

Quaranteam: North West

Chapter 23 (Beta)

By BreaktheBar

The following story is based on the fantastic [Quaranteam](#) series by CorruptingPower over on Literotica. You can continue to expect general themes of light Mind Control, bonding and Harems from the original, but with a slightly edgy and alternative cast.

Returning Dramatis Personae

House Black

- Harrison '**Harri**' Black - Sheriff of Black County, 'Jason Momoa-looking motherfucker' mountain man (mixed heritage), former Army MP
- **Erica** LaCosta - Fiancee of Harri, Leo's sister, Italian Tattoo Artist, Dark Brunette
- **Kyla** Bautista - Trained dancer, Phillipino Spy, Harri's Deputy Sheriff, Raven hair
- **Ivy** Gauthier - Quebecoise stripper, half-tattooed, Dirty Blonde anal queen
- **Vanessa** Peters - Construction Forewoman, Daughter of Brent Peters the head of the construction project, Brunette

Natives

- **Kara** Swiftwater - Harrison's high school sweetheart that ended poorly, community leader of the local Native band, Raven hair

US Military

- Lt Col **Miriam** Abarbanel - Military friend of Harri's, Air Force Lt Col, Jewish heritage, Commanding Officer for Valhalla Hills construction and the Oregon Quaranteam research project
- Captain **Laura** Bloomberg - Air Force JAG serving as Miriam's second, Blonde

Guns of Thunder Bikers

- ??? - Leader of the gang, somewhere in his mid-fifties. Served as a Marine in the Gulf War, and the early invasion of Afghanistan. Father of Kashm.
- **Chuck** - Young, dumb, relatively attractive biker. Dating Kashm.
- ??? 'Neck Tattoo' - Neck tattoo of eagle and American flag.
- **Garret** - Older biker, dangerous hippy vibes.
- **Kashm** - Short Persian woman with an attitude, daughter of the Guns of Thunger biker boss. Big tits, hourglass figure. Dating Chuck.

Militia/Sovereign Citizens

- **Big Paulson** - Sovereign Citizen from the Golden Beaver group

Referenced Characters

- Abigail '**Abi**' Jónsson - Harri's Personal Trainer, Co-owner of Valkyrie Falls women's athletic retreat, Icelandic Personal Trainer and Crossfit Competitor, Tall Athletically Muscular Blonde
- Danielle '**Dani**' - Australian stripper, Brunette
- **Josie** 'Joss the Boss' Draper - Professional Wrestler, Athletically Trim Blonde
- **Leo** LaCosta - Harri's best friend and former roommate, Italian carpenter, Erica's brother
- **Macho** - Rescued daschund puppy, named for his big balls, mascot and beloved pet of House Black
- **Mary** Duncan - Attended high school with Harri, former cheerleader, Husband has disappeared while looking for work, left to join a 'commune' with her kids
- **Sara** Sigurdsdottir - Co-owner of Valkyrie Falls women's athletic retreat, Icelandic Personal Trainer and Crossfit Competitor, Tall Athletically Muscular Blonde
- **Vanessa** Peters - Construction Forewoman, Daughter of Brent Peters the head of the construction project, Brunette

Watching my family, and Leo's, mixed with the ladies of Valkyrie Falls as dinner was about to be served was heartwarming. After the tough day that Josie had gone through, finding out about the death of her best friend, and knowing that all of the women both in and out of my family were going through similar things, it was good to see them rallying together. That was really the only way we were all going to get through the shitstorm that was the pandemic.

"Did it go OK?" Erica asked me, sliding in to lean against me as I stood back at the edge of the cafeteria and watched as the ladies doted on both Josie and Macho. The fit blonde was holding him against her chest and smiling in a way I don't think anyone but a puppy could make happen.

"Yeah. She just needed to feel safe," I said.

"You're good at doing that," Erica smiled. "I texted after an hour went by but you didn't respond. I just wanted to make sure she hadn't choked you out or something with one of her wrestling moves."

I snorted and shook my head. "No, nothing like that. I didn't get the text though." I patted my pockets and realised I didn't have my phone. "I must have left it in the truck. Hold on, I should get it in case there's an emergency."

"If there was, Vanessa or Miriam would reach out to me next," Erica said. "And I haven't heard anything."

"Mary or Kara might try me though," I reminded her. "Or my sister. Or the Staties."

"Go," Erica said with a little smile and a roll of her eyes. "My hero-husband."

The sun wasn't setting yet, but the trees outside the retreat centre cast deep, cool shadows across the parking lot that late in the day. The air outside had that crispness that told me we

were probably going to get a good rain in the next day or so, and I figured I should probably move my murder board inside when I got back to the compound. The tarp contraption could handle the light drizzle that could appear at any moment in the Pacific Northwest, but I doubted it could take a full storm.

I found my phone in the cupholder of the centre dash right where I'd left it - seeing Kyla waiting for me when I pulled in had made me forgetful. With a sigh, I picked it up and felt it vibrate with the notification of a waiting message. I opened it as I started to walk back to the cafeteria, checking the first message.

'Harri, we're hearing multiple gunshots.'

"Fuck," I grunted, thumbing the call button. It rang as I stood stock still, every muscle in my body tensed as my chest felt like it was trying to squeeze my heart while my heart was trying to batter out of my rib cage.

It rang, and rang.

No answer.

I broke into a run.

"Kyla!" I shouted from the entryway into the cafeteria. The tone in my voice had my gorgeous girlfriend immediately looking up and around rapidly, scanning for danger, as she got up from her seat at one of the tables. The big room had gone quiet. "Erica, is your car open?" I asked.

"It should be," she said. "What's-"

I didn't have time to answer her as I sprinted back towards the parking lot. Erica's car was parked about halfway down, one row over from my truck, and I yanked open the driver door and thumbed the trunk open, then rounded the back and started pulling out the firearms that were stored there. When the girls had moved into the Falls, Sara and Abi had OK'd a few handguns to be kept inside the building, secured in Kyla's room, but had asked that the rest of the gear be kept in Erica's car. It wasn't ideal, especially if something had happened at the Falls, but it was better than nothing.

"Keys," Kyla called to me and I turned and tossed my truck keys to her. She didn't ask any questions yet - she didn't need to. She knew something bad was happening.

"Harri, what's going on?" Erica asked as she jogged out to me. A bunch of the ladies were following but holding back near the building courtyard and watching.

"Kara started hearing gunshots two hours ago," I said. "And they've been getting closer to her." I slung the two MP5s that Miriam had gifted to me over my shoulders, scooping up the loaded

mags that went with them, and then picked up the wooden box that held the four flash grenades and two smoke grenades that Miriam had sworn she would kill me over if I used them without proper need.

