiful, he couldn't even process his thoughts. She held her arms over her stomach and that was when he noticed how round she was.

"Please. Get me to Ella Brazos's farm. Please," she said and closed her eyes, seemingly in pain.

"Ella's? Honey, you need a hospital," Kendrick stated.

"We aren't getting her to one in this weather and with the bridge flooded out. How do you know Ella?"

"Please. The baby is coming. Just get me there," she said.

"Baby?" Kendrick asked and looked down just as Lou reached out and undid her coat.

"Holy shit. You're having a baby?" he asked, his heart instantly pounding. His thought about how he found the woman incredibly attractive, but now that he knew she was pregnant, and maybe some guy's woman, he felt like a dick.

“Where the fuck is the father?” Kendrick asked, raising his voice.

“He shouldn’t let you out driving on your own in weather like this. Jesus, what the fuck?” Kendrick carried on.

“Just drive her to our place, Kendrick. We aren’t making it the twenty miles to Ella’s. I’ll call the sheriff,” Lou said, pulling out his cell phone.

She grabbed his hand.

“No. No, please, no sheriff. Just get me to Ella’s,” she stated.

“Honey, it’s too far. Where is the father? Do you want to call him and let him know the baby is coming and that you’re with men that can help you?” Lou asked her. She held his gaze. Her gorgeous baby blues were filled with tears. “There is no father. It’s just me and my baby.”

Lou looked at Kendrick, who narrowed his eyes and just seemed to stare at the young woman.

“Kendrick, drive and call the others on the way. Have them get things ready. I’ll call Ella,” Lou told his brother.

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Vye cried out as another set of contractions came just as they lay her on a bed.

“Holy shit. She could have died out there, and the baby, too,” some tall man said. There were five very large, serious-looking men in the room, and still no Aunt Ella.

“Please. Ella,” she said, panting for breath and trying to breathe. Lou, the one guy

who comforted her since getting her into the truck, came over and held her hand, then caressed her forehead with a washcloth.

“She’s trying to get here, but I don’t think she’s going to make it in time. We’re going to have to deliver this baby, honey.”

“No. Oh, God, no, please, this can’t be happening. Haven’t I gone through enough? Goddamnit, I can’t take this bad luck anymore. I can’t.” She cried and then gasped as another contraction hit.

“Okay, I know this is a bad situation all around. You don’t know us and we don’t know you, but we’re soldiers, trained men in military abilities and some medical ones. We can handle this until Ella comes along and takes over and Doc arrives. He’s making his way through this torrential downpour. Trees are down and it’s a damn obstacle course. So, let’s work together. Introductions will help. I’m Tex,” the tall man with the dark black hair and huge, muscular body said, and she breathed through the pain and nodded.

“I’m Frankie,” the man with the black beard, a scowl on his face, and tattoos on his arms told her. He was scary. She swallowed hard.

“I’m Pierce,” the man with a very short, reddish brown crew cut and a beard said, looking dead serious. Maybe he was pissed that she’d invaded their home like this.

“And you know I’m Kendrick,” the flirty one with the blond, shoulder-length hair said.

“And I’m Lou. So, what’s your name?” Lou asked as he held her ankle and caressed it.

“Evonna, but my friends call me Vye,” she said and then gasped. “It’s coming. Oh,

God. I feel it.”

“Okay, sweetie. I’m going to pull down these pants and get ready.”

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“Oh, for crying out loud,” she said. Lou gave a small smile.

“Sweetie, we have to do this together,” Lou said firmly and she nodded and looked at the others standing there, looking intense, to say the least.

“Got everything sterilized? The scissors, the other things?”

“We’re ready, Lou,” Tex stated.

He pulled down her pants. She saw the expressions on Tex and Pierce’s faces. Kendrick knelt down by the bed and reached over and caressed her hair, then held her hand. “You got this,” he said to her.

“Okay, looks like the baby is ready, and a good thing. I can see the head, so it’s in the right position. Now, I want you to push when you feel that contraction.”

She didn’t know how long it went on. When she felt the pressure and saw Lou lower down as she grunted and pushed, she didn’t scream out, trying to be strong. Then she heard her baby cry and she cried, as well. All four men smiled wide, looking shocked and also amazed.

“You did it, honey. You got yourself a beautiful baby boy,” Lou said as Tex used the scissors to cut the umbilical cord. He then wiped down the baby and wrapped him up before Lou brought him over to her. He smiled wide, his dark eyes held hers.

“Here you are, Mamma. You did great,” he said.

They heard voices and Tex cleared his throat. “They’re here.”

“Oh my God. Oh, God.” An older woman who looked a lot like Aunt Gay came into the room.

“Doc Carter is on his way. Ford is here, too, but outside.”

She didn’t know who either man was, but Aunt Ella came over and smiled wide.

“Thank God you and the baby are okay. You made it, Vye. I’m going to protect you and the baby, and so are my men,” she said, and Vye nodded. She caught sight of the confused expressions on the men’s faces who’d delivered her baby, then stared at the miracle in her arms. A baby boy. She did it. He was here and what a hell of an entrance indeed.

* * * *

“We’ll get Vye and the baby moved as soon as we can. We appreciate all your help,” Scout, one of Ella’s husbands, said to Tex and his brothers. Ford was there, too, along with Sarge and Ray, Ella’s other husbands. Ella was in the bedroom with Vye and the baby.

“We were just glad that we were there or things could have turned out worse,” Kendrick said and looked back toward the bedroom with his hands in his pockets.

“It’s something else how you and Lou were there, and how Lou delivered the baby. Good stuff,” Ford said and smiled. The sound of the baby crying filtered from the bedroom.

“What is Doc Carter saying? Are the baby and Vye okay?” Pierce asked, sounding as concerned as Tex and the others felt. Lou was still in there with Vye and Ella. Just

then, Doc Carter walked out of the room. He came over, looking a bit upset.

“She needs looking after. Ella explained a little, along with Vye. Her and the baby will be under your protection and care up at the farm, right?” Doc Carter asked Scout and his brothers.

“Yes, Doc, we got it covered. Got word days ago that Vye was heading out here. She took several busses, then rented a car in Tennessee and drove herself the rest of the way. She’s been traveling for days,” Sarge told them.

“She’s lucky she didn’t have an accident or pass out behind the wheel of that car along the way. She’s completely dehydrated, hasn’t been eating well, and darn lucky that the baby is okay.”

“What do you mean, hasn’t been eating well? She wants the baby, right?” Kendrick asked.

“Of course she does. That’s why she’s here. Well, I have an I.V. going with some fluids. Maybe we can cook up some food and make her something to eat. Anything you men have or can whip up?” Doc asked.

“Or I can head back to the farm and grab some things. Maybe Ford can give me a ride,” Scout suggested.

“We have stuff. Can go out to the barn and grab fresh eggs and things. Defrost some meat pretty quickly, too. We’ll take care of making something for her. We’re pretty hungry,” Tex said.

“She’ll only be in your hair for a day or two. She’s already worried about invading your home and doing this to you men. She’s a sweet young woman. Damn sweet,” Doc said and then turned around to talk to Sarge.

* * * *

“Just bring his mouth right over toward the nipple and he’ll go and suckle. We can re-adjust if need be,” Ella said, helping Vye feed the baby.

She covered her top so her breast wasn’t showing as Lou kept his back turned.

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“She’s okay, Lou,” Ella said and smiled as Lou turned around to face them. Ella patted her top and then rechecked the I.V.

“They’ll get some food for you, Vye. It’s important that you eat. You’re safe here and don’t need to fret over the other stuff now. Trust me to take care of you.”

“Thank you. I didn’t mean to not eat well. I was just determined to put miles between me and everything and just get here. I felt the contractions days ago, so I knew time was limited.”

“What happened, that you wouldn’t stop at a hospital or even a hotel where Ella and her men could have come get you?” Lou asked.

She looked at him as the baby pulled from her breast. His eyes widened and Vye quickly pulled her top across.

“Here, I’ll burp him,” Ella said and took the little bundle into her arms and began to caress his back and burp the baby.

“I appreciate your help, Lou, and for delivering my baby. It was a hell of an introduction, but I won’t ever forget it,” Vye said to him.

“Why don’t I grab one of my men to care for this little guy while I help you get cleaned up? One of the men went back for your luggage and the car,” she said.

“I can take him, Ella.”

Ella widened her eyes

and said, “Lou McCann, seriously?”

He gave her a sideways expression. “Ella, you’ve known me since I was in diapers. You know my military background and medical experience. I delivered the baby. Don’t you think I know how to care for one?” he asked and stepped closer.

Ella watched as Lou took the baby into his arms, cuddled him close, and rocked him.

Ella looked at Vye. She had tears in her eyes.

“You don’t have to.”

“He’ll be fine, Vye. Lou is a Special Forces soldier, an American hero, and a man you can definitely trust your baby with,” Ella said. Lou winked and looked at Ella.

“I’ll take good care of him. Let Ella help you, and when you’re all set, I’ll bring him back in,” Lou said.

Ella couldn’t help but smile inside. What were the chances of Vye being rescued by Lou and Kendrick McCann? That Lou had to deliver her baby, and that all four men were deeply concerned? She exhaled and wondered what may or may not come of this. She supposed it was up to Vye, and just how badly her baby’s father broke her heart, and broke her down.

* * * *

Lou walked out of the bedroom carrying the baby. He was sound asleep, so tiny and fragile. A protective instinct came over him immediately after the child was born. He wanted to know who the father was. What had happened to make Vye take off and

travel nonstop to get here to Salvation and Ella? Was her boyfriend abusive? Did he threaten to hurt Vye and the baby, or was he some loser that wanted nothing to do with Vye because she'd gotten pregnant? So many questions went through his mind. Vye was absolutely gorgeous. Young, too, and, Jesus, she had one hell of a body. He felt a bit like a dick for even thinking that, but how could he not? From the moment he'd laid eyes on her in that car, in distress, something had happened.

"Is she okay?" Pierce asked while cooking up eggs and bacon at the stove. Tex, Doc, Ford, Frank, Kendrick, and Ella's men all looked at him. He rocked the baby in his arms.

"She's doing good. Ella is helping her clean up," Lou told them, and then took a seat at the table.

Kendrick glanced at the baby.

"It's small. You sure it's okay, Doc?" he asked, not wanting to come too close. Lou had to chuckle. Kendrick completely stayed away from babies.

"He's fine. Vye is petite, and even so, that baby probably weighs about seven pounds, and is three weeks early."

"Early? He's really okay, arriving early?" Pierce asked while cooking.

"Just fine," Doc said and looked at Lou holding the baby.

"Scout, what do you know about Vye's situation? About the father of the baby and why she's here?" Lou asked.

Sarge looked at his brothers and then exhaled before peaking toward the doorway.

“Got a call days ago from Ella’s cousin Gay. Vye is Gay’s niece. She got involved with this guy while she was in college. Don’t know much about him. Just that he was abusive. Beat her up pretty good while she was pregnant.”

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Lou clenched his teeth and he saw his brother's reactions by their facial expressions. They were pissed. No woman should ever get abused by a man, and definitely not a pregnant woman. That was the guy's baby. What a fucking dick.

"I know, it's terrible to think a man could be so cruel, but we all know of men like this. She was beaten up pretty good. He threatened to kill the baby. Pretty much wanted her to get rid of it. He cheated on her and knocked her around, anyway. Vye took off to her aunt's place in New York. She was there for a couple of months, working like crazy to save money. Then one night her boyfriend and some thugs show up at Aunt Gay's apartment. They rough her up. Demand to know where Vye was. She lied. Said she was never there. Gay called Ella, and basically Vye took off for here in hopes of safety and to put this asshole behind her. We're prepared to protect her with what we got. Ford is on board. You all know the rules in Salvation. She'll be protected here," Scout said to them.

"She sure will be. In a few days, maybe we can get pictures of this guy and some information so my deputies and the men of Salvation are on guard and aware," Ford said to Scout.

"Of course," Scout stated.

They were all quiet.

"She's a very attractive young woman. Very sweet, too. Someone will step in as a guardian or guardians in no time. Mark my words. I'd better go check on her one more time," Doc said, and Kendrick walked out of the kitchen with him. That's when they all heard Ella call out.

* * * *

Kendrick got to the door first and saw Ella by the bathroom. She was trying to hold Evonna upright, but it looked like Evonna had passed out. She wasn't fully dressed. The robe gaped open, revealing some of her olive skin and one full breast.

Kendrick got to her, lifted her up into his arms, and carried her back to the bed. The others were by the door in no time as Doc checked her pulse.

"The poor thing is exhausted. Utterly, physically, and emotionally exhausted. She needs rest," Doc said as Kendrick brought the covers up, tucking her in and making sure she was fully covered.

"She can stay here for as long as needed. No way she should be walking around, or even going in and out of the car. Plus, this weather is supposed to keep up like this, off and on, all week," Kendrick said. Doc looked at him, squinting. Kendrick looked away and got up.

"I think she's been through enough stress and she doesn't need more. We'll keep watch. When she wakes, we'll feed her," Kendrick said to him, then Doc looked toward the doorway at Sage smirking and Lou, Tex, Frankie, and Pierce looking shocked.

"More than likely she'll have to wake up in an hour or so to feed the baby. Stay nearby. It's important for both of them, Lou, men," Doc said, then looked at Ella.

"Maybe come back here first thing in the morning and help her out some more. We can bring over other supplies for the baby, too. Looks like she packed some stuff. A package of newborn diapers, some baby clothes. We can get a bunch more from the neighbors near us. Their littlest one is now two," Ella added and then caressed Vye's cheek.

“I could stay, Kendrick. She’s my family, and this was dropped on y’all—”

“No, we’re good. Come back in the morning. We’re up by five anyway,” he said.

“I’ll pull the recliner closer to the bed and stay right here so Vye hears the baby when he awakes,” Lou told them.

Ella smiled. Kendrick had the weirdest sensation in his stomach. He almost felt jealous that Lou got to hold the baby and remain in here with Vye, yet, he never liked babies, nor was he the nurturing type. He feared getting a woman pregnant and having that burden and responsibility when he never knew where he was going to wind up or what could happen on a mission. Now, here he was having these feelings, and he didn’t even know this woman. He’d caught sight of her body, had watched his brother deliver her baby...and she had trouble attached to her. This was a bad combination of feelings and events. So why had he insisted she could stay?

He walked out of the room and the others followed. It was going to be a long night. Hell, a long few days as Evonna recovered before leaving their house.

* * * *

Pierce thought he was dreaming as the sound of an infant crying woke him. He must have just dozed off, because he was pretty damn wired. He got up off the couch and slowly walked toward the bedroom. He heard Lou talking to Evonna.

“I think if you eat something you’ll feel better, and drink, too. Both you and the baby need nourishment,” Lou told her firmly.

“I’m sorry. Where is Ella?” she asked, sounding exhausted and groggy as she tried sitting up.

“She’ll be back by five or so. It’s four o’clock now,” Pierce stated, coming into the room. She pulled the robe tighter.

“I’ll grab the food. You take care of the little one,” he said to her, then turned around and headed to the kitchen. He was heating up a plate of food when Frankie came into the room.

“Everything okay? How is she?”

“Exhausted. Hopefully she
eats something.”

“I’ll grab milk,” Frankie said and Pierce nodded his head. They walked back into the bedroom to find Evonna feeding the baby and trying to keep her breast covered. It was a beautiful sight, the many abilities a woman had.

“I know I keep apologizing, but I truly am sorry for imposing like this. I mean, I’ve invaded your home, this bed, and room. I’m sure I can get up enough strength to leave when Ella comes back,” she said to them.

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“You don’t need to leave just yet. We’ll feel better knowing that you’re stronger and can walk on your own two feet and carry this baby with you. Now, food. You need it.” Pierce forked some eggs from the dish he held and brought it to her lips. Her cheeks flushed. He raised both eyebrows up at her and she squinted at him.

“Evonna, please, it’s important that you gain your strength back. It wasn’t too smart not eating and traveling without rest like you did. Now you’re here, and safe. Eat up. For the baby at least.” He softened his tone and she leaned closer, opened her mouth, and took a bite. He heard her stomach rumble.

“How long since you ate?” Frankie asked her, setting down the milk on the side table.

“What day is it?” she asked, and Pierce knew he was scowling. She looked down at the baby.

“We’ve been traveling and trying to get here quickly. I guess my determination was my only focus.” The baby suckled and made a humming noise. Her robe lowered slightly as he brought another forkful of eggs to her mouth. The woman was gorgeous, even exhausted after recently giving birth and passing out from dehydration.

Pierce brought another bite-full to her lips, then looked at the baby. “Out cold so quickly,” he whispered.

“Well, breast milk is warm, so it’s comforting and puts you to sleep. I guess that’s why parents warm milk for their kids before they go to sleep at night,” she said and eased his mouth from her breast and moved her robe back into place.

“Thank you for the food.”

“You don’t need to say thank you for anything. We’re happy that you and the baby are safe. Which, by the way, what is his name? Did you have one planned?” Frankie asked her.

She lay the infant on the bed and began to undo his onesie.

“The diapers and wipes, please. I’m not sure. There were a few that came to mind, now that I know I have a son,” she said, and Lou handed over the things she asked for.

The smell of baby powder instantly filled the air. He watched her change the baby, that robe lowering slightly, enough to reveal how well-endowed she was, and not just because she was making milk either. She was a petite little thing otherwise.

“How about after the father, maybe?” Pierce asked.

“That isn’t going to happen,” she said and exhaled.

Then she finished up and stroked the baby’s cheek as he remained sleeping. She lifted him up and held him in her arms against her breast and inhaled as she closed her eyes.

“More food, sweetie,” Pierce said to her softly. She opened her eyes and opened her mouth.

“I’m so tired,” she said and leaned back against the pillow.

“Milk. Have a few sips,” Frankie said to her and she looked at him, sat back up, and then reached for the glass. She covered his hand with hers and took a sip. Then as she swallowed she looked at him and quickly pulled her hand away.

“I can’t keep my eyes open,” she said, and then Pierce passed Frankie the plate.

“I’ll take the baby. Maybe while you’re sleeping you’ll think of a name,” he said and lifted the baby up into his arms, inhaling that scent that smelled so good it shocked him.

“Benny. Maybe Benny,” she said and drifted right back off to sleep.

He looked at Lou, who stared at her with such a serious expression.

“She’s okay. She’ll be fine,” Pierce said to him and then stood up with the baby in his arms and walked around the bed.

“So you’re holding him now?” Frankie asked.

“For now. Go lay down on the bed in my room, Lou. I’ll sit and watch over her. Ella will be here in no time,” he said, and Lou nodded, stood up, and stroked the baby’s cheek.

“It isn’t right, that this monster wanted to hurt them. They’re both so innocent.”

“As we know, the evil prey on the weak and innocent, not the strong and empowered,” Frankie said and walked out of the bedroom with the plate of food and the glass of milk. Lou followed.

Pierce stared down at the tiny little bundle in his extra-large arms. It amazed him how a couple could create a life. It was a miracle in itself. Some people had no right being parents or baring children. He wondered about Evonna’s life and the father of her baby. How long had they been together before she’d gotten pregnant? Had he wanted her to get rid of the baby and she’d refused? Many thoughts went through his head, but he kept thinking about what Scout had told them. That her boyfriend abused her,

beat her, and was capable of worse.

Obviously, it was a lot worse than even Ella knew if Evonna was willing to drive all day and night to get as far away from New York as possible. His gut clenched and his instincts were on alert. Evonna and the baby may not be out of trouble just yet. With that thought came the instant desire to protect them and be there for them. He didn't know why, and he didn't think any more about it. He just watched over both of them, absorbing her beauty, her youthfulness, and wondered if they would continue to be friends when she left to go live with Ella and Ella's men.

* * * *

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“It’s been a couple of months since we went by her aunt’s house and nothing. Still no sign of her. Where could she be?” Murdock asked Detrix.

Detrix lowered down and snorted a line of cocaine, then sniffled and wiped his nose.

“Beats the fuck out of me. You should just forget about her. You’ve been screwing anything in a skirt since she said she was pregnant anyway. Who gives a fuck? Besides, if she was still around, you’d have to pay that child support shit.”

Murdock leaned back into the couch. She’d been hot and a virgin. He’d taken her virginity and knocked her up. She was obedient, submissive, and petite. He could control her. For some reason, the fact that she had the guts to disappear and take off with his kid pissed him off. It was like he wanted to be the one to kick her to the curb. Like this, though, he was the one being kicked to the curb. She’d stripped him of his authority, his manhood, and power, and it enraged him. The bitch needed another good beating. By now she’d probably had the baby. She would be back in shape and fuckable again.

“I’m going to hire someone to look for her.”

“You’re fucking obsessed. That pussy was that fucking good, man?”

“You help me and you’ll find out just how good it was.”

Detrix’s eyes widened.

“You’d let me tap that sweet, young thing? Damn, you are obsessed with finding her

and getting it again. What about the baby?”

“The fuck if I care. I want her back, and after we have ourselves a little party with her, then she can go back to wherever she disappeared to. Maybe,” he said, and then leaned down and aligned some coke on the mirror and snorted a line.

He fell back against the couch and took a slug of beer. “Now, how about this hit on that warehouse in Chicago? Its’ all good? And an easy job?”

“Should be. Hopefully the security guards we paid to turn the other way do so. Then we’ll have a truckload of drugs, guns, art, and other shit we can sell to our buddies down south. It’s an easy hit.”

“Who owns that fucking warehouse anyway?”

