

Quaranteam: North West

Chapter 15 (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. In this chapter you can expect political movement, new toys, community check-ins and some new faces.

The funerals were held on the fifteenth up at the reservation. I only found out they were even happening because the State Troopers asked me to attend as a formal representative of local law enforcement - I guess they considered it a 'community initiative' to take the time for a funeral and wasn't worth the manpower when they were stretched so thin.

I hadn't been sure how to feel about the request, but I took it. And when the time came, I found out that the girls had discussed amongst themselves who should go with me. All four of them wanted to, both to support me and to pay their respects to the tough situation, but they also didn't want to draw attention.

In the end, Kyla attended as my 'deputy', while Erica attended as my fiancée.

"It's not fair how hot you look in that dress," Kyla muttered as she looked in the rearview mirror of the truck back at Erica.

"You could have worn a dress too," Erica countered. "I saw that little black one you've got. You probably look like a fucking snack in it."

Kyla sighed and shook her head, but then reached back to undo the bun she kept her hair in when we were 'in uniform' and started fixing it with her fingers. "It's more of a clubbing dress, or a cocktail dress, than for a funeral," she said. "Plus we're here in an official capacity."

We were waiting in the line of trucks and cars that were being let onto the Rez one by one. There were four big, dour-looking Native men working their 'gate' and most of the vehicles were only stopped for a couple of moments - I had a feeling anyone in the tribe was welcome, and they were just looking for outsiders. I'd already clocked a few confused glances at us as we slowly edged closer up the line.

"Baby, you're frowning hard enough to crack the windshield," Erica said. "Tell Kyla she looks pretty."

“She does,” I said off-hand, reaching a hand over from the steering wheel and taking hers in mine.

“Wow, don’t overstate it,” Kyla said with a little smirk.

“Sorry,” I sighed. “This is all just- The community deserves a funeral, but this big thing is a bad idea.”

Kyla nodded and frowned. “I’m surprised they’re allowed to do it at all.”

“It’s on the Rez, so the State Troopers don’t have jurisdiction, and if any Feds cared it would still be something of a nightmare to enforce,” I said. “Part of me thinks I should say something.”

“And the other part of you knows that wouldn’t accomplish anything except piss people off,” Erica ended my thought for me. “We can only do what we can do. We’ll wear our gloves and masks, and we’ll stay a respectful distance away at the back of the ceremony, and maybe we can let people know how serious we’re taking things and influence them that way. And then afterwards, when we get home, you can fuck me and Kyla a few times each to make sure we’re all inoculated.”

I glanced up in the rearview mirror to make eye contact with my fiancée. “Hold on, is that why you wanted to be the one to come?”

She smiled a little and adjusted the bust of her dress that showed a tasteful amount of her cleavage. “Maybe partially,” she said. “I also want to make sure I’m here to support you.”

“And to show off in front of your ex,” Kyla said. “Just a little.”

“Just a little,” Erica agreed. “I’m ‘the white woman with the tits,’ remember?”

I rolled my eyes and thought about asking her to keep it decent, but I already knew she would. We were also pulling up to the gate and one of the big natives was holding up a hand for me to stop.

“We don’t need you here,” the biggest guy said as I pulled up. We had the windows down and I could hear the muttering from the other three as they leaned back to look at the big ‘Sheriff’ emblazoned on the side of my truck. Or maybe it was that combined with ‘Black County’ under it.

“We’re just here to pay our respects,” I said. “Officially and unofficially.”

He grunted and narrowed his eyes for a moment, looking at the three of us dressed all in black. "Hold on," he said and stepped away to the little information booth and grabbed a handheld radio and spoke into it quietly.

"Where's Black County?" asked one of the other men, the youngest of them. He was wearing a rough-looking suit that looked like it doubled as his 'going out on the town' outfit on occasion.

"Southeast of here," I said vaguely, not exactly wanting to draw attention to the fact that we were *that* Black family, from *that* Black land. "This is my deputy, and this is my fiancée. We just want to pay respects."

The leader of the group came up, an obvious look of suspicion on his face. "Take the second right up this road. A member of the Tribal Police will meet you and direct you on what is or isn't appropriate."

"Happy to meet them," I nodded.

He nodded back, patted the hood of my truck, and backed off to let me through.

"Well, that was easy," Erica said after we were rolling and they wouldn't hear her.

"We should really get actual uniforms," Kyla said. "It would probably make us look a touch more official for formal events."

"Yeah, maybe," I said, wondering how many more of these things I would actually need to go to in the future. How long was I supposed to be Sheriff for anyways? Did I have term limits or anything? "Or at least actual badges."

"Harri, babe," Erica said, knocking on the plexiglass barrier between the front and back seat - I still hadn't figured out how to take it out. "Seriously, you need to get out of your head or you're going to scare people with that scowl."

"Ugh, sorry," I said, wiping my face and then scratching at my beard for a moment. "You're right."

"Of course she is," Kyla said.

"We should have given him a blowjob before we left," Erica sighed. "Or on the way."

"You said we should stay appropriate," Kyla said, looking back at Erica.

"You two discussed blowing me on the way to a funeral?" I asked, making the turn as I'd been directed.

"We all did," Erica said. "Seriously, Harri. You think everything just happens spontaneously?"

I blinked, raising an eyebrow. "At least half," I said.

"Maybe a third," Erica shot back. "Maybe."

"My life is a lie," I said whimsically, making both of them snort and grin a little. I wasn't sure if they were starting to pick up on each other's mannerisms a bit, or if maybe they had always been this similar. Or maybe Kyla's training had her mirroring Erica to create a stronger bond.

I spotted the Tribal Police cruiser ahead of me and it flashed its daytime lights to signal me over into the parking lot for the little general store it was parked in front of. Making the turn in, I pulled up so that we were window to window though I was looking down at the much older cruiser that looked like it might have been purchased third-hand about a decade and a half ago.

"So you're the new Sheriff we heard about, huh?" said the woman inside. She was young - or younger than Erica and I, but likely had a year or two on Kyla, and pretty in a soft sort of way. But she also looked a lot more official than Kyla or I in her brown uniform and full rig of equipment.