“Fuck,” Erica said, her face going a little white. I knew she was feeling guilty that she’d downplayed me not having my phone. And calling me to help with Josie in the first place. If I hadn’t been here, I could have been that much closer when she had first texted. “Harri-”

I turned and kissed her. It shocked her, and she didn’t have much time to respond. I didn’t have a hand free to pull her to me tightly like I wanted. “I love you,” I said. “I’ll be careful.” Then I turned and jogged towards my truck where Kyla already had the tailgate open and the safe compartment under the bed unlocked as she was pulling on her bulletproof vest. I’d swapped out the lighter ones for the heavy ones after the Raider incident.

“Ivy!” I called, and she came running for me. I set down the crate of grenades and the mags I was carrying and turned in time for her to leap into my arms. She kissed me fiercely. “I love you, and we’ll be careful,” I promised her just like I had Erica. “I need you to do me a favour and keep everyone calm, OK? It’s trouble on the Rez, not near here. Can you do that for me, *mon coeur?*”

“I will, *mon amour,*” she promised, holding my face in both hands for a moment and then kissing me again briefly. “Now go and rescue her.”

“It’s-”

“It’s about her,” Kyla broke in. “You would do this for anyone, dear, but you wouldn’t be running on pure adrenaline if it wasn’t for her.”

I had to swallow hard as I started putting my own bulletproof vest on. When I was finished Erica had joined us and she pulled the side velcro extra tight. “You kiss me like that and don’t even let me say anything?” she demanded.

“Sorry, babe,” I said. “I’m in a bit of a rush.”

“Then get your ass moving, cowboy,” she said, moving past me and opening the driver's door for me. Kyla and I slammed the tailgate shut and piled into the front along with our M4s and MP5s. It was a bit much and we had to do some shifting, but I wanted as much firepower as I might need.

“Erica,” I said through the open window after I turned over the truck engine. “Ivy is going to handle calming everyone down. I need you to be a lot quieter and get Dani and Leo to keep an armed watch. Nothing should happen anywhere near here, but I’ll be able to focus more if I know you three are being vigilant.”

“It’s done,” Erica nodded. “Now go.”

I reversed the truck out of my parking spot and turned towards the driveway, already thumbing the remote to open the gate.

“What do we know?” Kyla asked me. I handed her my phone and she quickly unlocked it, grimacing as she started scanning through the messages. “First heard shots two hours ago. Semi-regular timing. A few outbursts. An hour ago they realised the shots were getting closer. She tried calling a few times after that.” Kyla stopped and swallowed. “Did you read all of these?”

“Just the first couple,” I grimaced. I yanked the steering wheel hard and the rear tires spat gravel as I veered onto the highway. I flipped the lights but not the sirens and pressed the gas to the floor.

“Twenty minutes ago she said they left the house to investigate and found a convoy of trucks one street over. Men were going door to door, no uniforms and not from the Rez. The gunshots were coming from inside the homes. The men were- Fuck, Harri. The men were carrying out valuables and supplies, along with women and children.”

I had to force myself to suck in a breath.

“Call them again,” I said.

Kyla tried but there wasn't an answer. She went back to the texts. “They went back to the house but weren't sure if they should try to fortify it or if they should try to run and hide. That was the last message.”

I punched the centre of the steering wheel hard enough to hurt my knuckles, and the bleat of a honk wasn't nearly as satisfying a sound as I wanted to make.

“Call Miriam,” I said.

The truck speaker system rang twice before she picked up. “Hey, Harri. Can I call you back in-”

“I need a heavy QRF immediately to the High Hills Chinook reserve. I am en route and have actionable intelligence that the domestic terror group who struck Valhalla Hills is on-site and actively engaged in acts of ethnic cleansing including executions and kidnapping of an unknown number of civilians focusing on females and minors.”

“I-” Miriam stuttered, clearly caught off guard. Not that I could blame her, but I'd worded it as best I could to give her as much impetus to act as possible. “Clear out,” she ordered someone in whatever room she was in using the sort of harsh tone that demanded immediate action. Then she was shouting, though it was muffled and I had to guess she'd pressed her phone to her

chest for a moment before it cleared up again. "Repeat actionable intelligence," she said, her voice heavy.

"Eyes-on report as of-" I glanced at Kyla.

"Twenty-three minutes ago," Kyla filled in.

"I am on route with one additional operator, but a witness reports a 'convoy' of civilian vehicles in use. Unknown number of hostiles, but positive presence of small arms in use."

There was a long moment of silence over the phone, and then Captain Bloomberg was speaking instead of Miriam. "Who is your eyewitness?" she asked.

"Kara Swiftwater, a former member of the Reserve Leadership Council. And Gertrude Swiftwater, a former member of the Reserve Police Department," I said.

"Are you sure-"

"Yes, I'm fucking sure!" I growled. "This isn't a stunt."

"You're asking us to deploy the Air Force on US soil, Harri," Laura said tightly.

"Women and children getting rounded up, and the sick being shot in their homes," I said, trying to keep from shouting. "They witnessed it."

"Why is the report over twenty minutes old?"

"Because I forgot my fucking phone in my fucking truck and missed their texts and calls while I was trying to comfort a woman who had lost her best friend today," I broke, shouting. "And now I'm another... fifteen minutes out at least from reaching them." I was driving like a fucking maniac. If the road had been slick, or there had been any traffic whatsoever, there likely would have been an accident.

There was a long minute of silence and I had a feeling we'd been put on mute. Kyla reached over and put a hand on my arm, squeezing it as I gripped the steering wheel tightly. She didn't tell me to calm down, didn't ask me to slow down. She just let me know she was there.

"Harri, I'm sending you the off-duty Airmen from the site security detail," Miriam cut back in. "I can't get anything else to you faster than that. The next best I can get you is scrambling a unit of the National Guard. I'll have an ETA on them ASAP, but they'll be coming in behind you and I *need* to know if I should call them off. If this intel is off we can't have the National Guard storming a reserve, Duo Halo outbreak or not. It'll be all our fucking heads if that happens."

“Understood,” I grunted. I knew what she was saying was true. Even *if* this was fake, and the National Guard rolled up and Feather’s crazy cult was still alive and opened fire on them and everyone died, there would be no covering it up. Someone, somewhere, would find out purely from the mobilisation.

But it wasn’t fake. Kara would go to almost any length to try and help her people, but this wasn’t a false flag report. The fact that there was a big part of me that wanted to pull up in front of her house and see her smirking, knowing she’d pulled one over on the US military and forced their hand, didn’t help.

“Do I have permission to track your phone to give my soldiers your live location?” Miriam asked.