“The fuck if I know or even care, Murdock.”

“You sure double crossing Nuvon is a smart idea? He’s hooked us up with the other jobs, as well as this one coming up in Hoboken.”

Dexter smirked. “You want to be rich? You want to be a king? But we don’t have a family name like these fucking gangsters do, so we need to improvise. Because of the work we did for Nuvon, I came across this other shit. We can get away with it and Nuvon or these gangsters won’t be none the wiser. Mark my words. We’ll succeed and not get caught.

“Nuvon wants his money and shit. He’s willing to pay us top dollar to do the job. Let’s do it and then be done.”

“It brings us a few steps closer to gaining some power and other jobs. It’s about fucking time, my friend. About fucking time,” Murdock stated and then guzzled

down the rest of the beer and thought about Vye. She would be in his bed again. Detrix and he would teach her a thing or two about being obedient to your man.

Chapter Three

Vye rocked Benny to sleep on her lap while swinging on the porch bench. It was another beautiful day on the farm, and the ranch house that belonged to Ella and her husbands was spectacular. Vye smiled as the baby slept. She couldn't believe that nearly two months had passed. That she was working part-time running the register at the farm, and was helping out with the office work, as well.

She heard the screen door open and then close and a few deep voices she recognized.

Ford's brothers, Ghost, Laverty, and Evan, along with their woman, Lois, came out onto the porch. Their children, Kenny, Waylan, and Jessica, ran out and hurried to see baby Benny. Lois walked slowly. She was due any time now and looked more than ready to deliver.

"Is he sleeping again? When does he wake up? Did we miss it? Did you feed him?" Waylan asked a bunch of questions and Vye chuckled. It had been a surprise to learn about the ménage relationships in town and across the Brazos family. At first, she was a bit unnerved about it and uncertain on how it all worked, but seeing families like Lois and her men with the kids made it all look pretty normal. It was obvious that the men loved Lois. They kept close, protected her, and kissed or touched her at every opportunity. Vye was envious. Lois's sister Valentina and her men had the same type of relationship. They also had four kids.

"Don't go waking that baby up you three. He needs his rest. Just like

when your brother or sister is born, they'll need a nice, quiet house," Lois said and took a seat next to Vye.

Vye smiled. “How are you feeling? Still getting the small contractions?”

“Sure am. It will be any day now.”

“I bet you can’t wait.”

“I can’t wait to be able to breathe fully. Right now it’s difficult to take a deep breath, my feet ache, I have to pee every twenty minutes or less, and my boobs are aching.”

“You are definitely ready.”

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“You look amazing, Vye. No one would even think you had a baby. I guess those workouts you do and the special meals you prep really work. I’m going to need your help to take this baby weight off.”

“Sounds good to me. We can put them in the stroller and walk, or even jog,” Vye said to her and smiled.

“Sounds like a plan. Did Ford stop by and tell you about the part-time job being offered at the police training center?” Vye shook her head.

“There’s a program that’s started. A security and defense thing. They get specialists to come in and train law enforcement personnel from the four surrounding towns. Anyway, they need someone to run the front desk and help register the officers as they come in for training sessions they’ve signed up in advance for. The person would just keep everything logged and maintain documents. Anyway, Ford will probably explain it to you. He thought it might be a good part-time job for you. The place is opened Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from nine to two.”

She glanced up at Ghost, who placed his hands on Lois’s shoulders and massaged them.

“I don’t know. It’s soldier and police and stuff?” Vye said.

“Yeah, that’s a pretty safe place to be.”

“I guess I’ll see what he says,” she replied, but wasn’t certain.

“I thought I heard you all come in. Ford just pulled up, too. Come on inside for some sweet tea. I also made cookies,” Ella said and the kids carried on and ran into the house.

“Wash those hands,” Lois said and went to stand up with Ghost’s help.

“This baby needs to come already,” she said and Vye chuckled.

“Is Vye out here?” she heard Ford say, and Evan and Lavery told him yes. Vye turned around and smiled as Ford smiled, too.

He stopped Lois and kissed her tenderly. “Doc says any day now. I don’t want you traveling too far from town,” he said to her.

Lois rolled her eyes. “No risk in that.”

He gave her a wink, then held his Stetson in his hand. “Did Lois mention the job opportunity?”

“She mentioned a little bit about it. What else can you tell me about it?”

“It pays twenty an hour.”

“What?”

“Yes. That’s why I kind of secured it for you already. Had to negotiate some terms with Linda in admin, but as soon as I mentioned that it was you, she agreed.”

Vye felt a bit embarrassed. So many people knew her as the woman who nearly had a baby in her car alone on the bridge with the risk of drowning and being swept away.

“It starts Monday. You’ll know a few of the men in charge there.”

“I will?”

“Sure thing. Pierce, Tex, Frankie, Lou, and Kendrick are instructors and run almost all the training programs.”

She nibbled her bottom lip.

“What’s wrong? Don’t you like them? They’re good men.”

“Oh, I know they are. I owe them so much for rescuing me and taking me in, but I’m still feeling a bit embarrassed about it I guess. I haven’t seen them in a while.”

“Well, I’m sure they’ll be happy to see you. They’re like the first friends you made in Salvation. Think of it that way.”

“I guess so. Okay then. What are the responsibilities?” she asked, and Ford told her a little bit about how things would go and that Linda would explain a lot and help her at first to get things organized, but that Vye had control over the organization of everything.

“Well that’s great. I can definitely handle it. Thank you so much for thinking of me and securing this. I won’t let you down or embarrass you, Ford,” she said and Ford smiled.

“Embarrass me? Honey, you are a gem. You’ll love it. The hours are perfect and if you miss Benny too much, Ella can bring him by to see you at lunch time.”

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She smiled and then looked down at Benny who just started to blink his eyes open.

“Looks like he heard that,” she said and stood up. Ford reached out and stroked his cheek.

“He’s a cutie. You’re a good mom, Vye. Keep it up,” he said and winked. She smiled. “Thank you, Ford.”

“Let’s head inside, then I need to get back to work. I’ll have one of the dads drive you by the job location in town, that way you’ll know how to get there.”

“Great,” she said, and as they headed inside she couldn’t help but feel a mix of emotions about seeing the McCann brothers again. Then, she realized it would be nice to see them.

* * * *

Frankie walked into the building and the first sight he saw knocked him for a loop. His breath caught in his throat, his eyes widened, and he had to do a double take. Evonna was leaning over the counter helping three men fill out paper work, and the three men were staring at her chest, not the paper.

She looked up as he removed his sunglasses and took in the sight of her himself. She looked drop dead gorgeous—like make a man halt in his tracks, his dick instantly hard, and completely lose his train of thought. He felt jealous, pissed off at the three men obviously hitting on her, and he showed it.

“You guys need to fill out the paperwork at your departments and get approval first before showing up here.” He scolded. The three men stood up straighter, but one looked back at Evonna and gave a wink.

“Vye here was assisting us with the paperwork. Our captain called her up an hour ago and said we were on our way over,” the man stated.

“The fax machine isn’t working, Frankie. Tex is back there with Linda trying to fix it right now,” Vye said and then looked back at the three men.

“Why don’t you fill out the rest of this over there, and then I’ll get it all filed and your confirmation sheets printed for you so you can take the class you wanted,” she said to the guy who’d winked at her.

“Sure thing, doll. I think we’ll be interested in taking a lot of classes here. You’re so sweet. Make a man feel real welcome and all,” he said and gave her a wink. Frankie watched Vye handle the man with finesse.

“That is awfully sweet of you, Tyler. I appreciate the compliment.” She then turned around and walked toward the computer and started typing away.

Frankie stared as the guy checked out her ass in the slim fitting black skirt she wore. Her legs were bare, no stockings, and she wore open-toed heels and a pretty white blouse. She was thin, too. No one would know the woman had a baby. He came around the counter and greeted her hello. She gave a big smile.

“Hi, Frankie. It’s good to see you again,” she said to him. He stepped closer and placed a hand on her hip and she tightened up.

Staring down into her gorgeous baby blue eyes, he felt so much it was shocking.

“How are you feeling? You sure you’ll be up to this? What about baby Benny? He needs his mamma close,” he said sort of loudly. She smiled.

“He is doing great. I need to make money though. I’m hoping to move into my own place if the opportunity arises.”

“Your own place? Baby, you need to be careful,” he whispered and looked around them, but then back down into her eyes. That gorgeous platinum blonde hair cascaded along her shoulders and down her back. The dip in her blouse revealed the deep cleavage of her breasts. She was well endowed, sexy, petite, and feminine. He felt protective of her. Like him and his brothers had a responsibility—yeah, a responsibility—to watch over her, considering how they’d met.

She touched his arm and then pulled back, obviously feeling the same attraction he was feeling.

“I’m good. I think this wil

I work out perfectly. Plus, at lunch time, when I take my break, Ella or one of the men will bring by Benny for me to feed him. That way I won’t need to pump all that extra milk and make the bottles,” she whispered to him. He glanced down at her breasts. Lucky little Benny. Damn, the woman was hot. He couldn’t believe his thoughts. She was a mommy feeding her baby and he was envious. Fuck.

He pulled back and let his hand slide slowly off her hip. He licked his lower lip.

“Well, you call one of us if you need anything at all,” he said before Linda appeared.

“It’s fixed, and just in time. This place is going to start filling up soon. Let’s get ready for them, Vye,” she said.

“Good morning, Frankie. You’re looking good,” Linda flirted.

But Frankie turned away from her and reached out to stroke Vye’s cheek, then tap her chin with his pointer finger. “Anything you need, you find one of us. Understood?”

“Yes, Frankie. Thank you,” she replied softly, making his dick even harder. How the fuck was he going to train a class? Fuck. He walked away and into the main room and saw Tex and Kendrick, then he glanced back out toward where Vye was, once again by the front counter as more men came in for the program. They smiled wide, checked her out, and he was all pissed off and jealous again.

* * * *

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“More fucking guys hitting on her? What the fuck, man?” Kendrick said, taking a peak out of the doorway.

“She looks incredible,” Frankie said to them and put his bag down onto the seat.

“I know. So healthy, vibrant, and a lot better than the night she had Benny,” Tex said, then handed over a clipboard to Frankie. “You and Kendrick have twenty men in your group. Pierce and I have the same amount.”

“And Lou?” Frankie asked.

“He’s going to be working with Vye on the registrants coming in, helping her understand what each course offers and what is required. She’ll gain a better understanding of the work we’re trying to conduct here.”

“How did he get so lucky?” Frankie asked feeling jealous.

“He was here to draw straws with us. You’re late,” Tex said, then walked away. It seemed Tex was kind of in a bad mood, too.

Frankie looked back to where Vye was just as Kendrick was looking.

“You’d think those fucking men never saw an attractive woman before. Jesus, they’re relentless,” Kendrick stated in annoyance and grabbed his bag, then headed out of the room. Frankie followed. This was going to be hell.

* * * *

Lou walked into the back room to where Vye was feeding Benny. He cleared his throat and she placed a hand over her top, ensuring that he couldn't see. The movement came too late though. She prepared her own lunch and ate as Benny ate.

“Where is Ella?” he asked.

“Oh, she ran down the road to the store really quick. She'll be back soon. It looks like a light afternoon today,” she said to him, holding his gaze. The baby moved and she adjusted her top, placed the cloth over her shoulder, and began to burp him. Lou couldn't stop the smile that formed, nor could he not reach out and stroke the baby's head.

“My God he's getting big. He eat a lot?” he asked, taking the seat next to her.

She smiled and looked at her baby with such love and care.

“He sure does. I don't know how long I'll be able to breastfeed him. I have an appointment with Doc on Saturday. I'll talk to him about supplementing some cereal into the bottles or something. Plus, it will make it easier for babysitting,” she said, then the baby burped and they both laughed.

“What time is your appointment Saturday?” he asked.

“Ten.”

“You need a ride, or some company? I can help you out. I know Saturdays are busy at the farm for Ella and them,” he added, feeling kind of stupid for asking her. He didn't even know why he did. He just said what was on his mind.

“I think I'll be fine, Lou. After all, I'm a single mom, and that's something I need to handle alone.”

He stared at her. Saw the emotion in her eyes. He wanted to tell her she didn't have to be alone. That he would be here for her, but she seemed to be adamant about handling everything alone, except for watching Benny. She had no choice if she wanted to work. If she were his woman...

He stood up. "I need to head back. Do you need anything?"

She smiled. "I'm good. Thank you, Lou," she said and he stared at her as she looked at the baby, kissed his head, and snuggled with him. She was a survivor, a strong woman, and she probably feared all men now, especially soldiers since it seemed her boyfriend had been one. Not a good one obviously, whomever the dick was. As he headed toward the door he saw Tex standing there and he looked pissed.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Tex whispered as they walked from the room.

"What?"

"You know what."

Lou looked back toward the room and then at Tex. "I like her. I care about her and Benny."

"What are you fucking saying? We all like her, care about her, and want what is best for her," Tex said and then continued down the hallway.

"I think it's more than that. I want to protect her," Lou said, joining the others in the room. Pierce, Kendrick, and Frankie were setting things up for the afternoon class. Just one and they could head home.

Tex swung around and pointed at him.

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“We can’t give her what she needs. We don’t even know what tomorrow will bring, or next week, next month or the next mission,” Tex exclaimed.

“We’re done doing missions. We know what’s coming. These classes, this job offered to us. Instead of it being temporary, we can make it permanent and settle down here,” Lou stated.

“With Vye? You think she wants forty-year-old, washed up soldiers when men closer to her age are hitting on her, looking to be her guardians?” Tex said and Lou swallowed hard.

“The attraction is there,” Lou said firmly.

“Enough of this. We need to get ready for the class,” Tex said and Lou looked at Frankie, Pierce, and Kendrick. They were straight faced and not giving up any info on their emotions or what they felt or thought. So Lou dropped it. He had some thinking to do. He really was attracted to Vye. He was willing to help her raise another man’s baby, a man who abused her, assaulted her, and treated her like shit. He could give her what she deserved, what Benny deserved. A loving relationship, a father, a husband—hell, he really cared about her a lot.

* * * *

Vye was bending over, getting the car seat out of the backseat when she heard someone clear their throat. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw two cowboys. She recognized them from the other day at work. They had come in to take some classes with a few of their friends.

“Morning, Vye. You need a hand?” the one blond cowboy, Trey, offered.

“Oh, thank you, Trey, but I’m good. How are you?” she asked, pulling out the car seat and then checking on baby Benny. She pulled down the top visor to keep the sun from his eyes. His brother Avery held the stroller that the car seat locked into.

“I’ll hold this while you get the baby in.”

She gave him a small smile, but she honestly felt a little uncomfortable. All week at the training center, guy after guy flirted with her, talked to her about town events coming up and hinted about going out. She really wasn’t interested in dating anyone. In fact, she thought the last thing she needed was another man or men in her life trying to tell her what to do and make demands. She had plans, goals, and coming to Salvation offered her the opportunity to achieve them because of the help she had from Ella and the men.

She put the small diaper bag under the stroller and grabbed her purse. Then she closed the door and locked it as Trey looked into the stroller.

“He’s adorable, Vye. Looks just like his mamma,” he said and gave her a wink.

“Thanks,” she said and adjusted the strap on her shoulder, being sure that her top was not too low. She needed some new clothes. Things were getting bigger and bigger on her. If Benny was okay she was going to walk him in the stroller around town and check out the local boutique.

“Where ya heading off to?” Trey asked.

“Doc Carter’s for Benny’s checkup.”

“Want to grab something to eat in town, or maybe we can walk you around and show

you all the great places?” Avery asked. She felt bad and didn’t want to be rude. They really seemed nice.

“I don’t know. I was just going to see how the baby is and if he’s not fussy, then maybe check out one of the clothing stores.”

“We can show you,” Avery said and she swallowed hard.

“I’ll see. Let me go do the appointment,” she replied and started walking the stroller down the sidewalk. She noticed people looked at her, the baby, and smiled as Avery and Trey walked along with her.

“Do you need some company for the appointment?” Trey asked.

She looked at him. “I’m good.”

“Well, a woman shouldn’t have to do these things on her own. It isn’t right,” Avery said. She felt embarrassed. So they were being nice because they felt bad she was a single mom? Is that why Lou offered to come along today, too? Annoyed, she rolled her eyes and headed to the office.

“Vye?” Avery said and Trey stood right by him.

“Listen, you both seem like really nice guys and all, but I don’t need taking care of. I appreciate the neighborly offer, but no thank you,” she said and turned to head into the office. Trey held the door open.

“It wasn’t just us being neighborly. A woman as beautiful and young as you, shouldn’t have a burden like this alone because some guy was a jerk and didn’t stand by you.”

“A burden? Benny is a blessing, Trey, not a burden. Have a nice day,” she said and entered the waiting room at the doctor’s office. There were a few people in there and they’d heard her response to Trey. They kind of looked a bit taken back. She had to get used to this small-town mentality. Where she came from, no one cared what insulting thing someone said to another person.

She signed in, gave the woman at the front desk a smile, and then took a seat and looked at Benny. He was wide awake and staring at her. She smiled and stroked his cheek.

“Hey there, handsome. You ready to see Doc Carter again?” she asked, moving his hands and arms. He reached for her, wanting her to pick him up. It seemed as if he missed her a bunch when she was working. That was definitely one of the downfalls of having to work instead of staying home and taking care of Benny. Money talked, and without it they wouldn’t have a future. It made her feel bad, but no matter what, he came first. Her son was going to go to school, make good friends, grow up in a safe, loving community and be successful. Making those things happen was her primary job. She was his advocate and no man, no negative influences, were going to get in her way of making sure her baby had a good life. She caressed his hand. This cradle won’t fall. Mamma’s got you, Benny. I love you.

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“Miss Colon, Dr. Carter is ready to see you,” the receptionist said a few minutes later.

Vye took Benny with her into the exam room and was greeted with a hug hello from Doc Carter. It brought tears to her eyes and she smiled wide.

“How are you, Evonna, and how is this precious baby of yours?” he asked, smiling.

“We’re doing great,” she told him and he watched her take Benny out of the car seat and then hold him.

“Let me see this little guy.” He took the baby from her and spoke to Benny in a regular voice and Benny made some funny sounds, making her laugh.

He went through the checkup, weighing Benny on the special scale after she undressed him, and then gave Benny back to her so she could redress him again.

“He looks good, Evonna,” he said to her. They then went over questions she had about feeding, adding cereal to his bottles, and some other things before discussing work.

“It sounds like you’re handling everything well. How do you like Salvation and the people? I’ve heard that Ford Brazos has gotten inquiries about guardianship for you and Benny,” he said and looked at Benny.

“Guardianship?” she asked, not knowing what he meant.

“I’m sure Ella has explained or will shortly, considering the circumstances.”

“I don’t understand or know what you’re talking about.” He made a face.

“Well, the easiest way to explain it is that here in Salvation we have rules. Women are to be taken care of, watched over, and protected. Under normal circumstances, a woman with a child would be assigned a guardian or guardians. I guess the sheriff is holding off on assigning anyone just yet.”

“I don’t need any guardians. I’m twenty-three years old, surely responsible for myself and Benny. Besides having Ella, her men, and friends around town already, too.”

“That could be why Ford is holding off, or it could also be that there are multiple men asking to be you and Benny’s guardians.”

“What?” she asked and immediately thought about Trey and Avery.

“So that’s why Trey and Avery were here when I showed up and pushing to show me around town, to come for this appointment. Lou asked, too. Unbelievable,” she exclaimed and threw her hands up into the air.

He laughed, crossed his arms in front of his chest, and bypassed the information about Avery and Trey to focus right on Lou.

“Lou McCann asked to accompany you here today? Seriously?”

“Why do you ask like that?” she asked, strapping Benny into the car seat.

“The McCann men do not socialize much around town at all. The fact they took on this new security training detail for the county is pretty huge. They’re exceptional men. Obviously you and Benny made an impression.”

“We invaded their home. I gave birth on the guest bed,” she said and exhaled.

“They’re good men, Vye. A lot older than you. Tex is pushing forty.”

Her eyes widened.

“He is?”

He nodded.

“They’re so serious and stern. When they talk they sound like they’re giving orders. It’s intimidating. I don’t talk too much to them at work. Well, to Lou I do. He’s more soft spoken,” she said and thought about him and about the others. They were incredibly hard, good-looking men, but that ferocity made them seem unapproachable.

“Hmm, never know how Ford figures these things out, but he’s never wrong,” Doc Carter said and then uncrossed his arms and gave her a smile.

“What do you mean?”

“Nothing at all. Don’t worry. It will all work out. Just follow your heart. Sometimes fate has a way of making things happen. Keep up the good work with the baby. Also, Michelle Fortworth dropped off two bags of clothes, some with tags still on them for Benny. Her little guy, Taylor, grew out of them quickly or bypassed the sizes.”

“Oh, how nice of her. Thank you so much.”

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“I’ll have someone carry them out for you.”

“Great,” she said and took down the carrier and headed out of the office. She got Benny into the stroller and then Doc Carter wound up carrying the two large bags of baby clothes out to the car. That’s when she saw Trey and Avery standing by the bench. Sheriff Brazos was over to the side talking to Tex and Kendrick. Then all their eyes went to her, the baby, and Doc Carter.

Before Kendrick or Tex could move, Trey and Avery were there offering their assistance. “Need some help?” Avery asked and took the bags from Doc Carter. Doc said hello and then looked toward Ford, Kendrick, and Tex, and then smiled.