"That's me," I said. "I'm Sheriff Black, this is my Deputy, Kyla, and my fiancée Erica in the back."

"Hi," the woman said as she peeked back at Erica, then looked back at me. "Are you... *that* Harrison Black?"

"Uh-" I said.

"It's not a big deal to me if you are," she said, holding up her hands. "I think all the old-school grudgey victim stuff is BS."

"Well, yeah, that's me. Or us," I said.

She shrugged. "Kind of risky comin' here, isn't it?"

"I'm just here to pay my respects," I said. "The State Troopers couldn't spare anyone, and I've been doing community efforts and welfare checks all over the area for them. But, however strained it is, I do still have a connection or two here, too."

"Alright, well, do us all a favour and leave your sidearms locked in the truck," the officer said. "You can follow me over to the cemetery, try to keep to the back and not draw attention. Most of the folks who will be here are members of the Tribe, and you're already going to stick out as outsiders."

I couldn't bite my tongue completely. "Are there any safety measures going on for the quarantine?"

The officer grimaced. "Official policy on the Rez is we're leaving it up to folks to do what they think is best for them. No one will look at you funny if you wear a mask or anything, but if it bothers you to see folks unmasked then I suggest you just turn around now."

"I'm sorry, Officer, but you do realize that it's *real*, right?" Kyla asked from the passenger seat.

"Oh, I do," the Officer said. "But like I said, I'm not exactly the standard around here. Probably why I can put up with being a cop. Anyways, the service is supposed to start soon so we should head over."

"Sorry," Erica called from the back seat. "What was your name again?"

"Right. I'm Constable Gertrude Swiftwater, but everyone just calls me Gerry."

"It's nice to meet you, Gerry," I said.

"You too," she nodded. "Alright, let's head over."

"More like Officer Hotty McHotpants," Erica murmured from the back seat as Gerry pulled away and I turned the truck to follow her.

"You barely saw her," I said.

"She's cute as fuck and has big tits," Erica said.

"Could you stop objectifying my coworkers?"

"I objectify Kyla all the time," Erica said.

"Hey," Kyla said.

"What, you want me to stop giving you feedback on what lingerie or outfits he might like?"

"That's not objectifying," Kyla said. "That's advice."

"Advice based on deciding how hot you look in different outfits."

"OK, you two," I said.

"Fine, you can objectify me. On a case-by-case basis," Kyla said, a little chagrined smile on her lips.

I followed Officer Gerry through a couple of back roads in the main Rez community and we passed by the remains of the burned-down Community Centre. It looked like they hadn't started carting off any of the refuse; the blackened steel and concrete reminded me more of my stints overseas in combat zones than anything else. There was also a large memorial set up with large pictures and cascading with wildflowers, and it looked like folks had likely been holding vigil once the search efforts had finished.

We pulled up a short walk from the cemetery and I was helping Erica out of the back seat with one hand as Officer Gerry stepped out of her car.

"See?" Erica whispered to me. "Tits, and a big ass."

"Erica," I whispered sternly.

"Last one, babe. Promise," she grinned and winked at me.

"You see her butt?" Kyla asked quietly, coming around the back of the truck.

I just groaned, making them both snicker a little, and then we all got our black medical masks and gloves on.

Gerry found a spot and left us near the back of the cemetery, moving forward to check in with one of her fellow Tribal Police, as the service got started. It was one large one for all eight of the folks who had died in the fire trying to rescue as much of the food in the foodbank as possible. Six men and two women, dead because of an act of arson used to distract folks for burglaries. I assumed that the families would likely be holding their own personal funeral rites - the service was sombre, but still something of a community spectacle. There were speeches, and poetry, and a traditional dance presentation.

And as I looked around at the gathered crowd, I felt a creeping chill up my spine. I stopped counting unmasked faces after the first couple dozen since there were so many more to go. I saw folks shifting, talking to each other and hugging each other in between presentations. Every little cough, or someone clearing their throat, had me looking in concern.

I prayed, even though I hadn't really prayed since I'd been in the military, that everything would be OK.

Kara got up second during the memorial speeches for each of the dead, giving a heartfelt description of a man who had worked for the Community Centre for two decades, and organized the local sports rec tournaments that helped keep their community connected to other tribes through friendly competition. She was dressed in a slim and sombre black dress with black leggings underneath and had a large necklace of lots of white and black beaded strands hanging around her neck. I could tell the moment she scanned the crowd and recognized me - she didn't falter, but her eyes did come back to us a few times quickly. When she ended her

speech to soft claps, and more than a few mournful sobs from the crowd at the loss of a pillar of their community, I noted that Kara put a medical mask on before moving to shake some folks' hands and then hugging what I assumed was the grieving son of the man she'd given the eulogy for. Then she was free, and the next presenter was mounting the stage, and she quietly made her way towards us.

"Harri?" she asked in a whisper as she approached.

"Hey, Kara," I said. "You know my fiancée Erica. This is Kyla, my girlfriend."

"I thought you said you were dating the-" She stopped and took a breath, then looked to Kyla. "It's nice to meet you." She looked at Erica. "Thank you for coming."

"We're sorry for your loss," Erica said with sincerity.

"Thank you. What's with the utility belts and outfits?" Kara asked, glancing at the way Kyla and I were dressed. "Don't tell me you're the Sheriff I heard about?"

"It's a long story," I said. "But yes, I am."

Kara closed her eyes and put two fingers to her forehead as if she were trying to steady her brain from spinning, then blinked them open again. "I can't even begin to process whatever that means right now," she said. "I need to get back up front."

"Go," I nodded. "And I'm sorry."

"Thank you," she said quietly, eyeing the three of us like she still couldn't quite place how we were who and where we were, before starting to turn back.

"Kara?" I asked, stopping her. "I- Thank you for taking me seriously last time, and I know the people need this, but it's not safe. Be careful."