“I figured you already *were* tracking me,” I said, managing a slight smirk through my currently permanent grimace.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Miriam said. “Oh, look, the tracking kicked in really fast.”

“What sort of ETA on the Airmen?”

“They’ll be... seven to eight minutes behind you,” Miriam said, and I could tell she was communicating with Captain Bloomberg off the phone as well.

“How many?” Kara asked.

“Seven. One military jeep, one civilian panel van,” Miriam said.

“Alright. I need the phone back,” I said. “See if I can get a hold of my asset.”

“Be careful,” Miriam said. “And godspeed.”

Kyla hung up for me. “Everyone tells you to be careful,” she said. “No one ever tells me to be careful.”

“It’s because I’m a bigger target, hon,” I said.

She smirked and tried calling Kara again but it rang through to her voicemail.

“Keep trying,” I said, and she did.

We whipped past landmarks at reckless speeds. “Five minutes out,” I said.

Kyla texted that to Miriam, who would forward it to her team. Then, without asking me, she fiddled with my phone a bit and then music started blaring from the speakers of the truck.

The chaos of a fast guitar. A guttural shout. The kick in of fast rhythm guitar and smashing drums. Another scream, isolated, and then thick and almost operatic vocals over a speeding rhythm.

She'd picked perfectly. Not trying to calm down my adrenaline, and nothing too on the nose. The song transitioned into almost a groove, then picked up again quickly. The organised chaos of the song was a match to how I was feeling. To the spiking of my emotions, but bringing me back to that central groove that let me think clearly. It was the same way a firefight was going to go. Moments of extreme violence interspersed with strange, almost uncomfortable calm.

I drove through the song, and it descended into its final driving beat that had me bobbing my head lightly as I glared out the front window. The final beat cut off into silence.

"God, I love you," I said.

"I've got another one," Kyla said.

I shook my head. "We're here."

The cars that had been blocking the entrance and exits of the barricade looked like they had been smashed aside and we drove right through. I flicked off the overhead lights, not wanting to warn anyone that we were coming.

The smart thing to do would be to get out and hoof it on foot. It would give us more forewarning as we came up on anyone, and if there was a caravan worth of people we'd probably hear them. But in the last few weeks, I'd been making choices based on need, not what was smart. Speed and violence had been serving me a lot better than trying to be sneaky and smart. Every time I was cautious, someone got hurt. Oftentimes it was me.

Every time I went with my gut, shock and awe worked wonders.

I rolled down my window, trying to hear anything, as I jumped the truck over the low grass berm that separated the main road into the reserve from the residential area, saving us a minute of driving around to the main entrance and skipping the small 'downtown' near the burned-down community centre. Kyla checked her MP5, racking the slide, and then rolled down her window to listen as well.

My head was on a swivel as we sped past roads. I was looking for signs of the caravan. The number of bodies around had grown over the past four days, dotted here and there, and the abandoned vehicles made it hard to be sure sometimes of what I was looking at. Still, I wasn't seeing anything like the caravan, or worse.

I bypassed Kara's street, riding the cross-street down to the end to try and find the fucking trucks, but I didn't hear anything. No gunshots, no engines, no shouting. No screams. I pulled us back around and peeled onto Kara's street before realising that I didn't know what her house looked like from out front. I had to mentally count about how many lots in she was and pulled up in front of a house that looked right.

Kyla and I burst out of the truck. She had her MP5 up and scanning while I defaulted to the M4 as I checked back behind us. I could hear my heart in my ears and feel the sweat on my brow. No movement. There were a couple of bodies two lots over, one next to the other, and I grit my teeth.

I looked at Kara's house and saw that the front door was kicked in. "Going in," I said quietly to Kyla. I could hear her following me with quick, sure steps as I approached the gaping open front door. "Kara," I called. "It's Harri. Gerty, Tanaya, friendly-friendly-friendly. I'm coming in."

The inside of the house was ransacked. I could see bits of Kara's life spread out in shattered fragments of physical memories. Colours she favoured, keepsakes I could see her collecting. A picture of her and her parents on the wall, askew but unbroken.

No blood, no bodies in the front room. "Clear," I said, pushing in further. "Hold the door."

It was the wrong tactic for clearing a building, but we needed to keep eyes outside and on our truck. I checked the side room, then into the back hall. Two bedrooms and a bathroom. All empty. Ransacked and looted quickly. Muddy boots marking the flooring and carpet. Scrapes on the walls from gear carelessly bumping against the paint.

"Nothing," I called to Kyla, coming back out to her.

My girlfriend was grimacing but stoic, scanning the street around us. She tossed me my phone. "Call her again," she said.

I did, and at first got confused as nothing came out of my phone, but then I heard the ringing in the truck - it was still connected to the system. I snarled and thumbed that off, and then I heard the ringtone coming from the front yard. It was the hard chorus from the middle of *Say It Ain't So*, with Rivers Cuomo singing his heart out.

It was one of those songs that Kara and I had sung a hundred times in my old beater car, the windows down as we just drove.

I stepped out of the house feeling like my soul had left my body, following the sound of the chorus as it restarted with those familiar chords. '*Say it ain't sooo, your drug is a heartbreaker.*' I found the phone in the grass near the scruffy front garden, the screen cracked and one corner dug into the dirt like someone had tossed it hard. '*Say it ain't sooo, my love is a lifetaker.*'

It wasn't a happy song, but damn was it a good one to sing our hearts out to at the top of our lungs. And I knew she'd set that as my ringtone on her phone for the same memories that it was pulling out of me now.

My jaw hurt, I was gritting my teeth so hard. I bent over and picked up the phone, hanging up mine as it went silent.

"She might have ditched it in a hurry," Kyla said. "If it was making noise and she was on the run."

I shook my head. Not denying her, just knowing it was unlikely.

"We're too late," I said, my voice thick.

"Maybe not," Kyla said. "Let me run the lights and siren, see if anyone comes out."

I nodded and took a deep breath. Kyla went to the truck and got into the driver's seat, hitting the lights and then the siren. She let it run for about thirty seconds as we both watched either end of the street as far as we could around the hilly curves and then she cut it off by turning on the loudspeaker mic. "This is the police," she said evenly. "We are here to help. If you can hear my voice, come out of your homes. This is the police, we are here to help."

She let the siren ring again, then repeated herself.

Movement, five doors down and across the street, had me snapping my attention in that direction but I managed not to raise my rifle.

A kid, maybe five years old, came out of a house and started walking over. His hair was a mess and his face was streaked with grime and tracks from tears. Kyla cut off the siren when I waved to her and she stepped out, her eyes going wide as she saw the kid as well.

"Hey, kiddo," I said, dropping to one knee as he got closer, shifting my firearms to hang from their shoulder straps behind me. "We're here to help."