“Let me unlock the door,” she said and walked closer to the car with the stroller.

“Give me the keys and I’ll do it,” Trey said, holding out his hand. She felt completely uneasy and untrusting.

“I’ve got it. Thanks.” She unlocked the door. They put the bags into the backseat. She locked the doors back up and glanced toward Ford, Tex, and Hendricks. Tex and Hendricks looked good. Their expressions hardened, serious as Avery placed a hand on her shoulder, drawing her attention back to him and Trey.

“How about that lunch and the stroll through town?” he asked.

She stared at him. He was good looking and close to her age. Trey held her gaze.

“Or just to the boutique to show you where it is,” he said.

“I have to get back to the farm. I’m supposed to work the register later today for a couple of hours. In fact, I might just take Benny for a short walk through town and then back home for lunch,” she said and stepped to the side.

“Morning, Vye, how did the doctor’s appointment go?” Ford asked, joining them. She smiled.

“It went well. Benny’s doing great.”

“I’ll talk to you later, Evonna. Have a good day and remember what we talked about,” Doc said and winked, then smiled at Tex and Kendrick.

“Hey, Tex, Kendrick.” Doc gave a wave, then a handshake before excusing himself to head inside.

Kendrick stepped into Avery and Trey’s way and bent down to look at Benny.

“Hey, big guy, how are you?” he asked and smiled at Benny. Benny’s eyes lit up and she couldn’t help but smile, too.

Ford’s phone rang and he answered it, excusing himself a minute.

She felt the hand on her hip and Tex right next to her.

“Appointment went well? You don’t need for anything?” he asked her. She stared up at Tex’s tanned, chiseled face and her heart began to race, pound against her chest at his close proximity and his words. He slid his hand along her belly and she thought she might pass out. He towered over her, his arm huge, muscular, and his scent of cologne combined with cigar smoke did something to her body.

She was so intimidated by the man she couldn’t speak. She just shook her head

indicating she didn't need anything.

"Lou said he might stop in and show you around town. He might have gotten caught up at the bank."

"It's Lois! She's going into labor. Her water broke at the bank. Lou is with her," Sheriff Ford exclaimed and then started to run down the sidewalk.

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"Oh man, that's crazy. Her water broke?" Avery said, looking kind of disgusted.

Vye watched the sheriff high tail it down the block. "Exciting time. He'll want to be there for his woman, just like his brothers, so they can enjoy the birth of another child," Kendrick said.

"She's lucky to have them. He's been so nervous," she added, trying to hide the emotion she felt seeing Ford's reaction and how he dropped everything to get to his woman as she delivered the baby. Tears filled her eyes.

Kendrick reached out and stroked her cheek.

"We were there for you. You weren't alone," he said as if reading her mind. A tear escaped and she quickly wiped it away and forced a smile.

Avery cleared his throat.

"Well, we were just going to walk Vye and Benny around town and show them the boutique."

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“That won’t be necessary. We’re here,” Tex stated.

Avery’s eyes widened and so did Trey’s. “I thought you guys weren’t staking a claim. You’re kind of old, aren’t you?”

“Is that a challenge, son?” Tex asked.

She held his hand over her belly as he began to step away from her and perhaps toward Avery and Trey. She didn’t know what exactly was going on. She just assumed that this had something to do with that guardianship nonsense and about maybe knowing more about Avery and Trey than she did.

“I don’t know what’s going on but I don’t want any trouble,” she whispered.

“No trouble, Vye. We’re looking out for you and Benny. Going to spend some time with you today. You men can move on,” Kendrick said and they shook their heads in frustration, then walked away, but they kept looking back. Something was going on here.

Tex stepped away from her and she immediately felt the loss of his touch. Was he putting on some sort of show of possession to get Trey and Avery to take a hike? She squinted at him and Kendrick.

“So, what do you need at the boutique?” Tex asked.

She placed her hands on her hips and stared up at him and then Kendrick.

“What the heck just went down here? Does it have something to do with this stupid guardian stuff? If so, then just drop it right now. I don’t need any man or men getting up into my business, trying to control me, and ruin my plans. No thank you,” she said and started to walk the stroller past them.

Tex covered her hand that held the steering bar of the stroller. She stopped and looked way up at him. He was a sight, and holy God she was completely attracted to him and Kendrick. Shit.

“Those boys aren’t good enough for you or Benny. You mind my orders. We’re looking out for what’s best for you and Benny,” he said, then released her hand.

She started to walk. Mind his orders? Was he serious? Was she stupid for not even responding when she just said no man or men were going to control her life and order her around? When he said mind his orders for some stupid-ass reason, she felt her pussy clench and her breasts swell. It turned her on. She’d lost her mind and once again was going to succumb to the weaknesses of a good-looking, powerful man—or men—with abilities to weaken her resolve and make her submit to their dominant ways and ultimately be her demise? Had she not learned a damn thing after Murdock?

“So this is a great little town. They have all kinds of stores and little cafes and restaurants, even some bars, too,” Kendrick said, and she didn’t challenge Tex’s comments. She chose her battles wisely and she needed time to digest whatever this was that was happening. Before long, she forgot about his commanding words and actually enjoyed talking to him, Kendrick, and then Lou who joined them.

Lou approached, kissed her cheek hello, and then bent down to say hello to Benny, but he was sleeping. He kept a hand on her hip and was all smiles.

“So you heard about Lois?” he asked.

“Sure did. Ford ran to the bank from a block away,” Kendrick said, smirking.

“They’re on their way to the mid-wife’s house now. Won’t be long,” Lou said and smiled at Vye, giving her a wink. He kept a hand on her hip as they walked and she didn’t mind at all.

They wound up being a big help as they offered to watch Benny while she tried on some things in the boutique.

* * * *

“How did you wind up meeting up with Vye?” Lou asked, standing next to Tex and Kendrick. Max was still pissed off from hearing that multiple men were asking about guardianship of Vye, like she was some sort of item in a market. They didn’t know her, know her story, or what she went through. They saw her beauty, her sexy body, and sweet smile—the fucking assholes.

“Tex and I made a stand, Lou. We’ll talk about it later with Pierce and Frankie, too. Evonna and Benny need looking after. These young, punk cowboys think they can just stake a claim like she’s some sort of object. She needs us,” Kendrick exclaimed.

“You mean like being her guardians?” Lou asked.

“Men have been asking. Men like Avery and Trey. We had to step in. Those guys and their four brothers aren’t good enough for her,” Kendrick whispered.

“We’ve known them for years. They’re good men, have good jobs in law enforcement, and wouldn’t hurt her,” Lou said, and this time Tex shot him a look, a mean scowl on his face. Was Lou out of his fucking mind? He was the one who’d instigated this attraction. The rest of them had been trying to ignore it.

“Listen, we’ll talk later,” Tex stated firmly before Vye came out carrying a few items.

“Is that all you’re getting?” Kendrick asked.

“Yes, I didn’t want you guys to have to wait too long. I appreciate the assistance,” she said and then reached down under the stroller to grab her purse.

“We don’t mind. You can take your time and try on more,” Lou told her, and looked her over. Tex was doing the same thing. The woman was a knockout.

“I’m good. I can’t really buy too much. I’m trying to save and budget things out,” she said and then took the things to the register, wheeling the stroller along with her.

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When they exited the store, Tex asked, “What are you budgeting out and saving for?”

“An apartment to rent, then school.”

“Oh, you mean to go to college?” Kendrick asked.

“I’m one class shy of getting my degree.”

“Really, in what?” Lou asked before Tex could.

“Accounting and finance,” she told them, shocking Tex.

“You’re pretty smart then?” Kendrick said to her as they crossed the street and headed to the lake and park.

“Well, with most other things apart from choosing men I guess,” she said and then exhaled.

“Hey, I didn’t mean it like that,” Kendrick said to her. They approached an empty bench in the shade that overlooked the water and sat down.

“It’s okay, Kendrick. It’s a decision I have to live with. I was stupid, and then I was stuck. He just kept pulling me under deeper and deeper.” She reached out and looked at Benny as she rocked the stroller.

“Benny’s my focus. Anything I could want or need can go on hold except for the things that can ensure he has a good life—a safe and happy one where he’s loved and

surrounded by good people.”

“You’ll have that here in Salvation,” Kendrick said to her. Lou reached out and stroked her cheek. She looked at him and he stared at her lips.

“You can have that here, and my brothers and I can help.”

Her eyes widened and she looked down.

“Lou, don’t say such things to me. I heard about this guardianship stuff. I won’t be a burden to some men because it’s a rule of this town. I can make it on my own. I’m not taking handouts and being told that I need a man or men to survive,” she stated.

“Hey, it isn’t like that. It’s a rule to keep you and Benny safe, but it has to be approved by Ford. He wouldn’t assign someone to you just to do it. There are feelings, an attraction,” Tex stated.

She looked up at him.

“I don’t know how to feel. I don’t trust my judgment. I thought Murdock was a good man, a soldier, an entrepreneur who owned his own businesses. He treated me so good, and made me feel special. He was the only man I ever had sex with. Things changed the moment I allowed him to give orders, to make decisions for me and order me around, and started giving up my dreams. He made me quit school right before I finished the last class. He put demands on me. He struck me. He forced things upon me and it got worse and worse, and soon I was drowning and then I was pregnant. He kicked me, literally, while I was down on the ground in the fetal position,” she said as tears rolled down her cheeks. Tex felt so angry and pissed off. His brothers were, too, but then Kendrick lowered down and took her hands into his.

“We aren’t him. Pierce and Frank feel this attraction to you, too. We know we’re

older, and that you can get men closer to your age, but if you let us in, let us show you how good this could be, I promise you won't feel any more pain, only happiness," he said and then brought her hands to his lips and kissed her knuckles.

"Will you try, baby?" Tex asked, caressing her hair and then her cheek. She closed her eyes and leaning into his palm, then she lifted up and looked at Lou.

"I can't promise you anything. I can only take it one day at a time." Lou smiled.

"One day at a time sounds about our speed, too." Lou pressed his lips to hers and then pulled back.

She looked shocked.

"Trust us, Vye. You can trust us," he said and she nodded her head. She wiped away her tears and enjoyed the rest of the afternoon with Kendrick, Lou, and Tex McCann.

Chapter Four

"Is Mommy going to be okay?" Kenny asked Ford.

Ford smiled at Kenny, now eight years old, so bright and strong. He had gone through a lot at such a young age and seen more bad than good before coming here to Salvation.

Ford was tempted to rub that blond hair of his but knew that Kenny didn't like that anymore. He was mature for eight, tall, too, close to his mamma's height and he took being a young man of the house seriously.

"You know your mamma is as strong as can be. Doc says the baby is just taking its time coming, that's all. She'll be just fine."

Kenny looked toward his younger brother, Waylan, and sister, Jessica. Evan was holding Jessica, who was two now, on his lap. Now Waylan, the six-year-old, was staring at Ford wit

h concern in his eyes.

“Everything will be just fine. You’ll see,” Ford said, but he felt nervous, too, even though they all had Waylan and Jessica just fine. “Lavery and Ghost are in there with her now. You know your fathers, and how Ghost is, do you think he would let anything happen to Mamma or the baby?” Evan asked, joining in the conversation.

“No, sir,” Kenny replied.

“No, sir,” Waylan added and then snuggled up next to Evan’s side and held onto his arm. Evan locked gazes with Ford, who nodded. Kenny looked at Ford.

“I guess it was good that Mamma was at the bank where a lot of people were. That way she had help immediately.”

“Yup,” Ford said and looked toward the door waiting to get a word on Lois. Now he was starting to get really nervous, too.

“Vye must have been so scared when she was caught in the rain storm on the bridge in her car and ready to have Benny,” Kenny said very seriously and Ford looked at him.

“She could have drowned, and baby Benny, too. It’s not fair Benny don’t have Daddies,” Waylan said in his little six-year-old voice. So this was where the boy’s concern was coming from, as well. They cared about Vye and Benny so much. Kenny loved going by to see them, to talk to Vye and even walk with her and Benny in the stroller. He was acting like a father for Benny. Ford’s heart filled with emotion. Lois

was an amazing mamma who taught her children so much. She taught them love, protected them, made them strive for better things, and to explore the world and all it had to offer. Kenny was going to grow up and be a good man, a good father and husband one day. Ford felt proud. He gave one look at his brother Evan, and Evan nodded.

“Why don’t the McCann brothers take care of Vye and Benny and be Benny’s daddies and Vye’s husbands like you did for Mamma and me when we were alone and scared? They like her a bunch. Doesn’t she like them?” Kenny asked.

Ford smirked.

“Well, son, that’s something they would have to work out. I’m not sure how their feelings are, and you know that Vye went through a lot.”

“I heard,” he said and looked away. Ford squinted and looked at Evan, who narrowed his eyes as if unaware how Kenny would know anything that happened in Vye’s life.

“What do you mean you heard?” Ford asked.

Kenny looked at Waylan.

Waylan looked at Ford. “Benny’s daddy was a bad man and he could come to Salvation to find Vye at any time. He hurt Vye bad, like my biological dad hurt Mommy.”

Ford felt the pain in his chest, his heart ached. It was crazy that Kenny referred to his father as “biological.” Usually he didn’t mention the man ever, but Ford figured it was Kenny’s way of giving his dad a label to differentiate.

“Where did you hear this?” Evan asked and raised one of his eyebrows up at Kenny

and Waylan.

“Come on, really. We listen and hear. Tex and his brothers need to protect Vye and to love her the right way so she isn’t always scared. She’s alone and Benny needs them, too. You need to make them her guardians, Daddy. Then that bad man won’t ever be able to hurt Benny and Vye, and the McCanns can make Vye happy and loved like you guys did for our mamma,” Kenny said and then stood up and started to pace.

“When are they going to come out here?” he stated in frustration and Ford chuckled.

“Patience, son. You need to be patient.”

“He’s got a point. You fixin’ on assigning guardianship of Vye to the McCanns, or to Trey and Avery Parker and their brothers?”

“What?” Kenny asked, overhearing. If there was any question how the kid knew about Vye’s ex-boyfriend—or use of the term “biological”—it was just answered.

“You eavesdropping, son?” Evan asked very seriously.

Kenny walked closer with his arms crossed in front of his chest.

“The McCanns are going to be Benny’s daddies and Vye’s husbands. No doubt.”

“But Trey and Avery Parker and their three brothers have interest and are good men.” Ford teased.

Kenny swallowed, looked away, and then looked back at Ford. “Pierce, Frankie, Kendrick, Lou, and Tex look at Vye the way you and your brothers look at Mamma. It’s special and powerful. Can’t mess with that. Not even as sheriff,” he said to Ford then turned away.

Evan chuckled and Ford shook his head.

From the mouth of babes. Can't argue that.

The door opened and Lavery appeared, smiling wide and looking relieved.

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“It’s a boy,” he said and Kenny and Waylan cheered, then high-fived one another.

“Can I see Mommy?” Kenny asked before Ford or Evan could ask any questions. They stood up and everyone hugged, then Lavery took Jessica from Evan.

“Just wait a little longer while they clean up and Mommy rests a bit. The baby gave a little trouble coming and, well, he’s a big boy. Nine pounds, eight ounces.”

Ford whistled. “Damn.”

“Why don’t you and Evan go in and see Lois, and then come back to get the boys and Jessica,” Lavery said.

Ford looked at Kenny and his disappointed expression.

“Kenny is coming in with us. Waylan and Jessica can stay here with you. After all, he’s one of the men in the house,” Ford said and reached out and rubbed Kenny’s head, but Kenny didn’t look angry or push Ford’s hand away, taking annoyance in him rubbing his head. Instead, Kenny smiled and straightened his shoulders, then opened the door. “Let’s go,” he said and Evan and Ford laughed and followed Kenny into the room.

The sight of Lois lying in bed, the baby in her arms and Ghost right beside her caressing her hair, brought tears to Ford’s eyes. The midwife and Doc Carter congratulated them and Kenny smiled wide.

“You done good, Mamma. Scared me a little this time, but ya done good.”

Ford and Evan laughed, so did Ghost, and Lois smiled.

“Thank you, Kenny. Come on over and see your baby brother Connor.” Kenny approached and leaned down and kissed his mamma’s cheek first before kissing baby Connor’s cheek.

“I’m going to take good care of you, Connor. Don’t you worry. Plus, we have a great mamma and awesome daddies who love us. Welcome to the Brazos family.”

* * * *

Vye looked at the clock by the front office. It was almost time to head home. She could hear the class going on in the other room. No one was expected to come now as she gathered up all the files and made sure everything was in order for tomorrow. She walked into the back office and remembered that she needed to make another two copies of the document one of the men had given her today. As she ran it through, she heard footsteps approaching. A glance over her shoulder and there was Pierce. He stopped short and eyed her over making her body hum with awareness as she took in the sight of him. Thick, reddish-brown beard, serious, cold eyes, crew cut hair, and a tight, military green shirt pressed against major muscles. He wore a pair of relaxed camo pants that were baggy and combat boots underneath. He looked lethal.

“Hi,” she said and then looked back at the last paper coming out of the machine. She noticed the print was messed up.

“Hi,” he said and she exhaled.

“Damn it. How did that happen?” She bent down to lift the top part of the printer up to see if the ink cartridges were in place. She moved them around.

“Something wrong?” he asked, standing close behind her. She turned to look at him

just as he bent over to see under the printer and her chin hit his cheek. He stared into her eyes. Her lips parted, then tightened as one large hand held onto her hip and the other went against the printer. The man was even fiercer up close, and the look in his eyes right now did crazy things to her.

“Don’t look so scared of me.”

“I’m not.” He widened both eyes and raised both eyebrows up at her. She squinted and made the mistake of relaxing. “I’m not,” she said and went to turn, but he cupped her cheek and held her chin and cheek firmly while he looked down into her eyes.

“You sure look scared,” he said and his eyes zer

oed in on her lips, then back to her eyes again.

“Well, I’m not, Pierce.”

“Hmm,” he said, but didn’t step back.

He stroked her hip, and then up her blouse, against her ribs. “Pierce.”

“I don’t want you to be scared of me. Not ever,” he said.

“I’m not scared, just intimidated a little,” she added, not wanting him to know exactly how deeply he affected her. He was so big and tall, too. Even in the low heels, he towered over her, and that beard of his, and those eyes, they did her in.

“Intimidated? Why?” he asked and continued to stroke her side. She took a deep breath, her breasts hitting his shirt, and he looked down and licked his lips. “How?”

“Your muscles, the size of you. Your beard and you have this wild look about you.”

“All good things that can make you feel safe, protected, and special,” he said, then slowly began to lower his mouth to hers. She turned the last second and his mouth hit her neck. He didn’t pull back. He inhaled and wrapped her in his arms and drew her close against his chest.

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“Just so you know, you aren’t the only one taking a huge chance here, baby,” he whispered to her and held her close. He ran his palm along her back, coming lower and lower but not caressing her ass, and the thought that she wanted to feel his hand there shocked her.

“I’m not a trusting man. Especially not with women. I’ve learned to put a wall up over my heart, my emotions. It isn’t going to come down easy.” He pulled back and she stared up into his eyes.

“We can help each other pull down those walls we have up. That’s all I’m saying.” He added a moment later. He went to pull back and she gripped his hips. He stopped and stared down into her eyes, squinting.

“I’m trying, Pierce. I want to let down my guard, but it’s so hard.” He reached up and stroked her cheek and jaw.

“My brothers say we need to take this chance.” He stared into her eyes and stroked her cheek, holding her gaze so intensely she gulped.

“That I need to take a chance on you. I don’t know what’s going to come of this. I don’t. But I know how I feel when you’re near. When I get here early to work, I wonder when you’ll arrive. At night while I’m in bed, I think of you,” he told her and she lowered her eyes and felt her cheeks warm, uncertainty filling her heart.

“I know that probably scares you. It will take time but we aren’t going anywhere, Vye. Just know that.” He stared at her lips and this time when he cautiously lowered, she didn’t pull away. Instead, she pulled him closer, and things got hot and heavy

fast.

* * * *

The sight of her body, that backside in the skirt she wore today and the dip in her blouse that revealed all cleavage, did something to Pierce. Then her scent attacked his senses, and he wanted more. He wanted closer. Now here he was kissing her tenderly, yet wanting to do more exploring. She moaned into his mouth and he slid his hand along her ass and used the other one to cup her breast. She pressed her tongue deeper into his mouth in response. They were moaning. He was groping her, and then Lou walked into the room.

Pierce pulled her back and away from the printer and then felt her tighten up as Lou joined them. Pierce pulled from her mouth and she gasped for breath as he suckled against her neck and her cleavage. Lou cupped her cheek.

“Goddamn, baby, you look gorgeous,” he said and pressed his mouth to hers. Pierce squeezed her breasts harder and she gasped, pulled from Lou’s mouth, and covered her chest with her hand.

“Are you okay? Did I hurt you?” he asked her.

“I...um...oh, God, what am I doing?” she asked and pulled away and fixed her top, but kept her arms crossed over herself.

“Sweetie, it’s okay. I get it. That was my fault completely. Are you okay?” Pierce asked.

She worried her bottom lip and looked at Pierce and Lou.

“We shouldn’t have—”

Lou and Pierce shook their heads.

“Don’t,” they both said, and apparently the tone of their voices and that intimidation she felt caused her to start walking back and away from them.

“Jesus, baby, don’t look at us like that. We aren’t him. We would never hurt you,” Lou said and slowly walked toward her.

She shook her head.