She just nodded and turned. Erica, who had been standing beside me, grabbed my hand and gave it a quick squeeze before stepping forward and looping her arm in Kara's, walking with her for about a dozen paces and speaking to her quietly. The two of them stopped and Kara said something back, then Erica replied, and then separated from her and came back to us.

"What was that about?" I asked, watching Kara weave her way back through the crowd towards the front.

"I told her she needed to take better care of herself and actually take this seriously because if she dies from the pandemic it would break your heart."

"Erica," I sighed.

“She took it well, babe. Don’t worry,” Erica said, taking my hand.

“That’s not what I meant,” I said.

“Yes, it was,” she said, squeezing my hand harder for a moment and giving me a look not to argue with her.

I just shook my head and we listened to the next speakers.

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The buzzing of the tattoo gun was a soft drone in the compound as Erica slowly added her mark to Ivy’s collection of tattoos. Kyla and I had finished up another round of Welfare Checks in the afternoon after the funeral, and again the next day, before I woke up to a beautiful morning that promised to straddle the line between the strangely hot spring and the wetter, cooler weeks that had settled in.

I’d decided to take a day off.

First I spent the early morning with Vanessa, making love to her by ourselves out in the forest like I had with Erica and Ivy when the site was full. We packed coffee in thermoses and set off for a hike, and within twenty minutes her bare ass was pinned to a tree as she clutched her arms around my neck and I thrust into her with animal desire. Once her legs weren’t shaking anymore and she’d dripped most of my cum out of her, she pulled her panties and shorts back on, took my hand and we kept walking.

We stopped again on our way back and took our time, with her riding me slowly as we softly touched each other and locked our gazes.

Then I sat with Erica and drew. It hadn’t really been that long since I’d done that, but it felt like longer. We did little creative exercises, drawing each other’s hands, and then starting half of a sketch and swapping to finish for each other. Once we were into it, Erica flipped back and forth between a couple of different tattoo designs she was fiddling with while I sketched out a landscape from my memory of before the construction started.

By lunch, I was getting pulled out of my chair by Ivy, who wanted a quickie before we ate. Then after lunch Kyla had asked to go on a ride with the ATVs. She’d spent the morning doing some callisthenics with Dani and Ivy and then had been reading the Fellowship of the Ring at the heavy encouragement of Leo and Vanessa. We rode up to the Spring Pond, and we got naked and held each other in the cool water but didn’t have sex. Instead we talked; she was still having nightmares occasionally about the gunfight at Mary’s, and I’d woken up in a sweat myself once from my own nightmare.

We held each other and commiserated, and loved on each other. And when we were talked out we got dressed again and raced the long way back to the compound, buzzing on the ATVs at speed down the old paths and the new ones that the crews had been clearing.

When we got back, we found Ivy was laying out on a makeshift table in a t-shirt with her panties pulled up and wedged into her buttcrack as Erica leaned over her and was just starting a tattoo on her back, upper thigh. It was on the side of her that had all the other tattoos, and Erica was matching the dark navy of the others. When Ivy saw me she grinned and wiggled her bum, which made Erica scoff and give her a spank to stay still.

So, before dinner needed to start getting prepared, I decided I would indulge myself in one more luxury.

I took a fucking nap.

I couldn't have been asleep in the RV for more than ten minutes when I felt movement, and I peeked my eye open and found Vanessa climbing into bed with me and flopping down to cuddle.

Then I woke up again, but the smell of the hair my nose was pressed into wasn't right. It wasn't Vanessa, it was... "Kyla?"

"Hi," she said, rolling over from how she'd been spooned with me and gave me a soft kiss.

"I thought Vanessa was napping with me," I said.

"She was," Kyla said, stretching a little. She was only wearing a soft, lacey bra that gave minimal support but that she also said was comfortable, and panties. "We swapped out."

I kissed her back softly and went to escalate as I intended to make love to her, but she put a hand on my chest and stopped me with a little smirk. "Not right now."

"Not right now?" I asked.

She shook her head. "We have something to show you."

"OK," I said, a little confused. We got up and she put on one of my t-shirts over her underwear while I got on some shorts. Then Kyla took me by the hand and led me outside. It was late afternoon now, but the weather had held and the sun was peeking out from behind some clouds. The makeshift 'tattoo parlour' was put away, and Erica and Vanessa were lounging with India and Dani in the deck chairs while Ivy was laying out on a blanket, still only in a shirt and panties but now with saran wrap covering the fresh tattoo on her thigh.

As soon as we exited the RV, my girls all looked to each other and grinned, standing up.

“What’s going on?” I asked.

Kyla went on her toes to give me a kiss on the cheek, then went to the others and they all kicked off their shoes and pointed their right leg out, showing me their feet. It took me half a second to realize that each of them had a new, fresh tattoo on their ankles.

Matching tattoos.

“That’s cute,” I said. “Am I getting one?”

“Look closer, babe,” Erica smirked.

I raised an eyebrow in question but got down on one knee. Erica lifted her foot to rest it on my other knee, giving me a closer look. It was a line art heart design, cleanly applied with little decorative bits. Then Erica took my head and tilted it sideways and I saw it.

It was a sideways H and then a B, but the B was designed to be a heart that encompassed the H.

It was my initials.

“You girls didn’t need to do that,” I said. “It’s lovely, and I love it, but you didn’t need to.”

“We wanted to,” Kyla said.

“All of us,” Vanessa grinned, coming forward and leaning down to kiss me.

“I thought we should all get ‘Harri’ in big black ink on the sole of a foot like the toys in Toy Story,” Erica said. “They wouldn’t go for it though.”

“We wouldn’t be able to *walk* for at least a week,” Kyla said.

“And he could have pampered us that whole time,” Erica laughed.

“I thought we should get it right here,” Ivy said, pulling her panties partially aside and pointing to a spot just above and to the side of her pussy. “That would have been cute, and reminded you that we are yours every time you saw us naked.”

“I had to tell her you didn’t want your name tattooed anywhere you would see frequently,” Erica smiled.

I sighed and shook my head. “You four are wild and I love it. I love all of you.”

“We love you too, babe,” Erica said, and then I was pulled to my feet and being hugged by all four of them. Even Vanessa, who I hoped didn’t take the ‘love’ comment wrong, because even though I did, I still didn’t want to push her on it.