"Do you have any food I can have?" he asked. "I'm really hungry. My parents went away."

My whole body ached, thinking of what had likely happened.

"We'll get you something," I said, glancing at Kyla. She grimaced and went to try and find something in the truck. "Have you been hiding?"

The little guy nodded. "It was scary."

"Did you see what happened?"

He shrugged.

Kyla came out of the truck with a half-full water bottle and a Slim Jim that I'd stashed in the centre console back when we'd been doing the welfare visits for the Staties. I'd forgotten it was in there. "Here you go, honey," she said, peeling the dried meat stick out of its wrapper and offering it to him. "Just little bites, don't try and gobble it all at once. And take sips of water."

He tore off a chunk with his teeth and started chewing.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Virgil," he said.

"Alright, Virgil. My name is Harri, and this is Kyla. We heard there were bad men here. Did you see where they went?"

The kid shook his head. "They drove away."

I wanted to ask 'which way' but that would have been useless. "Did you see them with some women and other kids?"

"Yeah, they were crying and screaming," Virgil said. "That's why I stayed hidden inside."

"Did they drive away with the women and other kids?" I asked.

He nodded.

"OK, just stay here, buddy," I said, standing up. "Chow down, it'll help you feel better." It would, in fact, likely make him feel worse with all that salt if we didn't get him something else to eat as well at some point, but that was a later issue. I pulled out my phone and called Miriam.

"Status?"

"Site seems clear. We missed them. I have a kid here who witnessed women and children being driven away, and there is plenty of evidence of forceful entry into the residences. I have little doubt that if I check a couple I'll find executions."

"My Airmen will be with you in two minutes," Miriam said. "Handle recon. I'll call off the National Guard."

"Don't," I said. "This whole place needs to be searched for survivors. There might be more kids and they've been spooked and isolated for weeks, getting traumatised - we need to search for anyone who might have hidden from the raid. Your men will need the manpower."

"My men? What are you going to be doing?" Miriam asked.

"Remember when you said you could find me some special backup?" I asked. "Well, I need the meanest motherfuckers you've got on speed dial, Miriam. Unknown numbers of civilian hostages taken by an unknown number of backwoods militia."

"You don't know where they are, Harri," she said. "Unless you've come up with a new lead out there."

"Yeah, about that," I said. "This just went from a criminal investigation to a hostage rescue, so I'm less concerned about slow and steady detective work and am ready to start kicking doors. And faces. I promise they'll deserve it."

"What the hell are you going to do?" Miriam asked.

"Is Captain Bloomberg listening?"

"Not anymore," she said after a moment. I wondered if the blonde Captain had stepped out, or just pretended to plug her ears.

"I'm going to go see if I can make a deal with a biker gang," I said. "Enemy-of-my-Enemy situation. And if that doesn't come up with anything, I'm going to start shoving my rifle barrel up Sovereign Citizen asses until I hit prostates and they sing."

There was a long moment of silence again.

"Do what you need to," Miriam said. "Every living official in the state is focused on the cities. No one seems to care what's happening out in the rural areas."

A jeep and a panel van turned onto the street and came towards us.

"Your guys are here," I said. "What I do next doesn't land on you, Miriam. It's on me. Don't stick your neck out. Just let me know if you find anyone who can help."

"Fuck you, Black," she said. "I've got rank on you, I'll do what I want and take the heat."

"I'm serious, Miriam," I said. "You need to be where you are. I'm not-" I stopped, looking at Kyla as she tended to Virgil while watching me out of the side of her eye. "I'm not responsible for an entire State's worth of people," I corrected myself. "But I know I'm important to the people who really matter to me. And if something does happen, they'll need your support."

"Harri," she sighed. "You know... you know they might all be dead in a week anyways."

I swallowed the cloying feeling. "I know," I said. "But I can't just stop."

"I'll find you shooters," she promised. "Good luck."

"Thanks," I said. "And Miriam?"

"Yeah?"

"If you still have them, set aside some of those discretionary doses," I said. "If I'm going to save a bunch of women, I'd really rather them not die of the fucking plague right after."

"I'll have them ready," Miriam promised.

We hung up. Kyla was discussing with the Airmen, who fanned out in two teams and started checking the nearby houses. She said something quietly to Virgil, who nodded as he sat on the curb, and then came over to me. "You could have toned down the swearing in front of the kid," She said.

I opened my mouth in surprise, then clicked it shut when I saw the look on her face. She was teasing me, trying to lighten my mood just a little.

"What's next?" she asked.

"We wait for the National Guard to get here, and then we're going to go bang some drums," I said. "If we're lucky we won't be shot at before I can ask some pointed questions."

Kyla gave me a look.

"What?" I asked.

"We'll find her," she said. "Alive."

"You can't know that," I said.

"We will," she said with a little smile. "This isn't that kind of day."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I'm pregnant," Kyla said, wrapping her fingers around the shoulder straps of my bulletproof vest and tugging softly like she was trying to wake me up. "I tested twice, earlier today and while you were with Josie. You're going to be a father, and our firstborn will not be overshadowed by this."

I went down to one knee, my eyes squeezed shut. "Fuck," I groaned, hugging Kyla to me as I pressed my face to her vest-covered stomach. "How could you let me bring you here?"

“Because I couldn’t let you come alone,” she said, weaving her fingers in my hair.

I stood up and kissed her, feeling our vests and the firearms dangling from shoulder straps clacking together lightly as I poured my everything into her lips. She did the same, and I didn’t even care that the Airmen were coming out and looking at us as they moved from house to house.

When we pulled away I was crying, and Kyla’s eyes watered at seeing me crying.

“Stop,” she said, wiping at my cheeks. “Now isn’t the time.”

“Happy tears,” I assured her. “And stress relief.” I fumbled for my phone, bringing it up and hitting the Speed Dial. “There’s something Erica and I need to tell you though.”

It was almost 10 PM and I had no idea if they would still be at the Black Market, but I wasn’t going to wait until a polite hour to contact the Guns of Thunder.

The National Guard had taken almost thirty minutes to show up at the Rez, and in that time the Airmen and I had found another two women and a ten-year-old girl who had been hiding in the neighbourhood. They’d heard Kyla’s calls but had been too scared to come out until they actually saw our uniforms. The ten-year-old joined Virgil under Kyla’s care, and I interviewed the women quickly along with the Airman Sergeant who was leading the security team. She couldn’t tell us much more than we’d already found out, but a better corroborating witness than a terrified and half-starved child would help in the long run.

One thing she was able to tell us was that the men who had come had all been wearing gas masks. Mostly old military surplus, though from her descriptions some must have been construction-grade masks with filters and homemade hoods.