“I need to finish up and then head home. Did you need anything else done in the office today?” she asked and Pierce shook his head.

“I’ll fix the printer, but know this, Evonna. We want you in our lives, and we’re here for you no matter what. You’ll get over the fears you have by letting us in,” Pierce told her firmly and then walked toward the printer and started to fix it.

Vye walked out of the room.

* * * *

Vye fed Benny, watching him suckle against her breast. Her emotions were all over the place, and especially after she went online and read about lower arousal and sex drive after birth and while breastfeeding. As she read more and more articles, because she worried about what was right for Benny and for herself, she realized, even though she was done healing and could be intimate if she wanted to, that it was common for a woman’s sex drive to be absent. She was fine with that. She didn’t have a husband, and she wasn’t interested in being intimate with anyone. But then how was it she was so aroused when Pierce and Lou had kissed her today?

How could she want to feel more of their touches, their caresses, when her focus

should be on Benny and on healing emotionally?

She felt regretful, unattractive, and simply not sexy because she'd just had a baby a little more than two months ago, but here she was being pursued by multiple men. Did she really want or need a man or men in her life? For what? To make her feel like her life could only be complete and a success with a man in it? Her head was pounding. She liked all five McCann brothers for many reasons. Was it fate that they were the ones to rescue her and deliver Benny that night? She didn't know and she didn't much want to believe in fate or that it would make her go through pain, abuse, and fear like she had in order to get here to Salvation.

She made her own fate, by the decisions she made and by the route she chose. Salvation was her second chance at a better life for her and Benny and she couldn't screw that up. It didn't matter that apparently the McCann brothers' kisses, caresses, even small, comforting touches seemed to put her in that other category of feeling sensual so soon after birth, unlike most mothers. Maybe that article was trash. She needed to be smart here. Of course she found the five men to be sexy, mysterious, and a totally intimidating turn on. They were gorgeous, mysterious, and women had fantasies about men like them. Hell, they could get any woman they wanted. They'd probably had so many lovers, considering their ages. Why would they want some twenty-three-year-old woman who'd gotten beat up and knocked up by her abusive ex-boyfriend? An ex-boyfriend who more than likely was trying to find Vye anyway? That brought more tears to her eyes and a bit of anxiety.

She looked down and stroked Benny's cheek. He was finished and sleeping as she eased her breast from his mouth and adjusted her top. She looked down as he slept and then looked at the deep cleavage of her breasts. She thought about Pierce's touch as he kissed her. Then as Lou kissed her and Pierce roughly massaged her breast, causing some milk to leak out. It'd shocked her. Embarrassed her. Thank God he hadn't noticed.

How could she let them kiss her and touch her like that when she was a mommy and had no right engaging in anything that could lead to more trouble for her? After all, they were some sort of elite soldiers. Men who had capabilities that apparently made men come to them for training and for advice. The men were impressed with the McCann brothers and the training facility was getting busier and busier. She hadn't even snuck by one of the training rooms to see them instruct. The thought of what they looked like in action, teaching hand-to-hand combat, brought on that tingling feeling in her core. She would think her body, her pussy would want to guard itself from future penetration and abuse. Not with those five men. No, it seemed even though Vye was lactating and cradling a six-week-old in her arms, her body had a mind of its own.

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Well, she wasn't going to get caught in another potentially dangerous, and bad-decision relationship. Five men? Was she out of her mind? She didn't care about the town rules. She'd find a loophole. She would talk to Ford directly if need be but she would find one. The worst thing she could do right now was get involved with a group of men.

No, she had to be strong. Men wanted control and they wanted sex. They looked at women as an object, as someone they could have power over and use. She'd been used, abused, and made to feel like shit and a failure. She was a single mom and that was her position. She needed to resist the McCann men in every way and just be friends. This guardianship nonsense wouldn't apply to her. She was in control of her life and of her destiny. She would make her fate happen her way. She had to be strong. Benny is my focus. Benny.

* * * *

Tex was heading to the bank when he noticed the platinum blonde standing on the sidewalk talking to Phillip Chase. He recognized Evonna immediately, and she looked good. Really good. She wore a pale blue sundress that pressed tight against her body. She looked thin. A lot thinner than she'd been a few weeks ago. His concern for her health grew deeper. Her breasts pushed against the top that curved out, indicating how well-endowed she was. She had a bag in her hand and Phillip Chase was pointing at a piece of paper, standing too close to her and the baby stroller. A jealous feeling hit him hard and he parked the truck, got out, and headed that way.

Phillip was a businessman and he owned an investment agency and firm in town. He was smiling, and as the wind blew, Evonna's long hair pushed in front of her. As she

held the paper and her bag, Phillip reached out and pushed her hair gently back over her shoulder. At this point he was feet away and noticed Evonna step back and then shyly move her hair to the side. She than

ked Phillip for the paper she held and gripped the stroller.

“There you are. I thought we were meeting at the café,” Tex stated and walked right up to her, placed his arm around her waist, and kissed her cheek. She looked shocked. He winked and bent down to see Benny, who was wide awake and smiling as he spoke to the baby.

In between, he looked up at Phillip who had a stunned expression on his face and then a scowl.

“Hey, Phillip,” he said and stood up, going back to Evonna. “What’s going on?”

“I was just talking to Evonna about college and an online program that could assist her in achieving her goals,” he said and winked at her, then looked right at Evonna’s breasts.

Tex placed his hand on her shoulder and pulled her against his side.

“That’s great. She has a lot of options, especially with everyone’s help, including my brothers and mine. We’ll take care of her. Don’t you worry. Well, we need to go. We’re meeting the others.” He tipped his Stetson and then gave her hip a squeeze.

“Thank you for the information, Phillip,” she said.

He nodded at her but gave Tex the evil eye. Tex felt triumphant. Evonna may be resistant to him and his brothers taking care of her and soon becoming her guardians, but he would be damned if any other man or men tried moving in on her. She was

young, in need of good men to care for her, guide her, and help her get through tough times, and he and his brothers were the ones to help her.

She needed time. It was understandable and talking to her more about her bad experience would assist each of them in getting closer to her and understanding her fears. They, of course, had fears, too, but one crazy, raining night and a hell of a storm, brought Evonna and Benny into their lives. That wasn't something they took as coincidence or just being good Samaritans. She was meant to be their woman, and these feelings he had, possessiveness, protectiveness, and jealousy at seeing other men flirt and want her, just solidified she was meant for him.

"You didn't need to do that. Phillip seemed like a nice guy," she said as they walked down the sidewalk in town. He tipped his hat at a few older women walking down the street smiling and looking at him walking with Evonna.

"He's okay, but you looked a little uncomfortable, especially when he touched your hair, never mind stared at your chest," he told her and eyed over the dress she wore. She looked beautiful.

"I can handle men, Tex. I don't need a babysitter or bodyguard. I don't understand why a woman can't fend for herself in this town. Don't you think women are capable?" she asked, sounding a bit angry.

"Honey, a woman is capable of whatever she sets her sights on achieving and accomplishing. No one is saying that. It's more of a respect, a support that we're offering."

"It's more than that. I'm not stupid."

"What do you mean?" he asked. She stopped, pulled the stroller under the shade of the tree and looked up at him.

“It’s going on three months living in this town, getting to know the rules, as Ford likes to refer to them. Men walk around here picking a woman, not even knowing anything about her, just going by her looks, if she’s got trouble or is needy, and it isn’t right. How can that be right, and what if a woman has had enough with men and just wants to live on her own and take care of things on her own? It isn’t allowed?”

He squinted at her, at the fire in her eyes and in her tone, and it just aroused him more and made him feel more attracted to her and her strength.

“It’s more than that. Let’s sit,” he said and she moved the stroller toward the bench and they both took a seat. They watched people walking by and he looked at her. She just stared at him and looked frustrated.

“I’ve lived in this town all my life. My brothers and I left for service, did crazy shit, but it was in Salvation we found peace and comfort. For lots of reasons, Evonna. Lots.”

“Like what? Friends? Family?”

“Yes, but, well, when we did come back we stayed alone. Despite wanting to be back and see everyone while we were away. I know that probably makes no sense, but it’s important that you know my brothers and I went through bad times. We’ve risked out lives, have been stabbed, shot, and nearly killed more times than I personally would like to remember.”

“Oh, God, really?” she asked and placed her hand on his forearm. He placed his hand over hers and brought it on top of his lap, but then looked away. She didn’t pull back. She let him hold her hand.

He looked at her.

“I’m not perfect, honey. I’m older, I know, and perhaps you’re not interested in me because of my age, but my brothers are good men that could care for you and—”

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“What? Are you kidding me?” she asked and he squinted at her.

She turned slightly, her legs crossed and one of her hands under his and the other over it.

“I’m scared, Tex. I’m scared for a whole lot of reasons. I’m sorry I can’t accept this guardianship thing. I do want you to know that your age, your experiences, are not what holds me back from accepting a relationship. I’m just not ready. I’m not whole, Tex,” she said and then swallowed hard.

“What do you mean not whole?”

She took a deep breath and exhaled.

“I’ve made so many mistakes and went from being on the run, feeling like life was over and that I had no future, no happiness, to then feeling like I could survive and make it if I were strong enough and tough enough. I don’t know who I am right now. It’s hard to explain, but it’s like there are two halves of me. One that prays, dreams, hopes that I can keep Benny safe, succeed in life, and provide for us and not make any mistakes again. Then there’s the other side. The scared one. The one that worries about Bunny’s dad hunting me down and hurting me or Benny. The side that knows I made stupid mistakes. The first was giving up on me and my abilities, my dreams of graduating college and working in a professional career.”

“That’s normal, Evonna. Hell, people makes mistakes all their lives, but it’s what they learn from those mistakes that helps them to achieve their goals and maybe not make so many more mistakes as they go on living.”

“I don’t know that, though. I mean, you saying it or someone telling me that is one thing, but there’s a fear inside. It affects decisions in regards to emotions, attractions, whether or not liking someone is a smart move at this point in time.”

“You are attracted to each of us though?”

She looked away and then looked back up into his eyes.

“Yes.”

He nodded.

“We’re attracted to you, too, and we’re willing to take our time, to let you get to know us, and get comfortable with us.”

“I don’t know if I’ll ever be ready, and that isn’t fair to you and your brothers.”

“Maybe you need to do a lot less thinking, and more living, and just let things happen. Stop worrying about what could go wrong, and maybe things will go perfectly right. It’s something I’ve learned to do, and life is a lot less negative and stressful.”

She eased back against the bench and he did the same. He turned his body slightly and brought her hand to his lips. They held gazes as he kissed her knuckles.

My God, she’s so young and beautiful. What am I thinking? I feel so old.

“You’re the oldest of your brothers, right?”

He nodded.

“You’re like their leader? What you command or order, they do?”

“Not in life, only in the field, and more often than not, we work in sync. Always have and it’s what made us so good at what we did.”

“You say what you did as if you’re done doing that kind of work.”

“We are. Things have changed,” he said and looked away from her.

“How?”

He turned toward her as she sat forward. He reached over and up toward her face, cupping it.

“A gorgeous, sweet woman, and precious little baby dropped into our lives, and suddenly we wanted more, started seeing things in a different perspective.”

He saw the tears fill her eyes.

“You think it was fate, like people say? That we were all meant to find one another?” she whispered, voice cracking.

“I don’t give power to fate. Never did, but something brought you into our lives, Evonna, and I’ll do whatever it takes to prove to you that my brothers and I can make you happy, not control your life or take it over.” He stroked her jaw and stared at her lips.

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“You think I’m worth all that?” she asked, and she looked so emotional—so needy, sexy, beautiful, and all woman.

“Honey, there is no question there. I’m the one who fears I’m not good enough for you. That I’m too old, too experienced in life’s negatives, and the danger I’ve surrounded myself with for so long.” She shook her head.

“I like that you’re older and more experienced. You have this commanding way about you. Your brothers do, too.”

“We’re used to being in charge. In shooting from the hip and speaking our minds.” She smiled.

“Kind of like right now?” she asked.

He licked his lips and she stared at them, looking so serious. “You like me shooting from the hip, darling?” he asked and continued to stroke her jaw and inch closer.

“I like your honesty.”

“How about my touch, and being this close?”

“It makes me nervous.”

“Scared?”

“No.” He pressed his lips to hers gently. As much as he wanted to deepen the kiss and

pull her into his arms and make out with her, he knew she needed slow. They were making progress.

He eased back and she followed, gripped his shirt, and looked at him, eyes slowly opening, lips wet and parted.

“Goddamn, woman, I’m trying to go slow.”

She licked her lips and shyly looked away. He eased back on the bench and kept her close, then took her hand and placed it onto his lap.

“So, what does the rest of your day look like? Any plans?”

They heard the sirens and then saw the people walking closer to the roadway. As the fire engines sirens echoed around the town, the trailer behind them came into sight.

“What’s going on?” she asked and leaned down to check on Benny. He was awake and she turned the stroller around so he could see.

“Looks like they’re celebrating one of the youth sports programs. They do this every so often when a team or teams win a championship.”

“Really? That is so cool,” she said as the sirens got louder and all the kids in green and black uniforms stood on the back of a trailer as people waved and cheered.

“Looks like the soccer team this time,” he said and smiled at her.

They watched them pass by and Evonna stood up and then gave a wave as the boys in the back waved back. After they passed, he placed his hands on her hips and turned her toward him, her body between his legs. She placed her hands on his shoulders, that feminine touch of hers burning through his skin and arousing him.

“Would you like to meet my brothers and me for dinner tonight?”

“I have Benny.”

“The restaurant in town is family friendly. We want to spend time with both of you.”

“Is this some sort of way to ensure people around town think that you and your brothers could have a chance with me?” she asked. He eased his hands along her ass and squeezed. She gasped and gripped his shoulders, then looked around to be sure no one saw, but then he eased them up and gave her hips a shake.

“Do we have a chance with you, Evonna?” he asked. She worried her bottom lip.

“Didn’t we just talk about taking our time and going slow?”

“I’ll take it as a maybe. We’ll pick you up at six.”

She stared at him.

“Seal it with a kiss?” he pushed. He didn’t know where this light-hearted, flirty side came from, but apparently Evonna brought it out in him. Thank God his brothers and no one else were nearby to hear him. They would bust his chops. Then he didn’t care as a moment later Evonna pressed closer, cupped his cheeks, and kissed him tenderly. He hugged her to him as she released his lips and hugged him back. It was an encouraging, effective moment, and he couldn’t wait to tell his brothers about tonight.

Chapter Five

Lou was on the phone with Bailey. He talked about New York, working for the Fiorre family, and Lou told him about Vye.

“Damn, that is pretty amazing shit. I wish I was there to see you hard ass old men fall head over heels for a twenty-three-year-old woman. A baby, too, that’s crazy,” he said.

“I know it is. Like I explained. It just kind of happened. We’re taking things slow. She’s scared, and trying to fight the whole guardianship thing.”

“That’s funny, but hey, there was a time you guys, as well as us, avoided even seeing Ford or going into town so we weren’t chosen. We were all trying so hard not to feel an attraction to any woman because of the jobs we had,” Bailey said.

“I know. It’s a fucking shocker. The thing is, we don’t know anything really about Benny’s dad. Could be the dick gave up and is living his shitty life, but since he came from Pennsylvania, and apparently does shit in New York from what Vye has told Ford, we were wondering if you could find out anything? Maybe get your cousins and their connections to find out whatever you can under the radar?”

“Hey, not a problem at all. Give me the full name, any info on names of businesses, places he hangs, friends, you know the deal, whatever you got.”

“Thanks, Bailey. So how is it working for them?” Lou asked.

“It’s pretty fucking good actually. I just don’t like having to wear dress pants and ties and shit. Miss Salvation, hunting, shooting, and that kind of thing. Funny thing is, Donata says she misses it, too. I give it a few more weeks, tops, and she’ll be ready to head back to the ranch for a while.”

“Well, we’d love to see you and Donata, too. Have her meet Vye and Benny.”

“Sounds good. I’ll look this dick up and see what I can get on him.”

“Thanks, Bailey. Talk to you soon.” Lou ended the call and looked at Kendrick.

“Kind of makes me nervous. Like something is going to go wrong. Like what if this dick wants her back or wants to be part of Benny’s life?” Kendrick said to him.

“I thought about that, too, but don’t you think he would have hired someone to find her, or notified a lawyer or something?”

“Not if he’s into illegal shit.”

“A guy who thinks he can smack around a pregnant woman and do drugs and shit, and you think he would worry about getting a lawyer to go after custody just to fuck with Vye?” Lou asked.

“Jesus, I hope the fuck not.”

“Me, too.”

“I wish she would give in a bit more and accept guardianship from us. At least it would keep away other men in town who are interested and get them to stop flirting with her,” Kendrick said, sounding annoyed.

“I know, but we decided at her pace and only to give little pushes here and there.”

“Do we even know where she is right now? Where are Tex, Frankie, and Pierce?” Kendrick asked.

“Frankie and Pierce are going over the schedules for our classes Monday, and Tex went into town.”

Just then Lou’s cell phone rang.

“It’s Tex,” he said and smiled as he listened. Then he ended the call.

“Well?”

“Looks like we’re going to dinner with Vye.”

“What?” Kendrick asked and sat forward in his chair.

“Tex said he had a really good talk with her, asked her to dinner with us tonight, and she said yes.” Lou smiled.

“Holy shit,” Kendrick said and Lou couldn’t help but feel excited. They were going to dinner with Vye. She accepted an invite. Were the walls finally starting to come down? He sure hoped so as he called out to Frankie and Pierce to let them know. This was going to work out fine, and the call to Bailey was lost on happier thoughts and hopefully steps in the right direction to making Vye their woman completely.

* * * *

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Vye arrived back at the farm and saw the group of people gathered by the front porch. Something was going on. Scout, Sarge, Ray, and Ella were there, as well as Sparrow and Jace. And she thought she saw Ridge and Beck, which meant Tye, Lana, Grace, and Salena were there, too.

Ten-year-old Tye and eight-year-old Lana were by her car before she even opened the back seat to get Benny out.

“Your aunt is here! Aunt Gay is here,” they exclaimed, and she looked up to see Aunt Gay making her way down the steps with Scout, Sarge, and Ella.

“I’ll get Benny,” Sarge said with a smile as Aunt Gay pulled Evonna into her arms and hugged her tight. They both started crying. When Sarge came closer with the carrier, Aunt Gay pulled back and covered her mouth. “Oh my God, Vye, he’s beautiful,” she said and Vye wiped the tears from her eyes.

“Are you okay?” Vye asked. “It was safe to come? They haven’t gone back to the apartment to threaten you, or hurt you?” Vye carried on with concern, looking over her aunt and making sure there were no bruises or anything. Her aunt held her hand and shook her head. “I haven’t seen them or heard from them since that one night.”

“Come on up to the house. We’re going to have a nice celebration. A classic Brazzos family barbecue,” Sarge said and winked at Evonna. Evonna hugged her aunt’s side as they walked toward the house and up to the porch to see everyone. It was incredible. This was her family. They welcomed Evonna in, cared for her and Benny, and gave her the opportunity for a better life. That uneasy, pessimistic attitude was just brought down a notch. This was amazing.

A short time later as everyone helped prepare for dinner, she pulled Scout aside and they walked toward the hallway.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, and reached out and stroked her hair. She worried her bottom lip, looked around them seeing Ray keeping his eyes on her with concern. They were all so caring and fatherly.

“Do you have a way to contact the McCanns?” she asked. He squinted at her.

“Well, I need you to call Tex and cancel our plans.”

“What plans?” he ask

ed and crossed his arms in front of his chest, looking serious.

She looked back toward Ray, who had now left the kitchen and approached.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing, I just...well, today in town I spent some time talking with Tex.”

Ray and Scout smiled.

“That’s good.”

“Kind of. I need you to call them and cancel the plans I made for dinner.”

“You were going to have dinner with them?” Ray asked, seeming shocked but also amused.

“Well, Tex asked me to, and things kind of happened in town.”

“Things?” Ray pushed.

“Listen, I was talking to Phillip Chase. Tex got jealous came over, interrupting, and saying we had plans, basically ending the conversation for me. We walked through town and the park afterward.”

“Phillip is a nice guy, a bit older, and he has three brothers, too.”

“I know.”

She looked away.

“You like Tex and his brothers, don’t you?” Scout asked.

“What’s not to like? I’m just not mentally or emotionally ready to get involved in any type of romantic relationship just yet.”

“Says who?” Ray asked.

“Me.”

“Really? But you said yes to dinner with them, and you let Tex act possessive as if he was your guardian,” Scout said to her.

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She took a deep breath and exhaled. Tears filled her eyes.

“I like them. All of them, but Benny needs to come first.”

“And you don’t think the McCann men will put you and Benny first, and help to protect the two of you, to love you and provide for you?” Ray asked.

She opened her mouth to speak and no words came out.

“How about I call them and you invite them to come over? They’ll be disappointed if you cancel your date. Maybe having them here around the family will be a good thing,” Scout said and Ray smiled and pulled out his phone.

She reached out and covered his hand. “Wait, do you think that’s a good idea? Do you think they’ll be okay with that? I mean, they’re so quiet, private, and I’ve heard you say that they don’t really socialize. That you were surprised they took Ford up on the jobs running the new training center. Maybe it isn’t a good idea. Just contact them for me and let them know my aunt showed up. That’s probably better and—”

Ray placed his hand on her shoulder as he spoke into his cell phone.