By the time dinner was ready, Erica had the tattooing machine back out and my calf was shaved and wiped down, and she was giving me a new tattoo of my own.

EL + IG + VP + KB

If they were going to wear my initials, I was definitely going to wear theirs.

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“You’re sure she said this was OK?” I asked.

“Yes, for sure,” Kyla said. “Now, we’re running late. Why do you keep second-guessing this? Abigail said she wanted you to come get in a workout, too.”

I sighed and ran my fingers through my hair before tying it back with a hair elastic. “Because it’s a gym full of women, all of whom are way more fit than I am right now,” I said. “That’s a little intimidating.”

“You’re fine, hon,” Kyla said. “And you look hot in the shirt. They’ll be drooling all over you.”

“That’s not the point of this,” I said.

“Says you,” Dani laughed as she hopped into the back seat of the truck dressed in an athletic bra and workout shorts. “I want to see all these mythical muscle mommies drool all over you.”

“I gotta admit, it’ll be kinda fun to flirt with you in front of them,” Vanessa said as she got in on the other side.

The other women in our family had begged off of coming to Valkyrie Falls. Erica had taken up Ivy’s routine and it was working for her, and India and Aria were more calorie-counters than workout people - well, other than frequent cardio, and not just in bed. They enjoyed a good long hike, too, and had taken to dragging Leo along with them.

That left the four of us to take Abigail up on her offer, and Kyla had been getting texts from Spencer for a few days to come get started on her workout plan.

We made the drive over, just over sixteen minutes from driveway to driveway, and when I pulled up to the gate Abigail buzzed it open from the main building and I shut it behind us.

Abigail and Spencer came to meet us out in the parking lot. Spencer was dressed in a baggy sweater like she had been last time, her thick mane of long blonde hair pulled into a messy bun off the back of her head, and she excitedly greeted Kyla and started getting introduced to the others.

“Welcome back,” Abigail said, smiling broadly. She was wearing a loose tank top with big armholes not unlike my own, but had an athletic bra on underneath, along with a pair of high-waisted workout tights. Again I was struck by how impressively fit she was - her torso was like a thick trunk, her shoulders broad and her arms and thighs thick with obvious dedication put into every part of her body.

“Thanks for having us,” I said, offering her my hand to shake. “You’ll remember Kyla. This is our partner Vanessa, and our very dear friend Dani.”

“Call me Abi,” Abigail said, offering both women a shake as well. “You are policewomen as well?”

“No,” Vanessa laughed. “God, no. I work in construction.”

“Stripper,” Dani smiled and waved with her fingers.

Abi looked a little confused. “You said partner?”

“It’s... complicated,” I said.

“Not that complicated,” Vanessa said. “Harri is engaged to Erica, who you haven’t met, and is in committed relationships with Ivy, who you also haven’t met, Kyla and me.”

“Four women?” Abigail asked at the same time I was raising my eyebrows at Vanessa’s use of ‘committed relationship.’

Vanessa gave me a look that said, ‘It’s easier to explain than the vaccine.’

“We’re technically polyamorous,” I said.

“More than technically,” Dani laughed, then explained to Abi and Spencer. “I’m in a relationship with Leo, Harri’s best friend and his fiancée’s brother. I also share him with two other women.”

Abigail and Spencer were clearly surprised at all of this revelatory news, but it was Abigail who snapped out of it first. “Well, any man who can keep four women satisfied must have better cardio and endurance than I thought.”

“Hah, you have no idea,” Vanessa said.

“Let’s try not to make a big deal of it,” I said.

“Are you joking?” Abi asked. “This will just be even more fodder for the girls to compete over.”

Laughing, she started leading us to the courtyard in the middle of the building where the outdoor gym was. Behind me I could hear Spencer talking quietly with Kyla. “You didn’t tell me you were dating him!”

It seemed like the majority of Abigail's clients were out and about, and I had no doubt that news of our planned gym time had spread. Josie, the professional wrestler, was grinning and waved as she saw us coming, and soon we had almost a dozen women introducing themselves to everyone and chatting up what we would be doing.

Spencer took Kyla and Dani over to some outdoor mats and started running them through stretches while Vanessa and I were handed off to Josie to do a quick warmup as she talked with Vanessa about what she would want to do.

“Come on, mountain man,” Josie grinned as she gestured for me to follow her over to another matted area and led me through a series of standard stretches to get my limbs and joints loosened up. I noticed quickly that she just happened to be doing them with her ass facing me more often than not. Especially when she bent at the waist and touched her toes, the stubby legs of her loose workout shorts pulling tight against her ass and mound, the edges of her panties showing.

Around us there was grunting and sighs, and someone flipped music onto the outdoor speakers. It was a weird Amazonian heaven going on in that little courtyard. A dark-skinned Hispanic woman was doing deep lunges, and an absolutely stunning (to the point of it being obvious she’d had work done to achieve that sort of a face) musclebound woman was doing an impressive bench press. Two more ladies were doing burpees, their hops making their booties bounce enticingly in their skintight leggings.

“Ready for a run?” Josie asked me.

“If that’s on the menu,” I replied.

“Try to keep up, big boy,” she laughed and took off at a jog headed for the trail that led up to the falls.

Josie ran sort of like a gazelle with long, loping strides. Every once in a while she would look over her shoulder to make sure I was keeping up and flash me a grin, then speed up just a little. By the time we reached the overlook at the falls I was feeling the warmth in my skin and had a light sweat going. We stopped and both of us breathed deeply but not heavily as she checked her watch. “Thirty seconds, then back down,” she said.

“Sounds good,” I nodded. “You have great form, by the way.”

“I’d hope so, I ran track and field in high school,” Josie said. “But thank you for noticing. Were you staring at my legs?”

I decided that if the girls wanted me to get drooled over, it was OK to flirt innocently just a little. “Can you blame me?” I asked. “They’re pretty fantastic.”

“You haven’t seen my arms,” Josie said and lifted up her arms in a double bicep flex that was impressive even for how fit she seemed without flexing.