That was just *great*. Kidnapper militia assholes who were taking the pandemic seriously.

Totally excellent news.

Once the Guard actually arrived, Kyla and I handed off the kids to a female Lieutenant whose day job had been social work before quarantine demanded that she be isolated with her Troop and Battalion. The woman was in her mid-thirties and struck me as a Mom figure immediately, so I’d felt confident that she’d keep the kids safe and look after them. The Airmen had handed over command of the operation but volunteered to stick around and keep searching - finding the lady and girl, and the corpses we’d been discovering in the houses and doublewides, had been upsetting at first but then had steeled them.

“This is the place?” Kyla asked me.

“This is the place,” I said as I pulled up in front of the old lumber depot, the truck taking the potholes in the old dirt road easily. The sun was down but the lights from the nearby grocery store parking lot put a ghostly white glow on everything like the night couldn’t properly settle. I’d almost forgotten that feeling - it was urban and unnatural, and I’d been living out in the sticks long enough that it felt weird even with the constantly running construction site a hundred yards from the RVs.

“What’s our approach?” Kyla asked.

“Will you stay in the truck if I ask?”

“The last time you came here you got into a brawl,” Kyla said flatly.

“Exactly,” I said. “You’re-”

“Coming with you,” she said, opening her door. “I just need to know how many guns I’m carrying in.”

“Fuck it,” I said, getting out as well and hauling my MP5 with me but leaving the M4 in the cab. Kyla did the same.

Walking up to their ‘front entrance,’ with its empty parking lot, the place looked abandoned. Except the dull yellow security light illuminating the space wouldn’t have been on if it was, or if they had moved after my encounter with them.

I could have slipped down the side of the building to check if their bikes were parked in that little hidden lot they used near the office entrance.

I could have knocked politely, too.

My fist hammered against the metal door loudly and continuously, the boom of it echoing inside loud enough that we could hear it outside. With my other hand I held my badge up in the vague direction of the security camera I knew was up in the overhang of the roof. That left me with no hands on my weapon, but Kyla had sidestepped appropriately and had hers held loosely and ready to respond.

“What the fuck do you want, pig?” called a voice from inside.

“Open the fucking door,” I shouted back.

“Fuck off,” the voice yelled. “Get a fucking warrant.”

“Open the fucking door or I start spraying bullets into this building *right fucking now*,” I yelled, my voice booming with every ounce of command I could channel. I could practically feel the ghosts of my boot camp Drill Sergeants inhabiting me with that one.

“Give me one reason I shouldn’t start shooting first!”

“Because if that happens I’ll feed you your own fucking testicles, *Chuck*,” I growled, guessing at who it was. “I will shoot your dick off, cut those little niblets you call nuts off of you with your own knife, batter them in a nice panko breading, deep fry them, and then serve them to you on a bed of fucking rat poison. Open the *fucking* door and get me your boss!”

There were more voices from deeper in the building, and then quiet for almost a full minute.

“Why are you here, Sheriff?” came a new voice, much more calm, through the door. It was the boss.

“I need information, and I think you have it, and it’s about your enemies,” I said firmly but no longer shouting.

“We handle our own business,” the boss said. “We don’t trade information, we are not rats. Leave now, or we will open fire.”

I grit my teeth and could hear him backing one step away from the door. “You said you care about this country,” I called. “Once a Marine, always a Marine. You care about people not getting hurt unless they put themselves in the crossfire. Well, I’m chasing a bunch of degenerate backwoods murderers and kidnapers who killed at least fifty people earlier today in their own homes and made off with an unknown number of women and children. Tell me *that* isn’t worth a conversation.”

I glanced at Kyla, who was grimacing but nodded. It was the only card we had short of breaking out a shotgun and shooting the lock off the door.

The sound of the lock turning was like a Christmas bell in that moment. The door opened about half a foot as the Biker boss looked at me, his eyebrows furrowed as his gaiter covered the bottom half of his face. “We would have heard about something like that,” he said.

“It was on the Rez,” I said. “I was the first up there, and the National Guard has taken over the scene now and are trying to help find survivors. I’m hunting the missing people.”

His eyes, hard and cold, flicked over me and I knew he was taking in the legitimate overkill among the equipment I was currently wearing for a Sheriff. I had mags strapped all over me, flashbang grenades readily accessible, and an SMG hanging from a shoulder strap. Not to mention my sidearm.

He opened the door further and looked Kyla up and down appraisingly as well. "Come in," he said.

I entered and Kyla followed. He stopped us just inside with a hand out and I found myself looking at a miniature gunline. Most of the big warehouse area was in the dark, a trio of work lights pointing right at us making it hard to see much beyond the little ring of bikers. I'd been right that Chuck had been the one shouting at me earlier. His nose looked like he'd gotten it mostly back into place, and he was holding a ridiculous-looking Desert Eagle with two hands pointed right at me. Neck Tattoo, whose name I never got, had a shotgun pointed at me and the old hippy-looking biker Garret had what looked like an AK of some sort covering us from the side, though he was back in the dark so I couldn't tell what exactly.

Georgie Boy, who I'd fought, and Kashm weren't there.

"What do you want from me exactly?" the boss asked.

"You said you've been having problems with the Sovereign Citizens. I've interacted with the idiots up at the Golden Beaver, but I assume if you've had real trouble it would have been with whatever group is behind them. That's my best guess on who just murdered a ton of people and kidnapped more," I said. "I want to know what you know about them. Especially if they have a headquarters."

"How the hell are we supposed to know if this asshole is even telling the truth?" Chuck weaselled.

"What fucking reason could I possibly have to make up shit like this?" I countered. "I already know you're here, dumb fuck. If I wanted you out, I could make that happen. I don't."

"Harri," Kyla said quietly. "Perhaps ignore the child and speak with the adults?"

"She's not wrong," the boss grunted, then turned to Chuck. "Shut the fuck up."

Chuck clearly wanted to bite something back, but he just grunted.

"I need to know where these assholes are," I said. "We don't know what they are going to do with women and children."

The boss rubbed at his chin over his gaiter, his eyes flicking into the dark towards Garret and his AK for a long moment. "... understand your need," he said. "Let me talk to my people. Wait outside."

"But-" Chuck started.

"Please," the boss said firmly to me, but he was already turning towards Chuck.

Kyla backed out and I followed her, the door shutting behind us.

“Do you think they know what we need?” Kyla asked me as we stepped back over towards our truck.

“I don’t know,” I said, sighing in exasperation. “They’re hard to read.”

“What are we doing if they decide not to tell us? Or say they don’t know?” Kyla asked.