“Hey, Tex, it’s Scout. I’ve got Evonna here. She needed to contact you about changing up the plans for tonight. Here you go,” Ray said and turned the cell phone toward her. She stared at it, at Ray, and then Scout.

“Ask them. They’re good men, and they will take their time to show you that.”

She swallowed hard and took the phone.

“Hello?”

“What’s going on? Is everything okay? Is Benny okay?” he asked and tears filled her eyes as her heart lifted with excitement and emotion at his concern.

“Great actually. My aunt Gay showed up from New York. She’s here at the house and everyone is over. I can’t make it to dinner.”

He was quiet a moment, then cleared his throat.

“Um, of course. Well, that’s good news and I’m sure you want to spend time with her and the family.”

“I wanted to spend time with you guys, too, and was looking forward to dinner.”

“It’s okay. Another time.”

Ray nodded toward her. “Ask him,” he whispered.

She heard her voice crack.

“Um, if you guys aren’t all busy tonight, if you wanted to, I mean, you don’t have to. If you feel uncomfortable I’ll understand. Um, would you all like to come over, too? We’re having a barbecue.”

“You want us there with you? To meet your aunt, and be with your family?”

“Is that too uncomfortable, too much?”

“No, baby. Anything you and Benny need or want, we’re there. What time?”

“Um, come whenever you’re ready. We’ll be here,” she said and Scout and Ray smiled as she ended the call and handed over the phone. She was shaking.

“Don’t look so scared. That was a good thing to do, and it will help you decide if you want the McCann men in your life and as your official guardians,” Scout said to her.

“They care about you and Benny. That is something special. Now come on, we’ve got some prep work to do in that kitchen,” Ray said and they both hugged her and kept her between them as they headed down the hallway and back to the kitchen.

“Is everything okay?” Aunt Gay asked her as she held Benny and rocked him in her arms. Evonna smiled and felt emotional seeing her aunt holding Benny as everyone gathered around the country kitchen and the porch area, all talking while the sounds of kids laughing and playing filled the air.

“I hope so,” Evonna said and looked at Aunt Ella.

“What do you mean you hope so?” she asked, eyes squinted. She glanced at Valentina, Ridge, and Sparrow. “I just invited the McCann men over to join us.”

Their excitement was obvious as Valentina clapped her hands and Ella smiled wide and then pulled Evonna into an embrace.

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“The McCann men? Those soldiers you told me about, Ella?” Aunt Gay asked, smiling.

“You told her about them already? She just got here?” Evonna asked.

“Are you kidding me? Gay asked who was vying for guardianship over you. I just told her about the multiple men around town inquiring, but how destiny placed you and Benny into the McCann brothers hands the first moment you stepped foot in town. It’s a love story, Vye. A beautiful one and just the beginning. I’m so excited,” Ella said.

“A love story?” Evonna whispered and felt scared out of her mind. She stroked Benny’s cheek.

“You’re love story, Vye. You deserve men that will love you and Benny, not physically and emotionally hurt you,” Aunt Gay said to her.

Evonna looked at Aunt Gay, then Ella and Valentina.

“I just don’t think I’m really ready for anything more than friendship right now.”

“Take your time. There’s no rush. Everything has a way of working itself out. You’ll see,” Ella said to her.

“I can’t wait to meet them,” Aunt Gay said, then smiled.

She prayed that she hadn’t just made a huge mistake and some sort of commitment

she didn't have the strength, the courage to pursue. She was scared, and there was no hiding it, but it was too late now. She'd made a decision, and as long as she put Benny and herself and what was best for them, first, then she would wait to see how the cards fell.

Chapter Six

New York Grand Hotel Russian-American Art Exhibit & Fundraiser event.

Anastasia Perchaveck stood by a series of gorgeous paintings by Malayna Merkovicz-Mulicheck, daughter of Nicolai Merkovicz and wife of Border, Krane, Star, and Lucca Mulicheck. She was extremely talented and had a gift for creating such masterpieces as the ones displayed before Anastasia. The Merkovicz and Mulicheck families were very high up in power and continued to strengthen as their families expanded.

Anastasia's uncle was Nuvron Perchavek, a Russian made man who headed one of the top ten families. His brother Ogar, her father, was in charge of maintaining and securing the numerous artwork of the Perchaveck family while also working with members of the black market, and stealing, smuggling, buying, and selling profitable items around the world. Anastasia not only had a love for the arts but an ability to draw in buyers and maintain repeat customers. Her identity was disguised. No one knew if she were male or female as all correspondence was done with computer-enhanced voice-over devices. It kept her safe and secure as she had connections to many untouchable Russian affiliates.

Looking over Malayna's artwork that was selling in the mid- hundred of thousands, she searched for the artists of the painting she had a buyer for. A rare piece brought in by the Lenvick family. Her thoughts were interrupted as a small commotion erupted near the entryway. Her uncle Nuvon had

arrived with his men. She felt the instant anxiety, the hatred she had for the man and his ways. He treated her father, his own brother, like shit, yet her dad ran the most lucrative part of the family businesses. She had been forced into her role because of her mother's untimely illness, then death. She continued to work and hoped he, nor Creagan, his right-hand man and guard, had noticed her.

As she sort of hid behind the extra-large, wide paintings, she thought about somehow getting out of this life, out from under Nuvon's thumb, but knew if she did that her father would pay the price. This was her family and this was whom she was stuck with. She may as well make the best of it and make a shit load of money. She was well trained in self-defense, martial arts, and weaponry and could take care of herself. Men found that both sexy and a turn-off. She had yet to meet a man who could handle her abilities, as well as her successes.

She glanced between the paintings when she felt the hand on her hip and then heard Creagan's voice as he whispered into her ear.

"Sweet, gorgeous Anastasia, I missed you," he said as he kissed her cheek. She turned toward him, put on her fake smile, and showed her respect.

"Creagan, so nice to see you, too. I thought that you would be working or still away on business."

"You know me, always doing business. It never stops," he replied, eyeing over her body and, of course, her breasts in the slim-fitting navy blue evening gown.

"Boy, do I know that," she said and glanced toward her uncle where a few men stood. Creagan stroked her hip and reached up with his other hand to caress her hair from her face. She stared up at him, hating this guy as much as she hated her uncle.

"You were away for a few days. Where did you go?" he asked her.

“The beach.”

“Venice?”

“Florida, actually.”

“How boring,” he said to her and stared at her lips. “Your uncle would like a word with you.”

She squinted at him.

“Come,” he said, taking her by her elbow and leading her away from the paintings and toward her uncle Nuvon. He eyed her over and gave a small smile, an approval of her attire. As if she cared what he thought.

“Uncle,” she said and leaned in to kiss each cheek as he held her and then looked her over.

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“Where were you last week?” he asked, sounding pissed off. She wondered why. She had taken care of all her work responsibilities.

“Florida, taking a little time to soak up some rays and relax a little.”

“Alone?” he asked.

She was taken aback by his question.

“Does it matter?” He looked at Creagan and then back at her.

“We had a situation.” She squinted at him. She had just returned two nights ago and had heard nothing.

“What situation?”

“You didn’t hear?”

“No.”

“Product was stolen from our warehouse in Chicago.” She was shocked. Her father had a team that was in charge of that warehouse. She had just been there a few weeks before she left for Florida.

“What exactly was stolen and how?”

“That’s what we’re trying to figure out. Seems that items that should have been

inventoried weren't. Your father was supposed to be on top of this and he screwed up. That isn't acceptable."

"Nor is it the first time," Creagan added. She was shocked. She'd known nothing of her father ever making any mistakes either.

"I don't even know what you're referring to. My father has never screwed anything up. We run a tight, secure business."

"Apparently not tight enough, and we aren't the only family that got screwed in this hit."

"Who else?"

"Let's just say main families and leave it at that. They want blood, and if they were to find out who the negotiator is, you'd be dead," her uncle told her.

"That's ridiculous since I know nothing."

"Well, you'd better find out who stole the shit. If not, your father will suffer," Nuvon told her. Her anger boiled immediately.

"You mean your brother," she said, reminding him that her father wasn't just some guy. He was his brother.

"Business is business. I get screwed over, I don't care if you're blood or not. You're dead."

He gave Creagan a nod and both men walked away, leaving her there feeling speechless and definitely concerned. Who the hell would be stupid enough to rip off made men?

She headed out of the room and to a private hallway away from people. She pulled out her cell phone and called her father. He sounded funny. “Dad, are you okay?”

“Fine. Are you at the event?”

“Yes.”

“The painting?”

“Here. I’ll take care of everything.”

“Be sure to be careful. Have extra security on it. This can’t go missing, too.”

“I heard what happened. We have no leads?”

“Did he threaten you? Touch you, hurt you in any way?”

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“No Dad, of course not. He’s angry though.”

“Rightfully so. It was an inside job. Someone is doing this to others besides us and Nuvon.”

“Any leads?”

“None.”

“Dad, want me to try and find out?”

“If you can, but be careful of your cover. There isn’t anyone to trust right now. Things are getting worse. Our allies are few,” he said and then coughed.

“Something is wrong, I can tell.”

“I’ll be fine.”

“Son of a bitch, he sent men to hurt you, threaten you? You’re his damn brother.”

“Anastasia, please. I’m fine. Just stay out of this.”

“And watch him take things out on you? Whomever is responsible will be caught. I promise to make sure we find them.”

“Watch yourself, Anastasia. Like I said, our allies are few. No one can be trusted.”

“Believe me, Dad, I know.”

She ended the call and then tapped the top of the phone to her lips and debated about making the call. She looked up the number.

“Hello?”

“It’s Anastasia. I need a favor,” she said and then told her contact what was going on.

“You know how this works. No one states who brought the shit in. It’s put out, transferred to the right location, and then advertised and distributed out. If it was that rare then it’s already overseas.”

“So no way of getting it back?”

“Nope.”

“Shit, then if I can’t have back what was stolen, then how about who did the stealing?”

“Give me some time. I’ll do some digging, but you may want to start with Detrix Vane. Heard he was flashing some Russian jewelry. Could be a clue.”

“Thanks a bunch. I’ll check it out.”

“Anytime.”

She ended the call and thought about Detrix Vane. He was making his way up the chain in dealing and delivering goods. Could be him and his boy Murdock were the ones stealing. They worked for a few other big shots. Not too smart on his part. But they could do the job considering that Detrix would have access to the inventory at

the warehouses since he'd done some jobs for Nuvon recently. She couldn't go making accusations though. Detrix and Murdock, that scumbag, had a lot of friends. She wouldn't risk her position, her contacts to hand him over to her uncle. No, she needed to be smart.

What she did know about Murdock was his love of cocaine, need for steroids, and how he beat his pregnant girlfriend who'd disappeared. She overheard Detrix talking to a few of the guys who had asked about the beautiful woman. Anastasia was good at eavesdropping, at picking up on conversations and information then storing it in the computer of a mind she had.

Anastasia thought about what to do next. How could she find out for sure if it were Detrix and his buddies that had stolen the paintings and other things from that warehouse? She worried about her father. What had Nuvon done to him? Or better yet, what did he have his cronies do?

She turned around in time to see Creagan coming down the hallway toward her. She placed her phone in her purse and stared at him.

When he didn't slow his steps or seem like he was going to stop, she retreated only for him to grab her tight and press her up against the wall. His hand was at her throat. His arm wrapped around her midsection tight. She gasped.

"I hope you're not involved with this. I really do. I'd hate to have to kill you."

She was scared. Nuvon really thought it was her that was double crossing him.

“I’m not involved in this.”

He stroked her jaw, his lips close to hers. The man would be considered very attractive if it weren’t for the long scar down his cheek. Someone had tried to slice him in a fight. The other man had died.

She gulped.

“Nuvon doesn’t trust you and so you and I are going to be spending a lot of time together.”

“What? Why?”

He stared at her lips and squeezed her so tight she could hardly breathe.

“To ensure where your loyalties lie. He owns you, and you must remember that.”

“He doesn’t own me.” He gripped her throat and jaw, putting pressure on it.

“Oh yes, he does. There’s no way out of his grasp, nor mine. He has plans for you, Anastasia. Let’s find out who stole these things from him. It will be the beginning of a new journey together.” He pressed his lips to hers, forcing a kiss upon her. She struggled to get free, and when he released her she growled.

“Don’t you dare do that to me again.” He chuckled, his hold so firm and strong she had no way of fighting him or getting free.

“We are going to be very close. Tell me what you found out and we’ll go after them together.”

* * * *

Murdock bought another round at the club and the people around him cheered. He was a big shot tonight. He’d made a shit load of money on his latest score, along with Detrix. That warehouse they’d ripped off was worth the trip to Chicago. He made more fucking money in one hit than he’d ever done in his lifetime.

He downed another shot as two blondes hung on him, kissing his neck and runn

ing their hands all over his chest and his cock. He was going to be getting laid all night. He was a fucking king. What would Vye say now? He wondered and then almost sobered a moment. His joy dissipating at thoughts of her and the baby she had. He stared at the blonde. She was nothing compared to Vye. Sweet, classy, petite Vye. He cupped the woman’s breast and she gasped and then purred. He leaned into her, suckled her neck, and imagined her being Vye. It wasn’t her though. He’d fucking lost her. He’d fucked up because he was under pressure and didn’t know if this job would ever come to fruition. He’d done it though. No more slumming for shit jobs. They hit it big and there was more to come. More to accomplish.

He looked at Billy Zay. “Hey, you go by the aunt’s house at all while I was gone?”

“No, didn’t think you wanted me to. Thought you were over Vye.”

“I want to know where she is.”

“So you want me to fucking go by the aunt’s again, maybe rough her up for info?” Billy asked.

“Yeah, do it this week. See if she breaks down. That bitch couldn’t have gotten far with a baby.”

“You really want to even bother, man? Look around you. You can get any woman you want. We all can,” he said. The blonde licked his neck, then nipped the skin. He reached down and ran his hand over her ass and squeezed.

“No one is saying I’m turning it down. Vye was good, sweet, and I was her only man ever.”

“So you want to find her and raise a kid with her?”

“Fuck, no. I don’t give a fuck about the kid. I want her in my bed again. At my beck and call and to show her what I’ve accomplished. She’ll see my success and want in. I’ll make her beg while she sucks my cock,” he said and laughed. Billy did, too.

“Fuck, yeah. She was hot, maybe she still is after popping out that baby.”

“Oh, she will be. I know Vye. She took good care of herself and she knows I’ll always own her and she’d better take care of that body.”

“Well then, to finding Vye,” Billy said and raised his mug of beer.

“To finding Vye,” Murdock said and they clinked glasses and Murdock downed another drink. He was on top of the world, and sooner than later Vye would be back in his bed, and punished for leaving him the way she had.

He grabbed the blonde and kissed her hard on the mouth. He was the man. He was in charge, Vye would always be his bitch and there was nothing she could do about it.

* * * *

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“What did you find out? This is fucking bullshit,” Fedaro Fiorre said to Turbo and his men.

“We heard from Grisha. Dmitri has him heading to New York. Nuvon Perchaveck had a warehouse hit, too, and it contained millions of dollars’ worth of paintings and guns. By the looks of things and what Bailey and I came up with, it was an inside job,” Turbo reported.

“Fuck. If Dmitri sent Grisha then he’s super pissed, and also knows something more. Goddamn, this isn’t good. Find out what you can. Any leads and then I’m sure Grisha will contact us. Give him whatever you got and work with him on this.”

“Who is Grisha?” Bailey asked.

“Dmitri Sanclare’s right-hand man. A mean son of a bitch and definitely not a man you want hunting you down,” Covan said.

“Sounds like my kind of enforcer,” Bailey said.

“He isn’t a man to take lightly. He also doesn’t talk much either. He gives orders, you do it. No questions asked,” Fedaro stated.

“Got it,” Bailey said, then they headed out of the room.

“We’ll wait to hear from Grisha. In the meantime, I had some friends look into Tex and his brothers’ new woman’s ex. Sunny and Vinny Costanza do some business with liquor sales and distribution. They own a few smaller businesses and have a bar near

a dry cleaning place this guy Murdock owned and operated. Sunny said he found out the guy and two friends do some side jobs for Nuvon here and there, and last night they were partying it up big time like kings at a place in the Bronx,” Turbo told Bailey.

“So you thinking maybe their celebrating their earnings and were part of the hit on the warehouses?”

“Could very well be, Bailey. What do you say to a little surveillance?”

“I’m in. If this ex of my friends’ new woman is trouble and is looking for her, I want to know so we can cut things off before they get bad,” Bailey said.

“Okay. I have an address of a club they hang out at. Since you and the guys aren’t from around here, you won’t stand out as enforcers for Fiorre. I’ll tell you how we’ll play it as we go look. I’m sure Grisha will show up soon. More than likely he’ll do his own form of investigating.”

“Sounds like a scary dude.”

“Six-foot-five Russian hit man. What do you think?” Turbo asked and Bailey exhaled and followed them out of the back offices ready to do whatever needed to be done. He had a bad feeling in his gut. Somehow this trouble here in New York, and Tex’s girlfriend’s ex were connected. He just knew it.

Chapter Seven

Lou followed Evonna into the house to put Benny down for a nap. It had been a little awkward at first, coming to the farmhouse and being greeted by everyone and socializing. Him and his brothers really didn’t do barbecues even when they were asked in the past. They kept to themselves and they were fine with that. However, he

and the guys knew this was a big step for Vye, inviting them here to spend time with her family and accepting their guardianship of her. Right now, Tex, Kendrick, Pierce, and Frankie were talking with Ford, who'd stopped by to visit.

Lou watched Vye gently place Benny into the crib, her bare shoulders flexing and showing her toned muscles. She looked angelic, sensual in the light blue sundress that hugged her body like a glove. Tex and the others were right. She looked thin, and they were concerned. They even tried adding more food to her plate, but she ignored them and pushed the plate to the side, barely eating half.

As she stood by the crib, her arms crossed in front of her, watching her baby sleep, he stepped closer and wrapped his arms around her and leaned his chin on her shoulder. He stared at Benny.

"He's so adorable, Vye. You're doing a great job with him. Is it getting better leaving him with Ella so you can work, or are you still having a hard time?" he asked.

She leaned back against him and his heart lifted with joy. It was a slow sign of acceptance of his embrace and maybe made her feel safe and protected.

"Not so bad anymore. Ella and her husbands take such good care of Benny. They spoil him," she said and chuckled. The baby stirred at the sound of her voice. She pulled forward, placed her fingers over her lips, and went to move away, but before they got to the door, he took her hand and pulled her back into his arms. He wrapped one arm around her waist and used his other hand to cup her neck and cheek. Staring down into her gorgeous blue eyes, he held her gaze and slowly lowered toward her lips, testing to see if she would turn away or accept his kiss. When she closed her eyes and gripped his waist he pressed his lips to hers kissing her tenderly.

They explored one another with tongues, lips, and hands. He felt her fingers slide up his lower back as she pressed her body snug to his. He ran his palm along her sexy,

round ass, and as he deepened the kiss he stroked a finger along the crack of her ass, feeling the thin string of her thong panties. His cock hardened and she moaned into his mouth. He couldn't get enough. He wanted a little more. He eased her to the other side of the door, then lifted her up and pressed her against the wall. She ran her fingers through his hair and kissed him back.

He pressed his palm along her thigh to her ass and slid a finger along the crack. She pressed her lips harder to his. He pushed a little further and maneuvered his fingers between her cheeks and right to her pussy. She gasped and pulled her lips from his and tilted her head back as she gripped his shoulders.

He nipped her chin. "Easy, darling. Nice and slow. Just exploring this sexy little body. Getting you used to my touch. You okay with it?" he asked. She gripped his shoulders and held his gaze.

"We shouldn't.?"

?

"Yes, we should. We both feel it. Want it. It's just some petting, nothing more." He stroked a little firmer and felt her pussy moisten. "Yeah, baby, just like that. Let go and relax. I won't hurt you," Lou said to her. She gulped and tears filled her eyes.

"Trust me. I don't want to hurt you. I want to protect you and Benny. Take care of you, make you realize how special you are to me and my brothers." He pressed his lips to her chin, to her cheek, and then the corner of her mouth as he stroked his fingers into her pussy. She was super wet.

She gripped his shoulders and then hugged him to her. Her hips rocked and he thrust a little faster, deeper into her cunt.

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“Just like that. So wet and tight. Come for me, baby. Come all over my fingers like it’s my cock and you’re riding me,” he whispered into her ear.

“Oh, God.” She moaned and grunted against his shoulder, trying to be quiet, and he held her and she came.

He eased his fingers from her cunt and hugged her tight. She was breathing heavily and holding onto him. Vye was so light in his arms and feminine such a protective and possessive feeling came over him as he squeezed her to him and held her there. She kissed his neck.

“Are you okay, sweetie?” he asked her and stroked her back and her ass under her dress.

“I think so.”

He chuckled and pulled back. She looked at him and, holy shit, he was done for. The woman had him wrapped around her finger and permanently had a place in his heart. Her lips were swollen, her face flushed, and her eyes sparkled.

“Let’s sit down a few minutes and catch our breaths before we head back out.”

She nodded and they spent the next few minutes just talking about the farm and about plans for the rest of the week. Including spending a little more alone time with her.

* * * *

Aunt Gay headed back home to New York promising to visit in another month or so. That was three weeks ago. The baby was getting bigger. Time was flying by. Vye smiled as she watched Kendrick talking to a couple of police officers from a group he just trained. She had been peaking around the corner and taking in the sight of the classes her men taught. She paused, then felt her cheeks warm and a giddy feeling fill her heart. She was referring to them as her men.