“You’ve got me there,” I said and gave her a little whistle.

That got me a cheeky grin as she pivoted and posed again, this time looking back over her shoulder at me as she flexed her back and butt while sticking her tongue out. Then she pivoted again and was taking off, jogging back down the hill.

We passed Spencer, Kyla and Dani on the way up as we were headed down, and I offered both Kyla and Dani high fives as we passed. Back at the courtyard, Abi gave Josie a high five of her own and then a slap on the ass to send her off. Josie laughed at that and gave her hips a wiggle before jogging over to a stand of equipment that looked a little like a metal cat tree before starting to do some lat dips.

“She didn’t flirt too hard, did she?” Abi asked as she led me over to another one of the stands.

“No,” I said. “Just enough.”

“Good, we wouldn’t want you uncomfortable,” Abi said. “Let’s see what you can do.”

Abigail almost killed me.

Not literally, obviously, but figuratively. I wasn’t sure if she intended to try and find every physical limit I had, but I definitely felt like she was. I was doing all sorts of exercises, weighted and unweighted. I did more chin-ups than I had in the last seven years combined. I did push-ups with a weight plate on my back. And then more with Vanessa sitting on my back, laughing as she clung to me and tried to keep her balance as I moved.

Abigail would show me how she wanted me to do each exercise meticulously, taking things slow to really explain the form she wanted me to focus on and doing them herself to show it properly. I felt like I’d gotten an intimate tour of her body by the time we were done, she’d had me considering and analyzing her form so much. I also felt like my own muscles were falling off of my body.

It didn't help that there were a dozen women also there all pushing themselves in between cheering me on. It was like having my own personal cheerleading team, except they were grown women screaming at me to push harder, do one more rep, or breath deep.

When I peeled off my shirt halfway through I was more than a little proud to be the centre of attention but tried not to let it go to my head by reminding myself that they had all been cooped up there for months surrounded only by women.

Not that I was the only person getting attention. Dani's striking beauty drew compliments, as did her flexibility. Kyla was a little more heads-down and working hard with Spencer, who was coaching her through some weight training enthusiastically, often congratulating her on outdoing expectations. Vanessa, meanwhile, seemed to have fallen in with Josie and the Hispanic woman and was getting a workout of her own that seemed suited to her strengths and needs, with weighted lunges and battling ropes. She would later tell me of her meeting in the inside gym with the torture device known as the Stairmaster.

By the end of the workout, Abi had stripped off her loose tanktop as well and was spotting me as I pushed through a heavy bench press - she'd already pinpointed my easy rep weight that I could do for a good fifteen reps, and now wanted to find what weight I could do three reps at for heavy bulking work. She was grinning as she looked down at me from above, her broad features alight with energy from the physical activity. I'd noticed early on that for how tall and broad she was, Abi also had small breasts that had mostly been swallowed by her pecs. Now, though, in just her athletic bra I had a view of her pointed nipples and that spurred me on to hit my third and final rep.

"Niiice," Abi said, helping me get the bar back on the rest. "Excellent work. Now we need to cool you down or you'll get cramping. Let's go for another jog."

"I don't know if my legs will make it," I said honestly. I'd been through military PT that hadn't been nearly this rough.

"You'll be fine," she encouraged me. "Look, Spencer and Kyla are almost done, we can run with them. If you can't follow those butts, I don't know what will get you going."

"I dunno," I grinned as I peeked behind her. "There's another one right here that's definitely impressive."

She scoffed and gave me a little shove on the shoulder, but it was accompanied by a smirking grin that told me the flirting wasn't misplaced.

We went to the trailhead and they started to run, and Abi was right - with the vision of the two muscled women and my lithe Kyla in tight shorts, it turned out I was able to follow them all the way up and back in a slow jog.

“H’oookay,” I said as we hit the parking lot again on our way back. “I think I need to lie down.”

“Let’s try and make it to the bench at least,” Abi laughed, and soon Kyla and I were leaning back on the cool metal of the bench they had posted just outside of the outdoor gym. Most of the women had slowed down on their training, if not stopped entirely, and while a few were still hanging around many had headed inside.

“Abi, I am dead,” I told the trainer. “You’ve killed me.”

“So you won’t be coming tomorrow?” she asked with a chuckle.

I held up my hand blindly with three fingers showing. “Three days. I need three days of rest to recover from this.”

“You did really, really good for shaking the rust off,” Spencer said. She had stripped off her bulky sweater just before our cooldown jog and the big athletic bra she was wearing to hold and support her huge breasts was ringed with sweat, but she also had a big, tired grin. “Honestly, I thought Abi was going to make you puke about halfway through.”

“Almost did,” I chuckled.

“If I didn’t know it, I would have assumed you were working out regularly,” Abi said.

“Oh, we get in lots of cardio,” Vanessa said, coming over with Josie in tow.

“Yeah you do,” Josie laughed and offered Vanessa a high five, then bit her lip and gave me a silly eye-fucking as she crossed her arms and leaned back and nodded. That got all the girls laughing, along with me, though I also could feel myself blushing a little.

“Alright; Josie, Spencer, can you show our guests the showers? Sara and I wanted to talk with the Sheriff about something,” Abigail said.

“Oooh, the Sheriff’s in troouubllllllle,” Josie teased.

“Shouldn’t that be the other way around?” Dani asked, sauntering over to join us.

I shooed the girls off, Kyla taking a moment to give me a quick kiss and a wink that I wasn’t sure of the reasoning for. Once they were gone I turned to Abigail. “You can just call me Harri, you don’t need to drop my title,” I said.

“It was more for them than for you,” Abi chuckled. “Come on, Sara wanted to be part of this conversation.”

We found her business partner in the kitchen, working away on the evening meals for the women along with a couple of helpers, and Sara stepped away to head outside with us. The other blonde asked after how my workout went, and Abi answered in what I assumed was Icelandic and they had a quick back and forth that I couldn't follow a single word of as they led me around the side of the complex to a picturesque little picnic table underneath a trio of apple trees. I sat on one side and the two of them sat on the other.