I cracked my knuckles and grimaced. “It’s the ticking time bomb scenario,” I said. “I learned it in the courses to become an MP. Is it ever appropriate to torture someone? Even if we know for certain that *they* know the location of a time bomb that will go off and kill dozens or more people?”

“I know it,” Kyla nodded.

“I figured,” I sighed. She probably had even more training on that sort of thing than I did. Hell, she probably had a better theoretical grasp on ‘enhanced interrogation’ than I did, too. She was a trained spy, I was just an infantry lug at heart. “If they say no, we could try and shoot our way through and keep one alive. But one or both of us get fucked up in the best realistic scenario, too. Then we don’t even know if what we’re told is the truth or not.”

“We could try bribing them,” Kyla suggested. “We have the money to make it worthwhile.”

“Not if they won’t tell us on principle,” I said.

The door opened before we could continue or come to a decision, and the boss stepped out and walked to us. He was wearing his cut over a leather jacket and his boots crunched in the gravel of the parking lot in a way that made me think of all sorts of cinematic moments where a deal was made with a devil.

“We don’t know where they are,” he said. “But, we can make some calls. Someone will know, and we know people that you don’t.”

“Thank you,” I said.

“Don’t thank me yet,” he said, raising a finger to stop me. “If I do find out where they are, it’s going to cost you.”

“What price are you going to put on a bunch of hostage women and children taken by domestic terrorists?” I asked, trying unsuccessfully to keep the sneer out of my voice.

That, I knew, landed a hit. He'd served in Afghanistan at the start of the war, while I'd served in the middle, but we'd seen a lot of the same things. Bad men do bad things, and it's supposed to happen *over there*. Not here. Not at home.

"I'll tell you the price when I have the information," he said.

"You should have my number," I said. "I gave your daughter my card."

"I know. She has it," he nodded. "You will hear from us if we find something useful."

I grunted, not thanking him again. He nodded, and I nodded, and then he glanced at Kyla and nodded as well. He walked back to the building and went in, closing the door and audibly locking it behind him. We got into the truck.

"One lead," Kyla said, putting her hand on my knee as I started the truck. "And just the first. We'll find her."

"Them," I said. "We'll find them."

"Harri," she said, her tone dropping seriously and forcing me to look at her. She was staring deep into my eyes. "We'll find her. Stop lying to yourself."

I had to suck in a breath from my nose and let it out, getting the engine started and pulling us back out onto the pothole-filled road. "It's been almost fifteen years. I can be over her and still care about her."

"And you can fall in love with her all over again, too," Kyla said. "And with all the evil in the world around us, there are silver linings. You had Erica and Ivy *and* Vanessa, but you still allowed me in. A stranger. And now you are going to be the father to our child, and I will love you forever. But I want a man who is not afraid of himself, Harri. And especially not of his emotions. My father pretended to be emotionless because he thought it was strength, and I barely know who he is even now. Our team, our family, is going to get bigger. Three more women to reach the minimum number to keep you properly protected. *Minimum*. Don't tell me that you would rather the government system match you with more strangers before you would take Kara."

"It's not just my decision," I said.

"No, it's not," Kyla retorted. "It's hers as well, but from everything I've heard, *she* was the one digging the hole you two are in and so she needs you to give her permission to get out of it. So *when* we find her, you are going to tell her what you feel, and what you want. And then she can choose."

"Fine," I said as I pulled the truck onto the highway and started speeding to the next destination I had in mind. "Fine, Kyla. I'll tell her. I can risk a bruised heart."

“Good,” Kyla said. “Then let’s talk about Miriam.”

“That’s a completely different thing,” I said. “I’ve already talked to her and she says she’s holding off on contacting the person she will partner with until things are stable. She says it’s complicated, so there’s someone she’s planning on partnering with.”

“You haven’t considered that *you* might be the one it’s complicated with?” Kyla asked.

“How am I complicated? She could just set it up and it would be done,” I said.

“You are *not* an idiot, Harrison,” Kyla said. “Of course it’s complicated, and keeps getting more complicated. You were already partnered with two women when you two reconnected, right? And since then you accidentally imprinted Vanessa, were assigned me, got engaged with Erica, and got into three gunfights while technically under her watch *so far*. Not to mention asking her for help with your ex-girlfriend, getting into a quarantined city to help a woman from a whole bunch of athletic women who fawn over you, and the giant elephant in the room that you saved her from sexual assault over half a decade ago. It’s *complicated*.”

“So what am I supposed to do then?” I asked. “Just call her up and say, ‘Hey, Miriam. I know things are complicated and we’ve only ever been friends, but if you want to imprint on me I’d be really interested in that.’”

“No,” Kyla said. “Because it really is complicated, Harri. You just need to be open to her, and not lie to yourself that it won’t be you. She needs to ask you when she’s ready.”

“So I need to offer it to Kara, but wait for Miriam to ask me,” I said.

“Exactly,” Kyla said. “It’s like dating. Some people need to be asked, and some people need to do the asking. You, my love, haven’t dated in so long that you just don’t have any instincts about these things. All of your romantic instincts are built off of how your father treated your mother, not in seduction or the chase.”

That one hit home a little as my mind ran through my romantic situations since I left home for the military. There had been a few hookups, particularly when I’d been stationed in Germany and then while I’d lived in Portland with Leo, but I’d never chased anyone. Never really pursued. I’d offered dates, sure, but even then had I ever been the one to make an approach?

“Now let’s talk about Josie,” Kyla said.

“No, let’s not,” I said and shot her a look. “Or any of the Valkyrie Falls ladies. That’s not on the table right now.”

“Fine,” Kyla said, holding up her hands in surrender. “That’s fair, at least for now.”

I sighed heavily and Kyla chuckled in her chest. "Call Erica and give her an update," I said. "Please."

"You're right," Kyla nodded. "She'll want to know you're finally coming around on everything."

"Not what I meant," I said.

"I know, dear," Kyla said, taking my hand from the steering wheel and bringing it down to grip her thigh. "But I either need to break you down and get you to laugh, or I need to fuck you in the back of this truck. You need to release some of the stress you're carrying or you'll be too tight to do what comes next."

"You know, everyone thinks Ivy is the crazy one," I said. "But sometimes you are right up there with her."

"I know," Kyla smirked softly. "But only with you."

I looked at her in the dark of the cab as I drove through the hills along the empty highway.

"Now," she asked. "How are we going to beat an entire bar of rednecks into telling us what we want to know with only two people?"

The Golden Beaver was empty.

Well, not empty. It was dead.

Kyla and I came back out with our eyes watering and instinctively covering our mouths even though we had masks on. She staggered about a dozen steps into the parking lot and ripped her mask off to throw up. I could feel my own stomach recoiling as well but managed to keep it down through sheer stubbornness and already feeling a little deadened to the scene after checking the houses at the Rez.