She finished putting the files away as Kendrick walked the men out and then closed and locked the door. She grabbed her things and went by the training room, hearing a heated argument between Pierce, Tex, and Frankie.

In a flash, they were doing these crazy martial arts or hand-to-hand combat moves and punching, flipping, and beating the heck out of one another, yet not causing any damage to their skin. There were some grunts, and a few curses, but they went round and round, and she watched intrigued by their abilities, and also aroused by their bare chests and all those muscles.

A strong arm wrapped around her mid-section and Kendrick made her gasp, drawing their attention toward the doorway.

“Look who I found watching you guys,” he said and the men paused, eyeing her over with hunger in their eyes. They were so fierce and intimidating she looked away and that was when she saw Lou standing there. His arms were crossed in front of his chest and he looked her over from the corner.

Kendrick walked her into the room, his arms wrapped around her and practically lifting her up.

“Wait. They’re practicing.”

“You can practice with us,” Kendrick said and she planted her feet into the mat,

trying to stop him when Kendrick lifted her up into his arms and then placed her between his brothers. Bare chests, muscles, tattoos...oh, God, she was in trouble here.

“Toss off your heels,” Kendrick said and lowered to his knees, held her hip with one hand, and started to lift her foot. She nearly lost her balance but Tex grabbed her around the waist and stroked her jaw with his knuckles.

“We can teach you some moves. The classes are done and Kendrick locked up. Have you ever done any self-defense training?” Tex asked in that strong, commanding tone of his. She shook her head. They all looked disappointed.

“I, um, I did a kickboxing class a few times until I had to quit.”

“Why did you have to quit?” Kendrick asked, tossing her heels off the mat and then sliding his palm up her thigh and under the flair skirt she wore. She widened her eyes and he gave her a wink.

“Your guardians, remember?” He teased and then stood up.

Her thigh warmed from his touch and her ass did, too. She wanted their hands everywhere. She loved when they touched her. Never so far in the past few weeks had they all touched her together. She thought if they did, she would lose her mind.

She was trying to be strong here but they did things to her. Turned her mind to mush when they touched her as they asked questions and broke her down. She didn’t even think when she replied to Tex’s question.

“Murdock made me quit. He said the instructor was flirty and wanted me so I couldn’t go back.”

“Seriously?” Lou asked.

She nodded. They were all quiet until Frankie spoke.

“Come here,” he ordered and Tex released his hold around her waist and she walked along the padded mat.

“Stand like this,” he said and she mimicked his movements and position in a ready stance, he called it.

Frankie had her do a few variations of moves and strikes. She remembered a couple of things from the kickboxing class and remembered how much she’d enjoyed it.

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“I like this. I loved that kickboxing class. Are there any in town?” she asked.

Pierce stood behind her.

“You’ll get all the training you need right here from us,” he said firmly and sounding angry. She turned to look at him.

“Why did you say it like that?”

“Like what?” he asked, eying her over.

She adjusted her sleeveless blouse realizing that as she’d sparred a little with Frankie, it’d begun to hang lower and a button had come undone.

She went to fix it when suddenly Pierce was there, pulling her by her hips and then reaching for her blouse. He held her gaze.

“Arms at your sides. Wait for instruction,” Pierce commanded.

She didn’t know why she listened, or what was happening here, but the entire atmosphere changed. She felt aroused and needy, and apparently so did Pierce and his brothers. Instead of buttoning the top button to her blouse, he undid another, and then another until they were all undone and he spread her top open.

He licked his lips. She stared at his dark eyes, beard, and that wild, mountain man face of his and her heart hammered in her chest.

“Good girl. You take orders well and you get rewarded,” he said to her and slid his palm along her waist then up her ribs to her breast. He cupped one and she parted her lips and felt her breathing grow rapid.

She jerked when a second set of hands landed on her hips from behind. Frankie kissed along her neck and shoulder.

“We’re going to teach you so much, baby,” Frankie said and she closed her eyes and leaned back against him, loving how it felt to have two men touch her.

When she felt the strap of her bra and the blouse move off her shoulder, she opened her eyes and saw Tex. She locked gazes with him.

“You are so very beautiful, and all ours,” he said as he lowered the cup of her bra. Pierce cupped her breast and offered it to Tex. Tex held her gaze and she watched him lower until his mouth touched her nipple and he suckled hard.

“Tex,” she said and tightened up, but Frankie suckled against her neck as Pierce lowered to his knees and Tex cupped her breast and feasted on it. Frankie continued to suckle on her neck and then Lou was there, pushing down the other strap and feasting on her other breast. Kendrick stood behind Pierce, who slid his palms up her skirt to her hips.

“Training starts now,” Pierce said and slid her panties down her thighs.

“Pierce. Oh, God,” she moaned, leaning back against Frankie.

“I’ve got you. Let go and let us pleasure you, baby. All of us—your men, your guardians, and very soon, your lovers,” Frankie told her and suckled her neck.

“Arms up behind you. Hold onto Frankie,” Kendrick ordered, and she did. She slowly

raised her arms up until she felt her bra unclip in the front and part freely.

“Jesus,” Lou said. Then he and Tex started feasting on her breasts again just as Pierce raised her thigh up over his shoulder and stroked a finger into her cunt.

She nearly shot back and away from them, but all four men were holding her firmly as Kendrick stood there and gave orders.

“Let go and let us love you,” he stated firmly. Pierce stroked her cunt faster, deeper, and then he bent lower and licked her cream. They were all feasting on her and Pierce plunged his tongue into her cunt and she cried out her release. He pulled back.

“Fucking delicious. She’s delicious,” he said, lips wet and an expression so wild and carnal in his eyes. Pierce’s muscles flexed and Kendrick placed his hand on his shoulder.

“My turn,” Kendrick stated.

Pierce lowered her leg only for Frankie to bend down with Tex and Lou and lower her to the floor. As Frankie slid from behind her, her back hit the mats and it was on. Kendrick lowered to his chest and spread her thighs over his shoulders and started to feast on her cunt. She cried out and Frankie gripped her arms and held them above her head as Lou and Tex suckled on her breasts hard.

“She looks incredible. Look at her. Our woman,” Pierce said standing there panting for breath. She cried out another release, in shock over what these men were doing to her here on the mat, at the training center. What if someone came in or could see or hear them?

“Easy, sugar.”

“Could someone see or hear?” she asked in a panic.

“No fucking way. I locked up immediately,” Kendrick said to her and then thrust another finger into her cunt, then licked and suckled the cream he caused to flow from his ministrations.

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She rocked her hips and moaned.

“My turn,” Tex said and Kendrick chuckled.

“I don’t know if I can give this sweet pussy up just yet,” Kendrick said before suckling her clit hard and making her gasp.

“Move the fuck over,” Tex stated and then chuckled. As he moved, Frankie released her arms and went to h

er side, taking Tex’s place. Her nipple hardened as cool air collided with it, but then Lou was stroking her nipple with his thumb as he watched Tex lower down between her legs and suck on her cunt. He used fingers and tongue to stimulate her pussy and she rocked her hips and moaned as they all took turns feasting on her.

“Me next,” Lou said and then slid down her body only for Kendrick to lower down and suckle her breast.

“So fucking big. Goddamn, you’re bigger than my hand. Holy fuck,” he said and lowered down to feast on her breast as Lou plunged fingers into her cunt as he held her gaze.

“So wet. Jesus, baby, you like it. You want more,” he said to her.

“Yes. Oh, God, this is crazy,” she stated and rocked her hips. Lou pulled his fingers from her cunt and replaced them with his tongue. He suckled and feasted on her and she just kept moaning. When she felt his tongue slide over her anus, she gasped.

“Me,” Frankie said and Lou blew warm breath over her pussy.

“She has a nice, tight bud. We’ll need to work it so she’ll be ready for all of us to claim her fully,” he said and she knew what he meant, but then Lou moved and Frankie went down between her legs, his beard tickling her sensitive flesh before he started to lick her from cunt to anus. Back and forth he licked and then fingered her. When she felt the thick digit plunge into her asshole she cried out and came hard.

“Fuck, yeah. She is going to love a cock in her ass,” Frankie said, then lowered back down and feasted on her.

“You’re fingering her ass?” Tex asked and looked. He and Kendrick lifted her thighs higher and looked down.

Lou cupped her cheeks and tilted her head back so she would look at him. It caused her to raise her pelvis and her breasts.

“Ever have a cock in your ass?”

“No. Oh my God, no, never.”

“Oh,” she cried out as she felt Frankie’s fingers thrust into both holes. She rocked her hips faster.

“That’s it, baby. Fuck she is going to be a fabulous lover. Holy fuck,” Tex said and she grunted and came hard. So hard her head spun. Then Lou kissed her mouth as fingers eased from her body and multiple sets of lips kissed her everywhere they could.

She was afraid to open her eyes. Afraid to see their expressions after she let them feast on her and touch her so intimately. She was aroused, ready for more, accepting

of anything they would give her as long as she could feel what she felt. That depth of emotion, desire, and feelings of being wanted, craved, desired. She was breathing rapidly and they caressed her and whispered to her.

“Easy now. It’s okay. This is completely normal to feel so much. It’s because this relationship is pure and special,” Tex said.

She blinked her eyes open as they all gathered around her close. All those bare chests and muscles and, Jesus, hard erections. She could see them through the pants they wore. They were needy. She needed to do something.

She locked gazes with Frankie and sat up.

“Easy, baby. That was a lot,” Tex said and stroked her back. She stared at Frankie, then crawled to him.

“I should help you, too,” she said and his eyes widened.

“You don’t have to. This was a lot. We know you need slow.”

He caressed her hair and she shook her head.

“You’ve done something to me, Frankie. All of you. You’ve made me want things. Desire more of each of you and in every way. I feel so cared for and protected when I’m with you guys. I want to thank you. I want to make you happy, too,” she said and slid her hands along his camo pants, then started to undo them. He slowly slid to his back and she climbed over him, pushed down his pants, and locked onto his thick, long cock.

He ran his fingers through her hair as he spread his thighs and she lowered down. Behind her the others made comments. She felt the hands slide under her skirt and lift

it.

“Sweet mother, look at this fucking ass,” Pierce stated. His tongue hit her asshole and then her clit just as she slid her mouth over Frankie’s cock and began to suck on him.

Frankie parted her ass cheeks and fingered her cunt. Then he was fingering her asshole as the others sat close and watched.

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More hands ran up and down her thighs and over her ass. She jerked when she felt the smack.

“Keep sucking,” Frankie demanded, his fingers in her hair, his cock getting harder. He was going to come and so was she as whoever was spanking her ass cheek behind her kissed away the sting.

“I’m there, Vye. Swallow me. Accept me.”

She was filled with need and desire and she wasn’t going to let him go. As Frankie grunted and came, she came, too, and Pierce sucked on her pussy from behind.

“Vye. Oh, Vye,” Frankie shot his seed down her throat and she swallowed all of it. She licked him and he pulled back.

“Vye, we need, baby,” Tex said as he knelt down, stroking his cock.

“I need, too,” she said and panted on all fours on the mat while Pierce continued to thrust fingers and tongue into her pussy while someone else fingered her ass.

She was rocking her hips.

“Let us make love to you,” Lou said and she stared at him.

“Here, Lou?” Kendrick asked.

“Why the fuck not? It doesn’t matter where we are. We want her and she wants us.

She belongs to us. Let's make it official," Lou said.

Tex reached out and stroked her jaw.

"Come back to our place with us. Call Ella and say you're going to be late and that you're having dinner with us," he said to her and Pierce and the others stopped what they were doing. Her skirt went down and they all waited for her response.

"Okay. I'll call her."

"You sure you're ready?" Tex asked.

She nodded.

"I'm ready. I want to make it official. I want you all to be my guardians, my lovers. My everything," she said.

She gasped as Pierce wrapped an arm around her waist and hoisted her up to her feet. He turned her around and cupped her cheeks.

"You're a goddess, baby, and you're ours. Forever," he said and kissed her.

It wasn't until they started helping her get dressed and that she held Tex's cell phone in her hand and told Aunt Ella her plans for dinner that she started to panic. Once they'd locked up and headed out, Lou driving her car while she rode in the truck with the others, she wondered if she were making a huge mistake. However, she'd seen how all these ménage relationships around town, and in Ella's family worked. The men truly loved their women and catered to them, protected them and their babies. These men would do the same for her. For Benny. This was her new life, her new start, and a security most women fantasized about. She was going to make love to five men. Be the woman of five American soldiers. They were fierce, commanding,

demanding, and hard core, but they would be hers and she would be theirs. What could possibly go wrong and make this a disaster? What?

* * * *

Frankie held Vye's hand and showed her around the ranch and their barn where they stored their ATV's, talking to her about maybe going out with them this weekend. The others were showering and getting things ready in the bedroom. They wanted their first time making love to Vye to be perfect. "I've never ridden on a quad before. Is it hard to operate?" she asked.

He brought her hand to his mouth and kissed her knuckles.

"You'll be riding on the back of mine or one of the others. Then we'll teach you how to drive one," he said to her.

"Did you do this when you were kids?" she asked and he released her hand as she ran hers along the seat of one of the quads. She turned around to face him.

"Sure did. We did a lot of fun things. We can teach you, too, and even Benny when he's bigger," he said and her eyes widened and tears filled them. He squinted. He hadn't even thought about his statement before he spoke and had no idea it would upset her. He pressed closer, placed his hands on her hips, and stared down into her eyes.

"What's wrong?"

She placed her hands on his shoulders and shook her head. He gave her hips a shake.

"Talk to me. Tell me, baby."

“What you said, about teaching Benny when he’s older. I just didn’t expect it.”

He gave her a wink.

“Well, honey, expect us to say things like that. Get rid of those negative thoughts and any ideas that we could ever leave you, hurt you or Benny, or not be committed to you or this relationship. We’re in it for the long haul. We’ve never shared the same woman, all of us together at the same time, or cared so much for one that we could love her. We’re hard men, Vye. I know that probably scares you,” he said and pressed closer. He pulled her against his chest and she hugged him tight with her face against his chest. He pressed her against the quad.

“We’re soldiers. We know violence, danger, war, a lot of bad, terrible things. We’ve lived our lives doing danger and without a care in the world. We’ve been shot, stabbed, beaten up and thought we were going to die too many times to even talk about. Then you show up, and all hell breaks loose. We can’t stop thinking about you, about Benny, and about that instant attraction and desire we felt. How we want to protect you, possess you and make you all ours. We all feel it, Vye. We’ve talked about it, and we know what we want.” He pulled back and ran his hands up her arms to her shoulders then her cheeks. He cupped them and stared down into her gorgeous blue eyes.

“We want you. As our woman, our lover, and hopefully our wife.” The tears flowed from her eyes and her pixie nose got all red. She looked precious.

“Are you sure, Frankie? You can accept Benny and I even though he isn’t yours?”

“Baby, we’ve already accepted both of you as ours. We’ll take care of the two of you. You’ll see. We can love you, and love you fully is what we’re going to do, starting

today.”

He pressed his lips to hers and deepened the kiss. He lifted her up into his arms and they made out like teenagers. He sensed one of his brothers near the doorway and then heard their voice.

“We’re ready, baby. You ready for us?” Tex asked.

Frankie released her lips and gave her a wink. She looked at Tex, her eyes taking in the sight of his brother standing there in only jeans, Tex’s hair slicked back, wet and ready for her.

Frankie set her feet down.

“Go on, go with Tex. I’m going to shower and meet you all upstairs.”

She walked over to Tex who immediately picked her up and carried her into the house kissing her neck, teasing her, and making Vye giggle. The sound hit Frankie hard and a joy filled his heart, making him realize that after today things were definitely going to be different. His wants—their wants and desires, their plans for the future—would be based around Vye and Benny. An instant family, and some day they would expand that family with more babies, just like their friends did with their women.

He headed inside, the anticipation making him move quickly so he wouldn’t miss out on much as he showered. They would take her one by one, and if she was comfortable and could handle it, they would then take her together, sealing the deal, and making it all official.

* * * *

Tex carried Vye up the stairs and into the largest bedroom. They had lowered the shades, lit some candles, and Lou had gotten flowers from the rose garden and placed rose petals from the top of the stairs to the bedroom and even on the bed.

“Oh my God,” she said, looking at them and then at Kendrick, Pierce, and Lou standing there in their boxers.

Tex set her down and she looked at them.

“Like it?” Lou asked, closing the space between them and cupping her cheeks.

“For me?” she asked.

“Oh yeah, we’re going to love spoiling you, woman,” Kendrick said. Lou gave her a wink and then kissed her tenderly.

As his brother deepened the kiss and ran his hands along her body, she pressed closer and Tex began to unzip her dress. She pulled back, helping him, and a few seconds later there she stood naked, gorgeous, and a feast fit for kings.

“Mercy, baby. Mercy,” Kendrick said, taking her hand, looking at her body along with all of them before he lowered down and began to kiss her hip.

They were taking their time, exploring her body, spreading kisses everywhere, then she reached over and slid her hand over Lou’s cock.

“I’m yours, sweetie. Whatever you want and need, take it,” he said to her, pushing down his boxers before sitting on the edge of the bed. She pressed her hands over his thighs and then lowered down, taking his cock into her mouth. Behind her, Tex took in the sight of her luscious ass, her shapely figure, toned thighs, and couldn’t resist exploring. Kendrick slid fingers under her and right into her cunt. She moaned.

“Easy now. We’re going to get you ready, baby. We got everything all set. One by one we’re going to make love to you,” he said to her and she rocked her hips and moaned in response. He looked at Kendrick.

“You, then me,” Kendrick said as she bobbed her head up and down on Lou’s cock.

“Here,” Pierce tossed him a condom just as Frankie entered the room.

“I thought I heard something good going on in here,” he said, joining them.

“Something really good. Our woman is so giving and responsive. We’re all going to claim her tonight,” Tex said and eased the condom over his cock as he looked at her ass sticking out and her head bobbing.

“She is wet and ready, bro. Take her. Start this thing, ‘cause I am not going to last this first time around,” Kendrick said and stood up.

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Tex eased his hands along her ass, squeezing, massaging her hips.

“You ready for me, baby?” he asked, sliding his palms up to her shoulders and the tip of his cock to her pussy from behind. She moaned and Lou caressed her hair.

“She is ready and sucking me hard. I’m about to come,” Lou admitted.

“Hold that thought, bro. Not until I’m inside of her,” Tex said. Then he gripped her shoulder with one hand, aligned his cock with her pussy from behind, and slowly began to push into her cunt. He nudged and she moaned, spread her thighs wider, and rocked back.

“Easy, girl. I’m big and you’re super fucking tight. I don’t want it to hurt,” Tex said, and she pushed back, rocked her hips, and slid deeper and deeper.

“That’s our girl. You got this, honey. You were made for us,” Kendrick said, caressing her back. Then Frankie was on the other side, caressing her ass.

“Suck that cock and let Tex in. You got all our dicks super fucking hard for this sexy body of yours, baby. Come on now and let go,” Frankie ordered and Tex grunted and pushed all the way into her cunt.

“Sweet mother, she is fucking tight. Fuck,” Tex said, shocked at how tiny she was and how sensitive his cock was because of it. He didn’t want to hurt her, but then she was pushing back as if needing him to go faster.

“I know, baby. I know,” Tex said almost out of breath and he thrust into her, pulled

back, and thrust again and again. He kept that pace, and then Lou growled out and came in her mouth. Lou pulled back and she panted and moaned, her cheek over Lou's thigh.

"Tex, oh god, you're so big and hard. Oh." She moaned and he felt her pussy clench and come.

He ran his hands up her back to her shoulders and gripped her tight. He thrust faster and faster until he couldn't hold back. He came. "Fuck!" he exclaimed and shook and held still a moment trying to catch his breath and gain his balance. He was lightheaded and when he opened his eyes he looked at Kendrick.

"She packs one hell of a punch."

"Tell me about it," Lou added and ran his fingers through her hair.

Tex pulled out, turned her around, and kissed her tenderly. When he released her Kendrick was laying on the bed waiting for his turn to love her for the first time. Tex was already thinking about possessing her again, then with his brothers filling every hole and marking her their woman forever.

Kendrick pulled Vye on top of him and she straddled his waist. He reached up and cupped her cheeks. "Okay?" he asked and she smiled.

"Good. Now take me inside of you. I need you so badly, honey. We all need you," Kendrick said and she lifted up.

"Are you going to take me together?" she asked.

"Only when you're ready. No rush," Frankie told her. She nodded and then lowered her pussy over Kendrick's cock and took him inside of her. They both moaned.

“Holy cow, woman,” he said and pulled her down. He cupped her ass and rocked his hips upward, hard and fast. She was so fucking tight he could feel every inch of her insides grip his cock and milk him.

She lifted up and started to ride him, gripping his shoulders and holding his gaze.

“Yeah, Vye, just like that. Oh, that feels so good. That hot, wet, cunt sucking in my cock.”

“Oh, Kendrick, you’re wild.”

“Wild about you. Ride me,” he demanded. He pinched her nipples and tugged on them, making her cry out.

Behind her, Frankie kissed her back and down her spine. She jerked and Frankie chuckled.

“Just exploring, baby. Seeing how your body responds,” he said.

Kendrick pumped his hips upward to her downward thrusts.

“Feel good? Want his fingers in your ass?” Kendrick asked.

“Yes. Yes, Kendrick,” she said and moaned and rocked her hips.

She tightened up.