"So, what's all this about?" I asked.

"We've been thinking a lot about what you said about the pandemic and quarantine," Sara said. "Ever since our nutritionist left, I've had to take on much more of the meal prep and maintenance, and Abigail is managing all of the clients."

"We're just stretched a little thin right now, and the added pressure of the danger of heading into town is... it's just a concern, and we're doing it more than we want," Abigail continued. "We were wondering, since you're in and around town anyways and taking things so seriously, if we could make a deal with you to do supply runs for us?"

"We and the ladies will cover the costs," Sara said. "And in exchange, we would be happy to offer you the use of our facility."

"You and any of your partners," Abigail said, which got a raised eyebrow from Sara and Abi quickly said something in Icelandic that made Sara raise both eyebrows at me, but then shrug and nod. "We could even offer personal training programs between myself and Spencer," Abi continued.

"Ladies, I don't know if it's appropriate for me to make that sort of a deal in my role as a Sheriff," I said. "But, considering you're technically outside of my official jurisdiction, I think I could definitely help you out. I've already got a connection with the butcher up in Jewell and I'm sure he'll be happy to have an even bigger order from me every week as long as I let him know ahead of time. Offering your professional services feels like you might be giving me the better end of the bargain, though."

Sara and Abigail looked to each other and smiled, feeling more assured about things now that I'd said yes. "Most of our clients are deep into their programs, so it's more maintenance than anything with them," Abi said. "Spencer will take the lead for any of the women in your group, and I'll check over her work. I'll handle your program myself since you'll have slightly different needs."

"That's very generous of you," I said. "I'll admit, I already sort of do this for a family in town on an impromptu basis, and my fiancée Erica has been managing their needs. Can I have her reach out to you to coordinate your shopping lists?"

They were happy to have a point person to communicate with, and I took Sara's number to pass on to Erica. Abigail and Sara then quickly spoke again in Icelandic, and Sara turned to me. "Thank you so much for helping out," she said, offering me her hand as she stood. "I look forward to hearing from your fiancée."

Sara left us, and I turned back to Abi. "Anything else you wanted to talk about?"

"No, that was it," she said. "We really do appreciate this. Every time Sara or I had to go into town we were afraid we would be bringing back something bad."

"Well, I promise the girls and I will be careful when we're out, and if one of us does get exposed we'll play it safe for the rest of our family and you all," I said. I felt like it would have been more reassuring, but a lot harder to explain, that we were all covered by an experimental vaccine and as long as we fucked like rabbits we could get Duo Halo out of our system, so as long as we were sanitizing and keeping ourselves clean we would be OK.

"I appreciate that," she nodded. "So, you're all sweaty and I wouldn't want to send you into your nice truck like that. We only have our main shower room since we are a women-only facility. I'll check to see if the ladies are done with it."

Abigail led me into the complex, passing through the open kitchen and cafeteria area and beyond, pointing out their big indoor gym area, along with a rock wall room that spanned two stories, a sauna area that had both hot and cold rooms, and several utility rooms. One had an odd platform set up in it that I realized must have been for Josie to train her wrestling moves, while another was set up with football equipment that I recognized from my high school days. When I asked Abi about it she smirked a little. "One of our clients, Marida, plays in the LFL," she said.

"There's a Ladies Football League?" I asked.

"Lingerie Football League," Abi corrected me.

That had me raising my eyes in surprise - I'd never heard of such a thing. How was that not instantly more popular than the NFL?

A couple more of the utility rooms were empty, and Abi pointed out a big stairwell that led up to a second floor where all the living accommodations were. Right at the base of the stairwell was the entrance to the main floor washrooms, lockers and showers, and I waited outside as she went in to check if it was clear. I heard some voices inside, more than just Abi's, though not what was said, and then she came back out. "Just a couple of minutes. I assume you're not shy around your own partners?"

“No, that’s fine,” I said with a small smile and a little hope that Vanessa and Kyla wouldn’t try to get handsy in a semi-public space even if we were going to be alone. Well, I didn’t worry about Kyla so much, but when Vanessa got horny she could be almost as touchy as Ivy.

Spencer came out of the change room, her pale skin flush from a hot shower, and obviously in a rush to clear out for me. She smiled and gave a finger wave - she was wearing a pair of baggy sweatpants and had a towel wrapped around her chest and cinched tightly.

“Thanks for helping out Kyla today,” I said with a smile as she passed by.

“My pleasure. Maybe next time I’ll challenge you to a chin-up competition!” she said.

“You’re on,” I agreed with a laugh. She headed for the stairs and started heading up, and just as she reached the first landing and was about to go out of view I called after her, “Nice headware, by the way!”

“Oh my *gawd*,” I heard her mutter in embarrassment as she ripped the blue shower cap covered in yellow ducks off of her head, her heavy mass of blonde hair spilling out as she rushed up the rest of the stairs.

“Don’t tease her,” Abi laughed. “I think she has a little crush on you. She was excited for more than working with Kyla.”

“I’ll control myself, I promise,” I chuckled, shaking my head as I glanced back at the stairs where the stacked blonde had disappeared. “She made it too easy.”

“She really does,” Abi smiled, shaking her own head a little as she considered her intern.

“Spencer was the only one in there other than your group. We can head in - ah, I should ask, I’m used to coed spas and such back home so it is not such a big deal to share the shower room, but I can wait if that would be uncomfortable for you?”

“I think the military beat a need for change room privacy out of me, if not the football team in high school,” I said, surprised but not nearly unaccepting of this development. “If you’re OK with it, so am I.”

“Good,” Abi nodded with a smile, leading me into the change room. “I’ll feel better out of these sweaty clothes.”

The washrooms were around a short hall to the right, while the changeroom was the same on the left. Considering the elite-level athletes the retreat catered to it wasn’t surprising that the change room benches were all padded, the floor was heated, and the lockers were big affairs that could probably hold a whole suitcase each with room to spare. The showers were through a fogged-up glass doorway at the end of the room, through which I could hear the spray of water and voices echoing.