It hadn't been an execution inside the bar, it had been chaos.

Multiple dead, scattered around the bar. Clear signs of a fight, but none of it had really been near the door. The fight had started inside. And based on the state of one of the bodies I had a feeling about what had happened. Someone had shown up sick - the blood from the ears, eyes and nose were giveaways even if he'd gotten shot in the chest with a shotgun. So someone had come in sick, and an argument had started - if the pandemic was fake, there was nothing to worry about. But then why was Jim (or whatever the guy's name was) sick? Maybe it was real. Escalation. Fear. Anger. Firearms.

“That wasn’t close to all of them,” I said as I leaned against one of the support posts for the front porch.

“I think I counted eight?” Kyla said after spitting the taste of puke out of her mouth.

“Could be more behind the bar, or upstairs,” I said. “But yeah, about that.”

I blew out a long breath, shaking my head. Another dead end. Hadn’t I made that joke to someone about if this happened? I couldn’t even remember, now.

“I’m going to take another look,” I said. Kyla nodded, and I went back inside. The bodies weren’t rotting yet but weren’t exactly warm either. I’d been in that room yesterday, so it must have happened that night or sometime early in the day. If there were survivors they probably left infected, if they weren’t already. Some of the crates and pallets of stolen supplies looked like they’d been raided but there was still plenty left. It was just covered in blood.

Nine bodies, counting the bartender behind the bar. He was the least damaged and had died holding a gunshot wound to his neck and bled out all over the floor. I cracked open the beer fridge and fetched out a chilled bottle of vodka, carrying it with me as I headed up the rickety stairs to the second floor. The upstairs, which I had never seen, was mostly just a hallway with bedrooms lining either side of the building. I called out but didn’t get any answers so I started kicking in doors. They were all empty, though they *had* been occupied. Some of them still had stuff strewn about in the messy way of a single man living in misery, others looked like they’d been cleared out recently. At the end of the hall, one of the doors had bloody handprints on the door handle, and I only had to nudge it open with my foot.

Big Paulson, the massive guy with the ginger beard, was looking back at me with glassed-over eyes and pale skin as he leaned back against the bed on the floor. I thought he was dead until he coughed, blood dripping from his lips. He had a syringe on the floor next to him, and whatever he’d taken had knocked him into next week.

“Can you hear me, Paulson?” I asked.

He blinked agonisingly slowly, his eyes completely unfocused.

“Paulson, what happened downstairs?” I asked more firmly.

He let out a little groan and then tipped sideways, going loose. The side of the bed he’d been leaning against was soaked in red. His upper back was shredded by what must have been a shotgun blast.

“Fuck,” I grunted, stepping back. He was dead, his body just hadn’t realised it yet.

Back outside, I cleaned my gloved hands with the vodka and then took a swig before offering it over to Kyla. She gave me a look. "Pregnant," she reminded me.

"Shit," I said. "Sorry."

"It's OK," she said. "You've got a lot going on."

We did a quick tour around the back of the Golden Beaver, checking in the side building and the barn. There was plenty of random junk that would probably be useful to someone, but I was mostly concerned about the chickens that were still roaming in their fenced area. That and the feed in the barn.

"What do you think are the chances that these guys were already rescued once before from a situation like this?" I asked.

"I don't know what you mean?" Kyla asked me.

"Mrs Branston's chickens. We went to buy eggs from her and found out she was dead, but her chickens were missing," I said.

"That wasn't me, Harri," Kyla said.

I frowned. "Jesus," I said. "That was Dani. It was right before you joined us. Fuck, it feels like it was so long ago. And it was so like what we were doing with the welfare checks... Shit."

"Shhh," she hushed me, coming over and rubbing my back.

"Fuck," I sighed, going down into a crouch as I took deep breaths. There was just so much wrong in the world.

"Compartmentalize for now, Harri," Kyla said. "We're in the field. What's next?"

I shook my head, still crouching, and then sucked in a breath and let it out in a rush. "OK. Priority One is the kidnapped civilians. This place is a bust, so our only real lead are the bikers and they are working on it. Priority Two..." I hesitated as I processed. When lives were in the balance, it was hard to judge secondary priorities because they fell so far short of the primary. "Priority two is locking this place down," I said. "Call Vanessa and see if her kitchen staff want to add fresh eggs and chicken farming to their daily routines. I'm sure it wouldn't be hard for a couple of construction workers to slap together a small coop and yard. Then we call the National Guard. The inside needs to be cleared out or folks will come here looking for supplies and get exposed all over again."

"Good," she nodded. "And then we take care of us, and then we sleep."

"I can't sleep until I hear from the bikers," I said.

Kyla shoved me hard enough that I fell back from my crouch and onto my ass. I looked up at her startled. "You will rest," Kyla told me. No, she ordered me. "Because when we get the location and you go hunting, I'm not letting you do it sleep-deprived. My child, Erica's child, they aren't losing you. Do you hear me?"

"I hear you," I croaked. I stood up and rolled my neck. "You're right. I'm sorry."

"You don't need to be sorry," Kyla said. "There's nothing to be sorry for. You just need to listen, which you are. Now, you call Vanessa and I'll call the National Guard."

"OK," I agreed. I wanted to hug her, or kiss her, but we both knew that we'd been exposed to whatever was still floating in the air inside the bar, and there had been a lot of blood.

Vanessa was in on the chicken plan and had workers in full protective gear out to us in under an hour, during which Kyla made me try to nap in the bed of the truck while she kept watch. I might have gotten a few minutes, but it wasn't restful. One of the workers had built a makeshift coop in the bed of one of their pickup trucks and it took another fifteen minutes to catch the chickens and get them loaded up. We put the remaining feed into the back of my truck for transport.

The construction workers were just about to leave when the National Guard truck rolled up the beaten path, ploughing through the rickety palisade gate on one side because of its width. They were from another unit that wasn't managing the Rez situation and were also hazmat-gearred since we'd reported a multiple-casualty event. We gave them the rundown, and my best guess at what had probably happened, and the frustrated Lieutenant started shaking his head and didn't stop until I stopped talking.

There was a quick argument over whether the chickens needed to be destroyed or not until I looked him in the eyes and asked, "What chickens?" multiple times and he caught on. It helped that I probably had some crazy eyes going on.

The Guard took over the site, and the workers left, which meant Priority Two was now fulfilled. I didn't have the energy to argue with the Guardsmen over what would happen to the supplies inside the bar, or the valuables that I was pretty sure had been looted from the community. Later I would regret that since I could have gotten them sanitised even if I did it myself and then pawned them off to the bikers to fuel their market.