“Just a little lube so we don’t hurt you,” Frankie told her. He gripped her shoulder and thrust a finger into her ass. Kendrick could feel the tightness.

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“So giving and sexy. You’re going to love a cock in every hole. You’re going to please us and we’re going to please you sweet, sexy, Vye,” he said and pulled her down to kiss her as he pinched and tugged on her nipple.

She moaned and came.

Smack.

Sh

e jerked.

“Nice,” Tex said.

“Real nice,” Lou added.

“She wants a cock in her ass, and my cock in her mouth,” Pierce said, kneeling on the bed stroking his cock.

Kendrick released her lips and she moaned and turned to look at Pierce.

“You want that? Want us to claim you fully this first time?” Pierce asked her.

“Yes. Do it. I want to be owned by you. Possessed by you. I want more,” she said sounding so desperate and rocking her ass back against Frankie’s fingers.

“Do it,” Tex said and eased onto the bed and stroked her hair. She looked at him.

“No regrets, and no turning back.”

“I want it. I want more,” she said and moaned out the word more as Frankie thrust fingers faster into her ass and Kendrick rocked up and down into her.

“Bring me that mouth. Take my cock and claim it,” Pierce said to her.

She opened and leaned toward him as Kendrick and Pierce watched her. She began to suck part of Pierce’s cock into her mouth just as Frankie pulled his fingers from her ass. She moaned and he smacked her ass twice.

Smack.

Smack.

“Here I come, sugar,” Frankie said and eased his cock into her ass, slowly pushing in. They all moaned.

“What a fucking sight,” Lou said, watching.

“Fuck, I’m there. I’m fucking there.” Kendrick grunted and thrust.

“This mouth. Sweet mother, this mouth,” Pierce said and rocked into her. He came.

Frankie grabbed her hips and thrust harder, deeper. “I can hardly move. I’m already there. Ours. She’s ours,” Frankie said as Kendrick thrust into her pussy and Pierce pulled from her mouth.

She cried out.

“Oh my God. Oh. Oh!” she moaned, and that was it for Frankie. He came in her ass

and then fell against her, gripping her tight.

“My God, that was incredible,” Frankie said and kissed along her neck and shoulder.

“Let me in there. I need her,” Lou said and they all started to pull out. Then Lou was there taking her into his arms and kissing her. He rolled her to her back and caressed her cheeks.

“You okay?” he asked.

“More than okay. That was wild and so intense. I can’t believe I’m doing this, or how amazing it feels.” He smiled at her.

“It’s about to get even more amazing. The night is young, and making love to you is going to be addicting.” He pressed his mouth to hers and slid his cock into her cunt and began to thrust into her. They all watched, looking at one another, and knew they were in love with Vye already. They would protect her with everything they had and love her every day for the rest of their lives.

Chapter Eight

Vye gasped and jumped as she felt the hand slide under her skirt and then a strong arm wrap around her midsection. Pierce pulled her close, pressed her up against the counter, and nuzzled against her neck.

“Pierce, we’re still open and anyone could come in here and see,” she scolded.

“Let them see, and then they’ll know you’re mine. That you belong to the McCann brothers,” he said firmly and eased his hand away from her inner thigh, retreating slightly. She turned around to face him and smoothed her palms up his thick, muscular chest. He in return took complete advantage of the fact that the front desk was too high for anyone to see where his hands were, and he maneuvered them over her ass cheeks. He gripped her there tightly, then clenched his teeth.

“I need you so badly I ache,” he whispered.

She made a pouty face and then caressed his beard.

“You poor, baby. What can I do about it?” She teased.

“Get your ass in the back room and let me have my wicked way with you.” He growled against her neck making her laugh. She slapped his shoulder.

“I’m working still, Pierce McCann.”

“Yes she is and you two need to cool it before someone comes in here,” Tex

reprimanded. Vye felt her cheeks warm and she quickly kissed Pierce on the lips, then tapped his side.

“Can you let me go so I can get back to work?”

“I like how you feel right where you are,” he said and squeezed her ass cheek. She felt aroused, needy, and she worried her bottom lip.

“Damn, baby, no wonder you got my brother in such a state. You look so beautiful and sexy right now,” Tex said and stepped closer, clenched her chin, and tilted her face toward him.

“I can’t wait to take you home and make love to you with my brothers,” Tex added, then pressed his lips to hers. When he released her lips, she couldn’t help but smile.

“I have to go get Benny first,” she said. He winked.

“I know, Frankie is going with you, and then bringing you back to our place.”

“I can’t stay late. Just until seven. I don’t like having Benny out too late,” she said and Pierce released her as she stepped back and fixed her skirt.

“You should both stay over,” Pierce said, shocking her. Her heart hammered inside her chest and she panicked.

“Or not,” he added, squinting at her.

“I need to do what’s right for Benny, Pierce.” Pierce crossed his arms in front of his chest and was all serious and angry. She could tell. It’s how he was most of the time except around her when no one was looking. Then he got all romantic and sweet, like he just did sneaking up to her in the office.

“What does that mean?” Tex chimed in now, too.

She looked at both of them. She lowered her eyes and focused on the papers she needed to file as she picked them up and tapped them on the counter, making them straight and in line with one another.

“It just means I need to put him first. To make sure that I don’t rush into anything and forget who I am, what I went through and my fears,” she said, not looking at them. Tex took her hand and Pierce pressed up close to her and wrapped his arm around her waist.

“We’re not him, Vye. We aren’t some asshole soldiers who abuse women, demean them, destroy their self-esteem, and then take what we want before kicking them to the curb. We care about you and about Benny. Guardianship is more than just having bodyguards or men that are responsible for you. It means we want you in our lives as our woman and hopefully, someday, our wife. It can’t get any more secure and perfect than that,” Tex stated.

She felt bad. She was trying to learn how to let her guard down and completely let them in. They were hard men, commanding, and in charge. As much as it turned them on, especially during sex when they ordered her to do things or to raise her arms above her head or whatever, she wondered if in the long run her submissiveness would make them lose respect for her, or worse, not want to be with her and move on to some other woman. She supposed her self-esteem was scarred pretty damn good.

“Hey, what are the tears for?” Tex asked and she turned in Pierce’s arms and held Tex’s hand. She brought it against her chest and looked way up at both gladiators of men.

“I guess my self-esteem was damaged from Murdock. I’m afraid if I’m submissive that eventually you’ll get bored and find someone else,” she said.

“Are you kidding me? Sweetie, I’m in love with you already, and I’ve never said those words before, nor been in love,” Tex said and a tear fell.

“Really?” she asked. He smiled and cupped her face, wiping her cheek.

“Hell yeah.”

He pressed his mouth to hers and kissed her tenderly.

“What’s going on in here? I want in on this action,” Lou stated, joining them, and Vye laughed then accepted Lou’s hug and kiss after Tex released her. The others came in too and they talked about the schedule and about the plans for the evening. Pierce didn’t say that he loved her, too, and she wasn’t surprised because he was so hard and rough, and the most quiet. Frankie could be that way, too, and even Tex, but he’d surprised her by admitting he loved her. She loved him, too. She loved all of them, but she didn’t want to scare them, or jinx this relationship, so she would keep it to herself and wa

it them out. Her focus was on tonight and getting to make love to her men again. That’s when everything felt perfect.

* * * *

Later at the ranch, Kendrick sat in the chair in the kitchen holding Benny and talking to him. The baby was super cute and kept reaching out, grabbing Kendrick’s cheeks and kissing him. Well, more like sucking his face but it was still cute. He laughed.

“Oh, God, Kendrick, I’m sorry. He does that to me all the time. Even pulls my hair,” she said and stepped closer.

“Do you want me to take him?” she asked.

“No way. I don’t mind at all. Plus, he and I have things to talk about.” She placed her hands on her hips, her blouse parted and Kendrick could see the deep cleavage of her

breasts. He looked down at the baby in his arms and Benny made little gurgling, baby sounds. Kendrick hid his smile. “You see, little man, we’ve got eyes on your mamma. We’re fixin on making her our woman. You need to help us out here. Put in a good word or two, and get her to fully commit,” Kendrick said.

“Kendrick,” she scolded and went to softly swat at his arm, but he snagged her around the waist and pulled her close. Benny kicked and moved his arms, wanting his mamma. She lowered down and lifted Benny up into her arms and held him while Kendrick kept a possessive hand on her ass.

“You don’t listen to a word he says, Benny.” She gave Kendrick a sideways glance but she was smirking.

“He doesn’t know what he’s talking about. I’ve already made him mine, and his brothers, too. So there,” she said over her shoulder at Kendrick.

“Oh, honey, you just wait until that little guy falls asleep. I’ll show you how committed I am and how I own that ass of yours.” Kendrick said standing up and closing the space between them. He wrapped his arms around her and Benny, and lay his chin on her shoulder and kissed her neck and cheek.

“You’re mine already, sweetness,” he said and kissed her neck as he held her, then cupped her breasts.

She eased back against him.

“You are so sexy, mamma. I can’t resist wanting you. Next to me, in my arms, under me...all of you, always.” He stroked her nipple and she moaned.

“Why don’t I take the baby,” Lou said and reached for Benny. Vye looked at him. “Are you sure?”

“Positive. He likes me best anyway,” Lou said and took Benny into his arms and rocked him as he gave him a pacifier to suck on.

Kendrick lifted Vye into his arms and carried her out of the room laughing.

“To the dungeon with you, my pretty,” he teased and headed upstairs with Pierce and Tex on his heels.

Kendrick dropped Vye down onto the bed and pressed between her legs. He ran his palms up her thighs, lifting her skirt, then took her arms and pressed them above her head. He leaned down over her and pressed his mouth to hers. He thrust his hips against her mound, letting her feel how hard his erection was and how badly he wanted to be inside of her. Tex and Pierce undressed and he tapped her hands.

“Keep those up there just like that,” he ordered. She lay there, arms up, legs down, her skirt to her hips, and her top coming undone. He pulled off his shirt and tossed it to the side chair. He ran his palms up her thighs and stroked her panties over her mound.

“Kendrick,” she moaned and Tex and Pierce stood on either side of him as he undressed. They were naked already. She looked at the three of them.

“Someone is overdressed,” Tex said and reached for her skirt and panties, then pulled them down and off of her.

Pierce climbed onto the bed and started to undo her top. He lowered down and suckled her breast as he unclipped the front of her bra. He helped her out of her top so she was fully naked, too, and then pressed her arms above her head. He flexed his muscles and let his cock tap against her hip.

“I’m going to fill that pretty mouth with cock, lover,” he said and pressed his mouth

over hers and kissed her.

“First a little taste of sweet, sweet Vye,” Kendrick whispered and ran his paws up her thighs, spread them, and then licked her from cunt to asshole.

Vye wiggled and moaned.

Tex and Pierce started to cup her breasts and play with the buds.

“More than a handful,” Tex said and squeezed, then suckled the tip of one.

“Luscious, firm, round, and delicious,” Pierce stated and licked her nipple then suckled it.

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“Oh, God, please. Please,” she moaned and Kendrick licked the cream dripping from her cunt.

“She is so fucking wet. Fuck,” Kendrick said and lifted up, aligned his cock with her pussy, and thrust right into her.

“Kendrick!” she exclaimed as he filled her up and began to thrust over and over again into her pussy.

She reached for him and he grabbed her hands. His brothers released her breasts and he pressed her arms above her head.

“Keep them there. You listen or there’ll be hell to pay,” he said and she moaned louder. He ran his hand along her throat, held her possessively there and stroked her. She seemed to like it, got turned on by him restraining her so he grunted and thrust faster.

“So sexy and wet. She needs all of us,” he said and then pulled out, lifted her up, and kissed her on the mouth. She wrapped her arms around his waist as he turned, fell back to the bed, and she ravaged his mouth.

“Goddamn, our woman is a wild thing,” Pierce called out.

Smack.

Smack.

Smack.

“Oh!” She exclaimed after pulling from Kendrick’s mouth. She lifted up and he aligned his cock with her pussy as Tex tapped a tube of lube in his hand.

“So sexy,” Tex said and cupped her breast. He held her gaze. “I need, too, mamma.”

“Yes. Take me together. Please,” she said and lifted up, aligned her pussy with Kendrick’s cock as he assisted, then lowered down and began to ride him.

“Beautiful and perfect,” Pierce said, gripping her hair, pulling her toward him to kiss her.

A moment later as she rocked back and forth on Kendrick’s cock while he played with her pussy, she battled for control of the kiss with Pierce until she tightened, jerked, and then moaned.

“Sweet heavens, she is so fucking tight. I love fucking this ass, Vye, and I love you, baby,” Tex said and kissed her shoulder.

“Oh, Tex,” she said after she pulled from Pierce’s mouth. “I love you, too.”

Tex kissed her lips and then her shoulder.

“Hold on, baby. We’re going to take you for a ride,” Tex said and eased the rest of the way into her ass. Pierce took that moment to bring her head down to his cock so she could suck him down. Kendrick watched and moaned at the sight and the sensations.

She was their woman. They loved her and she loved them. “Love you, Vye. I fucking love you. Love fucking you and hearing you purr and come and let my brothers take

you together the way it's supposed to be. This is perfect," Kendrick said and thrust upward faster. She moaned and rocked between the three of them.

"Fuck," Tex exclaimed, coming a few strokes later.

"Vye! You're mine, woman. Mine!" Kendrick exclaimed and came next.

Tex got up and then Pierce was pumping faster into her mouth when he grunted and came. She sucked him clean and he fell back onto the bed.

"Amazing," Pierce said.

Then she lowered down and kissed Kendrick, who rolled her to her back and started kissing and caressing every inch of her.

"You are our everything," Kendrick said and continued a path along her body as Tex returned with a washcloth and towel to clean Vye up.

"I'll go relieve Lou of his duties," Pierce told her and then lowered down, cupped a breast, and kissed her mouth. He trailed his thumb over her nipple and then slid his hand down over her ribs.

"Get ready for Lou and Frankie," he said and then exited the room with Tex.

* * * *

Lou and Frankie walked up the stairs after Tex and Pierce came downstairs to take care of Benny.

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“This could work, you know? Taking turns caring for Benny and then making love to Vye,” Lou said to Frankie.

“She should be living here with us. The baby, too, like it’s supposed to be now that we’re lovers,” Frankie said sounding pissed.

“Hey, she needs time to adjust. It will happen,” Lou said.

They walked into the bedroom to find Kendrick and Vye making out on the bed. She was over Kendrick, her sexy, round ass and toned thighs facing them.

“Now this is a sight I can get used to,” Lou said and quickly got undressed. Frankie did the same and Kendrick rolled her to her side and kissed her again. When he released her lips, he gave her a smile, stroked her jaw, and then started getting up.

“See you later,” he said and she smiled wide and watched him walk over and get his clothes. Lou stood by the edge of the bed and stroked his cock.

“Hey, beautiful,” he said to her. She smiled.

He reached down and stroked her calf. She giggled. He gripped her ankle and pulled her lower, then pressed a knee between her thighs and moved over her. He stroked her hair from her cheek, then brushed his thumb over her lower lip. “You look well loved.” He stroked her nipple and she tightened up and tried closing her legs.

“Oh no you don’t, baby. You’re all ours,” Frankie said, joining them on the bed and lowering to suckle her other nipple into his mouth. She reached for his head and tilted

up, hissing at his brother's methods.

"That she is," Lou said and maneuvered between her legs. Frankie pulled his mouth from her breast and Lou kissed her, then rolled to his back taking her with him. He cupped her breast and she lifted up, let her long blonde hair fall forward, then lowered down and kissed him on the mouth. She plunged her tongue in deeply and he ravished her in return until she jerked and pulled from his mouth.

Her eyes widened and she started to push back.

"Oh yeah, baby, just like that. Such a tight, wet ass. You need me inside here, don't ya?" Frankie asked her. He gripped her shoulder and rocked against her ass.

"Yes, Frankie. Please," she said.

"Lift up. Take me inside of you," Lou ordered. He gripped her hips and

assisted. She sunk down onto his cock, her pussy hot and wet. He moaned and then rocked his hips.

"Lou, oh, you're so big and hard," she said and slowly started to rock her hips.

"Just wait, baby. I got something really big and hard waiting for this ass. You ready?" Frankie asked.

"Yes. Oh, God, yes." She lowered down as Frankie pressed on her back. She hugged Lou and rocked her hips. Lou ran his palm over her ass cheeks and spread them wide as Frankie pressed lube to her ass. He fingered her as Lou thrust into her. She moaned and panted.

"So sexy, and all ours," Frankie said and pulled his fingers from her ass and replaced

them with his cock. Lou felt the tightness and then heard Frankie moaned. Vye moaned, as well, followed by him as he began to thrust and stroke into her body, needing, wanting to mark her their woman forever. They moved faster and faster. His brother grunted and smacked her ass several times, causing Vye to cry out and her voice went horse.

Lou gripped her cheeks and forced her to look at him. Her eyes were glazed over, her lips full and wet.

“I love you, Vye.”

“I love you, too,” she whispered and then Frankie stroked into her ass harder and she moaned. Lou counterthrust again and again until Vye cried out another release and they followed, coming inside of her.

* * * *

Frankie stood there by the doorway, his arms crossed and anger in his belly. She was leaving and he didn't want her to. He wanted Vye here with them. Benny, too. They could take care of the two of them and be a family. Why did she have to leave?

“Please, Frankie. Don't look at me like that,” Vye said, standing there barefoot and trying to find where she'd put her sandals. Tex was putting Benny into the carrier seat for the car. As she went to get her sandals that were on the floor next to him, he stared down at her.

“You should be staying here with us, living under our roof and under our care and protection. You're our responsibility, our woman, and we're your guardians,” he stated firmly.

“Frankie,” she said.

Frankie cursed and uncrossed his arms. She grabbed onto his arm with her delicate, feminine hand and he stopped. He reached for her, ran his hands along her hips, and then lifted her up and set her ass down on the table.

She cupped his cheeks.

“Please, Frankie, understand that we need time to adjust to this.”

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“Adjust to what? Us loving you, wanting you in our bed at night, holding you close and knowing that you’re safe? This is bullshit, plain and simple. Enough is enough. You got a decision to make. This week. One more fucking week is all I’m allowing of this nonsense.” He stared down at her and she narrowed her eyes and growled.

He cupped her cheeks and kissed her hard on the mouth. He lowered her to the table and caressed her hair. She ran her fingers through his hair and he rocked his hips against her mound.

When he released her lips, he trailed his mouth along her neck and to her breast. He nipped her nipple above the material of her blouse and bra and ran his hands up and down her thighs as he held her gaze.

“You should be right here with us. I don’t like it when you’re not with me or my brothers. I hate it, Vye. Fucking hate not having you where I can see you, hold you, and get lost inside this sexy body.”

She looked toward the others and so did Frankie. Their expressions were just as hard and angry as he felt.

“You all want us here with you? You all feel like Frankie does?”

“Yes,” Tex said.

“Yup,” Lou stated.

“Fuck yeah,” Pierce said.

She held Kendrick's gaze.

"Sweetie, I would be in heaven if every night your sweet, tight ass was wedged up against my cock ready for me to take you at any time," Kendrick stated. She blushed and they chuckled.

"I second that," Pierce said.

"We all want that," Tex said and winked at her.

She looked at Frankie.

"I just wanted to be sure. I guess I'm still getting over insecurities, fears, a little distrust in men in general because of what happened. You'll help me though. Just like you have been."

"Help you more if you're living with us, sharing a home, our daily lives, and our bed," he countered.

"You're sure?" she asked.

"Definitely," Frankie stated.

"Then I'll talk to Ella and the uncles tomorrow. I'll see how this process works. I accept whatever you ask and want of me. I trust you, each of you, and love you. I want this to be perfect, and perfect is with the five of you."

Frankie gave her a wink and then kissed her. When he released her lips and helped her up, he gave her ass a tap. "Forget me giving you a week. A couple of days, maybe one, then you and Benny are moving in here. That's final," he said.

She raised her hand and saluted him. “Yes, sir.”

“Why you little—”

She gasped and ran around the table and right to Pierce, jumping into his arms.

“Help,” she exclaimed and they all laughed.

“Oh, she is going to try and play us against one another I see. Well, there’s only one way to handle that,” Pierce said, and gave her ass a spank.

“Hey, you were supposed to help me, not spank me,” she said.

“There are rules, sweetie, and something tells me that you are going to have a very pink ass more often than not. Just saying,” Pierce said and then squeezed her ass and kissed her.

The others chuckled and Frankie wondered if she would accept all the rules or give a hard time over every single one of them? Suddenly he felt excited. A nice ass spanking was defiantly going to lead to some serious love-making. Looks like life was only going to get better and better, and nothing was going to destroy what they had with Vye. Nothing.

Chapter Nine

“I don’t know anything. I don’t,” Gay screamed as Murdock grabbed her by her hair and pulled her into the living room. He’d broken into the apartment along with three other men.

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“I know you’re lying, bitch. Where is she? I know you flew out somewhere. Your neighbor watched your fucking cat,” he yelled and smacked her across the mouth, sending her onto the couch. Gay nearly fell off of it, but then pulled herself back up and used her forearm to cover her face and head. “Please stop this. Stop it, please. I don’t know where Vye went. I haven’t seen her in months.”

“Got anything?” Murdock yelled to one of the other men. He was rummaging through her desk drawer. He was going to find her ticket information on the reservation she’d just made to visit Salvation again next month. Oh, God, no. No, don’t let them find it.