Abi pointed me to an empty locker where I could set my things while we were showering and then went to her own, dialling in a code on the digital lock. I pulled off my shirt, regretting not bringing another one with me, and then shucked my shoes, socks and shorts. As I was setting those items in the locker I couldn't help myself and glanced over my shoulder towards Abi - she was facing side-on to me and was peeling her workout tights off of her legs, having already taken off her athletic bra. Her breasts acted as I'd guessed earlier, though weren't quite as small as I'd suspected - her athletic chest lifted what must have been b cups, the fatty tissue of the breast jiggling with her movements while her pectoral muscles underneath flexed and remained firm. As she stood up with the tights in her hand she stretched, rolling her shoulders, and I marvelled dumbly for a moment at how physically powerful and raw she was.

Not wanting to get caught staring, I pivoted back to what I was doing and quickly stripped off my briefs, glad that I wasn't some raging horny hormone monster - if this encounter had happened before Erica, let alone the others, I would probably have already been halfway to hard. Instead, I was able to keep a clear mind about this and not jump to any conclusions. I'd never been to any Nordic country, let alone Iceland, but nudity was definitely less of a deal in Germany so I had some sort of frame of reference for where Abigail was coming from.

I set my sweat-stained briefs in the locker, again wishing I'd thought to bring a change of clothes, and turned. Abigail was walking towards the glass door already. "Towels are here when you're done," she said, gesturing casually to a wall-mounted set of rails where plush-looking fresh towels were set out, though I had to guess about half of them were currently in the big laundry hamper closer to the hall leading out. I was more focused on Abigail's ass than the towels anyways.

Now, I had a variety of asses to hand at home. Erica's was nice and plump with a firm core, curvy and mature. Ivy's was small, tight and perky. Vanessa was more active than Erica on a day-to-day basis but had a stealthy plumpness to her bum that gave it a wonderful jiggle. Kyla's ass was perfectly proportioned to her, athletic and firm.

Abigail, though? Abigail had an ass that was all power. There was no doubt in my mind that those thick, meaty cheeks and thighs held the endurance and power of a workhorse. And yet she was still graceful as she walked naked to the glass door and opened it, casually glancing back at me to see if I was following and then holding it open for me as she gestured me in.

"Thanks," I said.

"You're welcome," she replied with a smile, totally casual as I walked by her completely naked.

The shower room was fully tiled in swirling patterns and pastel colours that made me think of a Roman bath more than a gym shower. There weren't any pools around or anything though - six shower heads lined either side of the room, each with adjustable heads to set different water

pressures and patterns. There were two benches down the centre of the room, just out of reach of the water sprays, and a few plastic stools tucked into the corners of the room.

“Babe. Harri. We’ve got to get one of these in our house,” Vanessa said, grinning as she saw me walking in naked and unflinching when Abigail followed. “The tiles are all textured to be non-stick, but not abrasive on the skin. And the shower stools!”

“Stroke of genius,” Kyla nodded from the shower next to Vanessa. Just watching the water run over their bodies had me worried I might start chubbing up.

“Whatever you want, Vee,” I said. “You know that. But... I don’t get the stools.”

“Look,” Kyla said and walked around Vanessa to grab one and brought it back to her shower, set it down and put her foot up on it. “It’s perfect for shaving your legs, or your pubes.”

“Whatever you say, hon,” I laughed. “We’ll get a shower stool.”

That was when a loud *snap* echoed through the chamber and I jumped a foot in the air as my ass stung like I’d gotten bit.

“Fuck!” I shouted.

“Gotcha!” Dani laughed as I turned, holding the wet towel twisted up in her hands that she’d used to whip me like she was a teenage boy at the public pool.

“Oooh, you,” I growled playfully, wagging my finger at her as I rubbed my stinging ass cheek with the other. “If you weren’t naked I’d pin you down and smack that ass of yours until you apologized.”

“Bring it on, Harri,” Dani laughed, skipping away back to her own shower. I was blessed to witness Dani’s naked almost gravity-defying breasts on an infrequent basis due to her casual relationship with nudity, but I hadn’t seen her completely naked since that first morning she’d come down the stairs of my old house after having just woken up from her imprinting. She was taller than both of my girls, though not nearly reaching Abi’s impressive height, and her legs and ass looked fantastic with water running down them.

I shook my head and sighed, trying to shake the vision of Leo’s girl out of my head as I headed to the shower next to Kyla.

“Ooooh, fuuuuck,” I grunted as the hot water hit me. The water pressure was amazing. “I might just come up and visit for the showers.”

“Right?” Vanessa laughed from her shower, facing away from it and letting the hot water beat across her back.

I started scrubbing at my skin with my hands - having not planned to shower at all, I hadn't brought any soap either, but just rinsing off the sweat was welcome. It was just as I was rinsing off my hair and running my fingers along my scalp that I heard the soft whoosh of the glass door opening.

"Well, well," Josie said. "That's a first."

I wiped my eyes and opened them, and Josie was strutting naked and proud down the centre of the shower room. She even had her wavy blonde hair pulled back into a messy bun with a hair clip to keep it up off her shoulders. Where Abigail was a thick trunk of muscle with a soft hint of curves, Josie was a super-athletic bikini model. Her curves were more dramatic, the ratio of her shoulders to waist to hips fairly steep with her half-body builder, half-lean frame. Her abdomen was tight and muscled, though I'd already known that from her workout clothes, and her breasts were only a little larger than Abigail's but stood out more on her shorter frame, and each nipple had a little silver barbel through it. She also had a shock of blonde bush trimmed close but in a wide triangle, leaving her lower lips peeking out from between her muscled thighs. Naked, I could see all of her tattoos as well, her one sleeve already clear but the one on her opposite hip and down her leg now fully revealed to be excellent work, if somewhat 'standard' in that it was all designs and patterns and didn't hint at her personality or likes.

"Y'all good if I'm in here?" she asked, directing her question to Vanessa and Kyla.

"You can look but not touch," Vanessa said.

"Oh, yeah?" Josie laughed. "Harri, do me a favour - bend over and spread 'em."