Instead, Kyla and I spread our arms and legs and let the Guardsmen spray us with sanitiser from a device that looked like it was designed to spray weed killer on a lawn, and then we got into the truck.

"Bring me home," Kyla said. "To our home."

“OK,” I nodded and started up the truck. “Tell Erica and Ivy that that’s where we’ll be, and they can stand down their watch. They shouldn’t be in any danger.”

Kyla called while I drove, and soon we were pulling onto the site and checking in with the Airforce goons manning the gate. They asked me some questions - they knew about the Rez since their fellow security were still out there, and I told them what I could. They needed to know that it was possible we’d get hit heavier than last time if the Raiders were escalating. That immediately got the Sergeant in charge of the gate for the night interested and I could see the gears in his mind working, but I was too tired to ask any questions.

I got us up to the compound and Kyla and I both stripped in the dark before heading into the RV and piling into the shower. We rinsed and scrubbed each other, completely non-sexual. When we got out she put on one of my clean shirts and I slipped on some shorts before collapsing onto the bench seating.

“Don’t sleep yet,” Kyla said to me, making me blink my eyes open. She was on the phone and said something quietly then hung up. Then she climbed onto my lap, straddling me and started kissing me softly. “We need to have sex,” she whispered. “Both of us. I know you’re not in the mood, and neither am I, but we need to.”

“OK,” I agreed. We ended up naked and she was riding me right there when Vanessa came in. Usually, she would have been home already since it was well past midnight now, but she’d been managing the chicken situation since it was a bit of a special scenario. Now she kicked off her boots and stripped right there in the entryway of the RV before climbing up to kneel next to us and pull my face around to kiss her.

“You don’t mind?” Vanessa asked Kyla.

Kyla shook her head with a smile, running her fingers through Vanessa’s brunette locks for a moment. “He needs us,” she said.

I ended up in bed with them both snuggled up with me. It hadn’t been hot, or sexy, but it had been loving. They had taken care of me more than physically, and I found myself staring up at the ceiling of the RV feeling a lot more clear than I had an hour before.

At some point I must have drifted off because I woke up to my phone ringing. Vanessa was already rolling out of bed to go get it from where I left it on the kitchen counter, and she came back and handed it to me without answering before climbing back into bed, still naked.

I thumbed it open. “What have you got for me?”

“Three skilled shooters and a civilian chopper will be on site within twelve hours,” Miriam said. “Any progress?”

“The SovCit cell is dead,” I said. “Outbreak and internal violence. My biker pals are checking their contacts, but they said they’ll be asking for something in return. I’ll handle it.”

“Alright. They found more survivors on the Rez, do you want the full update?”

“Email it to me,” I said. “I’m trying to get my head right for when we have a location.”

“OK,” Miriam said. “I can’t get you more shooters for an assault in under 48 hours, but I can have a QRF ready to roll for when you need a lift out of there with your objectives.”

“Thanks,” I said. Then Kyla put her hand on my thigh and squeezed, and I looked at her as she gazed at me pointedly in the dark. “I appreciate all the help, Miriam. And I want you to know I appreciate you a hell of a lot, too.”

“Well, good,” Miriam said. “Now stay alive for you to get the chance to actually show it. I think we might be up to you hiring Gordon Ramsey to cook me that dinner you owe me.”

“Get some sleep,” I told her.

“You too,” she said. “And make sure you tell me when you’re going operational.”

“I will,” I promised.

We hung up.

“What was that, ‘I appreciate you?’” Vanessa asked, dropping her voice to mimic me.

“Harri and I had a talk about Kara and Miriam,” Kyla said.

“I’ve been informed that my seduction game isn’t up to par with a world that is heading the way it is,” I sighed.

“I dunno, you did pretty well with me,” Vanessa said, and I could hear her smile in the dark. I turned and kissed her, and then settled in to try and get back to sleep since it was only about four in the morning and I’d gotten maybe two hours total.

“So when are we talking about Josie and the Valkyries?” Vanessa asked.

I grunted and pulled the pillow from under her head, planting it over her face as she broke into a laugh.

I woke up again, this time to my phone ringing on my chest where I’d set it down when I hung up with Miriam. Both Kyla and Vanessa groaned and I blinked my eyes open to see that there was

a soft blue glow coming in through the cracks at the edge of the RV window shades. “Fuck,” I groaned but grabbed my phone. Unknown number.

“Hello?” I asked.

“Good morning, Cowboy,” a woman’s voice said, and it took me a second to place Kashm’s sultry tone to her face and name.

“What do you have for me?” I asked.

“We have a location and my father is working on confirmation that it’s the right group,” Kashm said.

“And what’s it going to cost me?” I asked.

“We’ll discuss that when we meet,” she said. “10 AM in the grocery store parking lot.”

“OK,” I said. “I’ll be there.”

“I hear you had a lady cop with you last night. I thought you were single, cowboy.”

“You’d be surprised what my life is like,” I said. “But don’t go getting any ideas. I’m a little busy right now and wouldn’t make a good date.”

She laughed and hung up the phone.

“Who the fuck was that?” Vanessa mumbled.

“Biker gang leader’s daughter,” Kyla mumbled.

“How do you know that?” I asked, then shook my head. “Never mind.” She would have put the pieces together.

“Is she hot?” Vanessa asked.

“She tried to get me seriously maimed, if not killed, the last time I saw her,” I said. “It’s just banter.”

“Banter can lead to more, and she definitely pushes your buttons to get you flirting like that,” Vanessa said.

“I put a shotgun to her tit and used her as a hostage to walk myself out of the biker den,” I reminded them.

"Maybe she's into that," Vanessa said.

"Jesus Christ, stop," I groaned, turning over to lay on my stomach and press my face into the pillow.

Both of them leaned in and kissed my shoulders and then rubbed my back, their hands meeting and making them both snicker as they realised they had the same thought to soothe me.

"Go to sleep," I groaned.

They did. I think.

AUTHORS NOTE: Internet Cookies for the person who guesses what the Pump Up song was I was describing during the drive to the Rez!

Guesses from the Alpha Readers that were incorrect:

- *All Along the Watchtower - Jimi Hendrix*
- *Bodies - Drowning Pool*
- *Child in Time - Deep Purple*
- *Chop Suey - System of a Down*
- *Down with the Sickness - Disturbed*
- *Du Hast - Rammstein*
- *Fortunate Son - CCR*
- *The Immigrant Song - Led Zeppelin*
- *Ride of the Valkyries - Richard Wagner*
- *Sweet Child O' Mine - Guns N' Roses*
- *Welcome to the Jungle - Guns N' Roses*
- *We're Not Gonna Take It - Twisted Sister*