“What’s this?” the guy said and pulled out notes. He found it.

“Texas. That’s where she went and it looks like she’s going there again,” the guy said and then continued searching.

Murdock pulled her up by her hair. “You fucking lied to me?” He struck her again and again and Gay felt dizzy as she cried and begged him to stop. He was a monster. She never expected him to show up after so much time. She thought she had been careful. She didn’t even call the police the first time they came because she didn’t want to bring attention to Val or make it easy for him to find her. She thought sneaking her out of New York would be enough. Now what was she going to do? How would she warn Val?

“Grab the address and info. My woman is there. She went to Texas and we’ll find her.”

“What about her?” his other friend asked.

“We can’t have her warning Vye that I’m coming.”

He put a gun against her head.

“No. Oh, God, no,” she cried out.

“You can’t shoot her. It will be heard and it will lead to more trouble. Tie her up, and keep her from blabbing,” the other guy said.

“She needs to be helpless for longer than that,” another guy said, and as she looked at him, Murdock slammed the butt of his gun against her head. She cried out and then fell back against the couch and darkness

as it overtook her vision.

* * * *

“So I was thinking, maybe we could go by the hardware store together and you can pick out a nice color to paint Benny’s bedroom,” Frankie whispered against Vye’s ear. His arms were wrapped around her waist tight as he held her by the printer in the office. They were all finished up for the day and she just needed to make a few more copies before filing them.

She was surprised by his suggestion. They hadn’t really talked about where a crib would go in their home or about which bedroom she would share with them. They, however, seemed to have it all figured out. She turned in his arms and ran her hands up his chest. Her head was tilted all the way back, something she was getting used to with her five very tall, masculine soldiers.

“Paint color for Benny’s room? What do you mean?”

“I mean he’ll have his own room. The guest bedroom down the hall between my room and Tex’s. We’re changing things up anyway, working it out so we all get to have you in our arms at night.”

She felt emotional as tears filled her eyes. That they would do this for her. Make her and Benny feel so special. He squinted at her.

“You’re not rethinking moving in, are you? We’re set for tonight. Benny’s room will be painted in a few days, once you make a decision on color,” he said so seriously. She couldn’t believe big, bad Frankie with all his tattoos and serious attitude was sounding jubilated about painting a baby’s room. Tears spilled from her eyes. He tightened his hold. Her nose clogged up.

“What’s wrong?” he asked loudly.

“What?” Tex asked, coming in and seeing her. The others followed and she cried, and then hugged Frankie tight. “I love you so much. I love all of you so very, very much,” she said and squeezed him tight. Frankie held her and caressed her back and her ass.

“What did you say to her, man?” Pierce asked.

“Just asked her about picking a color for Benny’s bedroom,” Frankie replied.

“And you got this reaction?” Lou asked and walked over and caressed her back.

She chuckled and wiped her eyes as she pulled back. She held Frankie’s hand.

“I’m fine. I just appreciate how much you all care, and every day I love it more and more that we’re together. That Benny and I have men we can count on for love and support and protection, and I think I can finally feel happy and safe.”

“You think?” Pierce asked and stepped closer and pulled her into his arms. He cupped her head and hair and wrapped his arm around her waist.

“I know,” she said and he kissed her, and she kissed him right back.

“I’ll order the pizza. You guys go pick out the paint and stuff and we’ll get it done together. Then in a couple of days, once the smell of fresh paint is out of the room, we can move Benny’s crib in. Kendrick and Pierce were working on a high-tech monitoring system so that we can all hear him when he wakes or needs something,” Tex said.

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“What?” she asked when Pierce released her lips.

He ran his hand over her ass and gave it a tap.

“Your soldiers are resourceful,” he said and winked, then suckled against her neck. She held onto his big muscles and then pulled back.

“Oh wait. We were going to do some more training in self-defense. I was getting good at that stuff,” she said.

“We can teach you at home. In the bedroom,” Pierce told her.

“In the bedroom?” she asked, pulling back.

“Oh yeah. Very complex and sneaky tactics,” Lou said and then slid his hand under her shirt and to her breast, cupping it.

“Lou!” she exclaimed and they all laughed.

“My kind of training. Good idea, bro. Let’s move,” Tex said and they gathered their things and headed out. Vye shook her head and felt her cheeks warm, but she held onto Pierce’s arm, hugging him as Frankie joined them. Something told Vye there would be no painting getting done tonight at all.

* * * *

Bailey, Turbo, Brady, and Cobra arrived at the apartment building just as Grisha

arrived. They weren't the only ones there tracking down Murdock to a woman's apartment. Creagan, Nuvon's main security guy, was there, and so were a bunch of police and paramedics.

They got out of the SUV at the end of the block after pulling up alongside Creagan's SUV.

"What's going on here?" Turbo asked Creagan, but Creagan looked right at Grisha. Bailey listened and just kept his mouth closed. These men were intense. Creagan was a mean-ass-looking dude with a scar down his cheek.

"Grisha, you didn't need to travel so far for this. I have it covered," Creagan said to him.

"I'm here. What do you have?" he asked.

"Two men who did some work for Nuvon had access to inventory lists and such. They did some side work for the boss. My associate, she came across some information and we were just coming by to check this lead when we came upon the scene," Creagan said.

"Where is your assistant and what did you find out?" Grisha asked in a thick, Russian accent.

Creagan looked down the block and Bailey noticed a very attractive woman with straight, long brown hair walking toward them. She was dressed in a slim-fitting black business dress that hugged her figure. She looked classy and confident until she seemed to lock gazes with Grisha, and then she shyly looked away and pushed her hair behind her hair before she approached.

"What did the cops say?" Creagan asked.

She looked at Grisha and nodded, like she knew who he was and showed respect for him. Then Creagan squinted like that pissed him off, but that was just Bailey's observation.

"A woman, Gay Colon, was beaten and knocked unconscious after some men broke into the apartment. Nothing was stolen, but the place was ransacked like they were looking for something. The one detective mentioned her only having family in Texas and that they were looking up a woman named Ella Brazzos. That's all I got."

Bailey looked at Cobra and knew that it was Tex's woman's aunt who'd been beaten up.

"When did this happen?" Bailey asked. The woman looked at him.

"When?" Grisha asked, eying her over.

"Two days ago, they think. They aren't sure. The woman is in bad shape," Anastasia said.

"Bailey, Tex's girlfriend, this is her aunt's place and she was involved with Murdock. You better contact Tex. If this happened two days or more ago, and he knows we're all onto him and his buddies, he could be heading to Texas or already there," Turbo said to Bailey.

"This is fucking crazy. Can this Tex guy and your friends handle Murdock and his buddies?" Grisha asked.

"They're soldiers. Special Forces, and this dick abused and is after their woman. What do you think?" Bailey asked, then picked up the phone and called Tex, explaining the situation and the fact that they didn't know how long her aunt had been hurt and alone in the apartment, but they assumed it was days.

Chapter Ten

They were all enjoying the town festival and the picnic they set up around all their friends. They'd picked a nice spot by the sheriff's department that had both shade and sun. Everyone was there—Lavery, Ford, Ghost, Evan, Lois, baby Connor, and the kids. Their dads, John, Bane, Scott, and their wife, Dora. Valentina and her men and the kids, as well as their other friends.

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Tex was talking with Ford and Ghost, along with Frankie and Pierce. He could see Vye walking Benny in the stroller and heading down the sidewalk with Kenny tagging along.

“Looks like you guys are being replaced right now with Kenny for a stroll,” Ford said and Ghost chuckled.

“That boy has been obsessed with Benny and Vye since they came to Salvation,” Ghost stated.

“He’s a good kid,” Frankie said and Tex smiled.

“Did Ford tell you the story about the day Lois went into labor?” Ghost asked Tex and Frankie.

“No, he didn’t,” Tex said.

“Oh, you’re going to get a kick out of this one,” Ford said and began to explain about Kenny’s concerns over Vye and Benny and how he’d told Ford that he needed to assign the McCann brothers as her guardians. They looked at Vye the way Ford and his brothers look at his mommy Lois. The men chuckled as Vye and Kenny disappeared around the corner.

“That explains the sit-down Kenny asked us for earlier today,” Tex said.

“What sit down?” Ghost asked.

Frankie chuckled.

“You didn’t catch sight of the deep discussion we all had with him by the lake?” Frankie asked and smirked.

“Oh boy. That kid is too much. What exactly did you all talk about?” Ford asked.

“Seems he may take over your job Ford, when you’re ready to retire,” Tex said and Frankie laughed.

“I have got to hear this,” Ghost said and Ford narrowed his eyes and looking serious. It made Tex chuckle, but then they told him about the conversation and how Kenny laid down the law and made sure they knew how to be patient and understanding to a woman who had been abused and treated badly. They were shocked at how much the poor boy had witnessed of his own mom’s abuse. It made them think about how lucky Benny was not to be exposed to his violent father, or the circumstances of that life back in Pennsylvania. It just made them feel even more protective of Vye and Benny. They gained a great deal of respect for a nine-year-old little boy like Kenny.

* * * *

It was quiet and Vye and Kenny were walking back down the sidewalk toward the main event and crowds of people while Kenny was pushing the stroller.

“I like Tex, Kendrick, Pierce, Frankie, and Lou. They’re good men, and they love you a whole bunch,” Kenny told her and she smiled.

“That noticeable, huh?” she asked, knowing how in tune Kenny was to everything that was going on. He was so smart and caring. Lois and the men were lucky to have such a great son. In fact, she noticed most kids around here seemed respectful and kind. It was a small town. A very close knit one and it made it even more special of a

place.

“Benny is going to have five dads who will love him, play ball with him, and teach him lots of cool stuff like my dads taught me and Waylan,” he said to her, and she smiled.

“I hope so. They really seem to love Benny and he likes them, too. Gets all excited and babbles, raises his hands out for them to pick him up whenever they approach. It’s comforting,” she said and then noticed a car ahead with tinted windows, and a man standing outside of it, right across the street from where they were walking. As they passed, the window rolled down and she gasped. Oh, God, no. Murdock.

“What is it? What’s wrong?” Kenny asked as the car door opened.

“Kenny, get Benny out of here. Get him to your dad, to Tex and my men, now.”

“Wait. Why? Who is that?” he asked. She looked down at Kenny with tears in her eyes and a serious, firm expression.

“He’ll hurt Benny. You have to save him. I’ll distract him. Hurry,” she said and pressed against Kenny’s back. The boy walked quickly, pushing the stroller and glancing over his shoulder. She took a deep breath. She had feared this day would come. What would he do? What would he say to her? Would he want to hurt Benny? Take him? She glanced up the sidewalk. Kenny was far ahead and disappearing into the crowd.

Murdock closed the space between them, eyed her over, and grabbed her arm.

“Let go of me,” she demanded and yanked her arm free.

He lifted his shirt, revealing the gun.

“I’ll start shooting fucking people. You think I fucking care?” he said and pulled her along toward the car.

“Why are you here? I left and you wanted nothing to do with me.”

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“That’s not how this works,” he said and pulled her close, inhaled against her neck, and ran his hand over her ass. “Fuck, baby, you look damn good. Super fucking sexy. I missed you,” he said to her and she pushed away, only for him to grab her arm hard, instantly causing bruises. She glanced over her shoulder. She didn’t want anyone getting hurt over her. These people in this town were good people.

“I can’t fucking wait,” he said and pulled her past the car and toward the side of the building. He shoved her ahead of him and she fell to her knees, crying out as her legs scraped against the ground.

He was licking his lips and then snorting like he’d just done coke or something. Anger pooled in her belly. That hatred so raw and intense, she hated like never before. Her happiness was at stake here. Her life with her men, with Benny, was all jeopardized by this man and what he thought he had a right to.

“Stay away from me, Murdock. I don’t belong to you anymore.”

“Oh, you think so. Do you?” he asked and grabbed her dress, ripping the material as he pulled her close. She struck him. Right in the throat, stunning him. As she ran past, Detrix was there, pointing a gun at her.

“I don’t think so, honey. We traveled far to get here to you. I was promised a nice, sweet piece of ass like you and I’m going to get it,” Detrix said as strong arms wrapped around her waist, and a hand cupped her breast hard.

“Ouch!” she cried out, struggling to get free.

“You bitch. You’ve forgotten where your place is,” Murdock said as he lifted her up and pulled her back between the buildings. She screamed and kicked at him and then remembered the training her men had given her. Where were the men? Hadn’t Kenny gotten to them by now?

She slammed her head up and back hard, hitting Murdock in the nose. He grunted and then yelled. He dropped her to the ground and kicked her. When he reached down to pull her up. He struck her in the face just as she saw the gun in his waistband and Detrix walking closer, gun still on her. She didn’t care. She wasn’t letting these men rape her or destroy what she had here in Salvation.

As he bent down again, she reached for the gun and then fell back to the ground, her face throbbing, her lip bleeding. She fired the weapon. Murdock raged as the bullet hit his shoulder and he attacked.

* * * *

Tex’s phone started ringing and, glancing down, he saw it was Bailey calling. As he answered, his eyes locked onto the sidewalk and Kenny running, pushing the stroller alone.

“What the hell?” Frankie said and took off with Ford and Ghost. Kenny was yelling.

“Bailey?”

“Get your woman and her baby. Her ex could be there. Him and his crew of shit beat up her aunt and left her for dead.”

“Fuck. He’s here. I have to go.” He ended the call and ran.

“It’s two men in a car. Vye told me to get Benny away from them as quickly as

possible and get help. She's in trouble, Daddy."

"Where? Where is she?" Frankie asked.

"Down the block across from the post office," he said and Ella came running over with Lois and the others.

"Hurry," Ford said as Kendrick, Pierce, Frankie, Tex, Lou, and a bunch of other men started running down the street, guns drawn. When they heard the gunshot, Tex felt his heart drop to his stomach.

"Vye!" he yelled out as they got around the corner, saw the man with the gun, and more shots rang out.

* * * *

"You fucking bitch!" Murdock roared and jumped at her. Vye fired the gun again and again and rolled to her side. She'd gotten up when the next shot rang out, and something slammed into her shoulder and sent her forward to the ground. Two more shots went off. She realized as she lay face down on the ground and that she felt numb aside from the pain in her shoulder, which was excruciating.

"Vye. Oh fuck, he shot her. Call and ambulance!" Frankie yelled out and was down next to her.

"What a fucking mess. She killed him. I got the other one," Ford said and she could hear the radios going off and sirens blaring.

Frankie and Tex were there.

"Benny?" she asked, voice cracking and tears rolling down her cheeks.

“He’s okay. Kenny did as you said and got him away from trouble. Oh, God, baby. We should have been protecting you,” Frankie said.

“It hurts,” she moaned and cried harder.

“Let me see. Carefully roll her over,” Lou said and she moaned and grunted.

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“Fuck. There’s so much fucking blood,” Pierce stated. Lou ripped off his shirt. She saw all the men around her, and then Lou pushed the material of her dress to the side and pulled off his shirt and applied pressure. “It looks like it went right through. Where’s the fucking ambulance?” he asked.

Frankie caressed her cheek.

“Just relax. You’re going to be okay,” he said.

“Murdock?” she asked.

“Dead,” Tex stated.

“I wouldn’t let him take me, Frankie. I wasn’t leaving you guys or Salvation. Benny and I love it here,” she said and felt cold and dizzy. She shivered.

“Paramedics are here. Let them in, Lou,” Tex said and then she closed her eyes and leaned back. She wasn’t going to die. She wasn’t going to leave her men. Benny deserved to have his mamma and dads that will love him.

“You stay strong, baby. We need you,” Pierce said to her.

She must have passed out or something, because she felt her body jerk and then she was being lifted into an ambulance on a stretcher.

“I’m not going anywhere. Wait for me. I love you,” she said to them.

The paramedics were talking to her and tending to the bullet wound. She heard them say different things over the radio as sirens blared and the ambulance took off to the hospital. She kept her eyes closed and thought of her men and of Benny. Murdock was dead. He could never hurt her or her family ever again. Never.

Epilogue

The sound of Benny crying woke Vye up from a deep sleep. She started to move when a strong arm wrapped around her waist and pulled her closer.

“Don’t even think about it,” Tex said, then kissed her forehead and then the scar she had from the bullet wound. She blinked her eyes and stared at him as lips kissed her shoulder from behind her.

“Lou’s turn, remember?” Frankie asked and smoothed his palm up her thigh to her belly. She closed her eyes and relaxed between them.

“What time is it?” she asked a few minutes later.

“Almost seven,” Kendrick said from

the doorway.

She adjusted herself between Tex and Frankie, cringing as her shoulder ached.

“Stay in bed a little longer,” Tex ordered.

“I’m awake now, especially with these two hard things pressing up against my ass and my belly,” she said and Tex chuckled.

“You aren’t tired from the long night of lovemaking?” Frankie asked, cupping her

breast and kissing along her neck. She shook her head and eased back against him just as Tex started to lower his mouth to her breast. As his hot mouth suckled her nipple, she moaned.

“I’m awake, too,” Pierce stated joining Kendrick in the room. Her men all gathered around her, kissing her softly, caressing her body. She wanted more. Craved more, despite the pain she was still in. It had only been a month. She was excited though. Aunt Gay was able to travel now and she was going to move out to Salvation, right down the road from the farm. She was going to babysit Benny as Vye finished her college degree and worked at the training center with her men.

She moaned as Tex suckled her clit and then slid a finger up into her pussy.

“Yes. Oh, that feels perfect,” she said and Frankie chuckled.

“Damn, baby. I love you so much,” Frankie said and kissed her lips.

“As do we. I’ve got the lube. That ass is mine this time,” Kendrick said.

“Me next,” Pierce stated and then it was on. Tex grabbed her hips and rolled to his back, taking her with him. She gasped, and then pushed away the feelings of aches and pains from her shoulder and focused on her men, their bodies, and those thick, hard cocks of theirs. She was in heaven. She lifted up and aligned her pussy with Tex’s cock and slid down over his thick, hard cock. He moaned and so did she.

Hands landed on her hips and then she felt the cool liquid and then Kendrick’s mouth on her shoulder.

“I love making love to you, woman.”

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They all mumbled in agreement and then she felt fingers of lube press into her ass as Tex began to thrust upward. She rocked her hips and rode him, then pressed back against Kendrick's fingers.

"Together, baby," Frankie said, pulling her down to kiss him before he lowered her head to his cock. She inhaled his scent, smiled, and then opened wide and accepted his dick. She sucked him down, moved her body, the aches no longer a care. Just loving her men, and letting them love her. She could have lost this chance forever. She pushed the thoughts from her head as Kendrick pulled out his fingers and replaced them with his cock.

He slowly pushed into her ass and they moved in sync, thrusting and stroking until her first orgasm hit her. Tex moaned and groaned, and then Frankie came in her mouth. She swallowed his seed and licked him gently before he pulled back. He moved off the bed and Kendrick came next.

"Goddamn, it just keeps getting better and better," he said. Kendrick pulled out and Pierce took his place.

Pierce slid more lube into her ass and then gripped her hips and pushed his cock inside. He slid his hands along her good shoulder, being sure not to grab her bad one as he rocked his hips and made love to her. Heaven. It was pure heaven. The sounds, moans, and groans filled the room and then Lou was there.

"I thought I was going to miss out on this."

"Fuck," Pierce said and came inside of her. He pulled out and Tex rolled her to her

back gently.

“Shoulder okay?” he asked. She nodded and he thrust harder into her cunt.

“Oh, Tex. Oh, God, that feels good,” she said, tilting her head back. He cupped her breast and stroked faster and faster. Come with me. Come,” he demanded and then thrust a few more times, making her moan a release, and he followed. Tex kissed her everywhere from lips to breasts to belly as he slid his cock from her body and then kissed her inner thighs. She opened her eyes and locked gazes with Lou.

“You, me, and the shower,” he said and scooped her up into his arms, kissed her lips, then carried her into the shower. She hugged him tight and looked over her shoulder seeing Tex pulling on his pants, Frankie sitting back in the chair naked and still recovering, and Pierce getting dressed. Kendrick must be with Benny. She smiled as Lou turned on the shower, tested the water, and then brought her right under the spray. He readjusted her in his arms, pressed her up against the wall, and rocked his hips.

“I love you, sweetness,” he said.

“I love you, too,” she replied, and ran her hands through his wet hair then rocked her hips back against his. Lou lowered slightly and licked then suckled her nipple as he aligned his cock with her pussy. She lowered down over it as he feasted on her breasts. She moaned.

“Oh, Lou. Yes,” she said, tilting her head back as he rocked into her and licked along her throat, his hands on her hips as he rocked harder and deeper into her cunt.

“So fucking good. Goddamn, baby, I’ll never get enough of loving you. Life is perfect. I would be nothing without you,” he said to her and kissed her lips. She hugged him and he continued to thrust into her, a little slower though. “I’m so there.”

“Me, too,” she replied. The emotions and the powerful connection they all shared was amazing. Her juices flowed and he grunted and came inside of her.

She held him around his shoulders as the water sprayed over their bodies. Lou kissed along the scar on her shoulder. To him and his brothers, it was a constant reminder of what they all could have lost, but to her it was a reminder of what she fought so hard to keep. Her men, her family, and a safe, loving future for her and Benny here in Salvation. Together with her five American soldiers was exactly where she and Benny were meant to be, and every day they would celebrate their blessings, and remember that dark, lonely, rainy night when fate stepped in and sent her heroes. As Aunt Ella said, it was the beginning of the love story that Vye and Benny truly deserved.

THE END