That got the women in the room chuckling, other than Abigail who just rolled her eyes and seemed to try to ignore the banter.

"Careful, Josie," I said. "I already threatened Dani with a spanking for her shower room shenanigans."

"Oooh, that's on the menu?" Josie asked, then she put on a ridiculous porno voice. "Daddy, please can I have another?" She turned, pointing her muscled ass back towards me, and gave herself a little spank.

"Careful what you wish for, Josie," Dani said. "Harri's got big paddle hands. He could probably bruise that ass."

"Mmm, now you're just teasing!" Josie laughed.

The banter continued, though it cycled off of me thankfully as I tried hard to limit myself to short glances at the women around me. Kyla, Vanessa and Dani had all definitely finished their

showering and were just enjoying the water pressure since the RVs weren't exactly rocking the strongest pressure tanks with the biggest water heaters.

At one point I glanced over at Josie, who was currently soaping up her tits and down to her abdomen, when she looked over at me at the same time. We both blushed and she laughed a little at herself for feeling silly for checking out the naked guy showering practically next to her.

"Hey Harri," she said loudly, getting the attention of the others. "Nice cock."

"Yes. It. Is," Vanessa laughed. "Too bad I'll be having fun with it tonight and you'll be all alone, bitch."

"Aw, you cunt!" Josie laughed. "Now you're making me jealous."

"You already were jealous, Joss," Kyla said and skipped from her showerhead to mine and hugged me, her skin warm and slick as she pressed herself to me.

"Hey, none of the hanky panky in the showers," Abigail said sternly.

"Sorry, it was just a hug!" Kyla said but gave me a little kiss before literally slipping out of my arms.

The rest of the shower time was mostly just some friendly ribbing and banter as the girls tried to find fun innuendos. It was... well, I would say heaven, but I was missing an Erica and an Ivy in the mix. That could have made it heaven. And thinking of that made me smirk a little at how jealous Erica would be that not only was I seeing Josie and Abigail naked, but Dani as well. It had become a bit of a secret game between us of who would see more of Dani next. She was winning until now, having seen the gorgeous Australian in just a thong bikini bottom the week prior. I thought I would never one-up that, but now...

I ended up heading out of the showers first, for all the world wanting to stay but also not wanting to be holding any of the clients up if they were waiting for us to leave, along with risking my getting hard the longer I was able to glance at the familiar and unfamiliar naked women. That seemed to be the signal, however, and the rest of the girls soon followed and the change room was quickly full of naked ladies. I noticed that Josie seemed to take her time getting dressed, happy to sit and chat with Kyla about how Spencer had directed her workout - and I didn't miss the fact that she was sitting pointed pretty much right at me with her breasts on display and only wearing a thong.

Abigail seemed happy to take her time as well, starting to brush her hair at a mirror on the wall while still naked. I took that more as just her being comfortable naked than trying to tease me, though.

I ended up just putting on my athletic shorts, bundling the sweat-cold shirt and briefs together to carry out with me.

“Nice to see you, Josie,” I said with a grin.

“Nice to see you too, big guy,” Josie laughed and winked. Then she stood up and pulled a clean tank top on without a bra and stepped over to meet me at the door, giving me a quick hug and then a spank on the ass.

“What did I say about touching, you sneak?” Vanessa razzed her.

I waited out in the hall and the girls took another five minutes to get themselves together, their laughter echoing out to me. Several of the other women in the compound wandered by, a few heading into the change room, saying hello to me and waving pleasantly. And all of them eyeing me in a hungry way that made me just a little worried for my safety. Josie and Abigail both walked Dani, Vanessa, Kyla and I out to the truck.

“Thanks again for inviting us to use the facility,” I said as we were loading in.

“Yes, thank you so much,” Kyla said. “Seriously, I’ll be back to use one of those utility rooms if you don’t mind.”

“Any time you want,” Abigail said. “Here, I grabbed one of these on the way out. It will remotely open the gate for you. Just remember to shut it behind you when you’re coming in or out.” She handed over the little remote. “Thank you for agreeing to help out with our supply runs, Sheriff.”

“Abi, please. Just call me Harri,” I said. “And it’s no problem at all.”

“Sorry, it’s the truck,” Abigail smiled and shrugged.

We all got into the truck and Josie and Abigail waved us off. Kyla tested the remote at the gate and it worked perfectly, and we were on the highway in just a couple of minutes.

“Josie wants to fuck you so bad,” Vanessa chuckled once we were out of the woods.

“So bad,” Dani laughed. “God, that was funny.”

“Spencer wants him too,” Kyla said with a smile. “But she’s too innocent to just come out and say it. I think Abi wants him the most, though.”

“OK, I can see Josie,” I said. “She’s being pretty obvious about the blatant flirting. But Spencer just has a little crush after being in quarantine for so long, and Abigail was just being professional.”

"I dunno, babe," Vanessa said. "She did come shower with us."

"That's just a normal Icelandic thing," I said. "I think. Or that's what she said."

"Well that's easy to figure out," Vanessa said. "Let's just break out some Google-fu."

As she was searching for whether nudity wasn't a big deal for Icelanders, the answer to which I wasn't sure if I wanted or not, my phone rang. The number and my saved contact popped up on the dash display showing it was Miriam. I thumbed the Answer Call button on the steering wheel - a feature that had proven pretty useful. My old truck had been over a dozen years old and all the new Bluetooth pairing shit was pretty neat.

"Hey, Miriam," I said. "You're on speaker in the truck. Vanessa, Kyla and Dani are with me."

"Hey," all three girls called in chorus.

"Oh, um, hey all," Miriam said. "Well this makes things a little easier, you were my next call, Vanessa. I just wanted to give you folks a heads up - apparently California is moving ahead with vaccine rollout down there in some of the urban centres. They start tomorrow, and just thought to let us testing regions know."

"What's that mean for us?" I asked.

"It means that we've got a lot more pressure to finish up our own rounds of testing and prep for the rollout, and right now I've got about six hundred construction workers and their new partners bogging down my system since they're spread over a few hotels and motels. I need the site back up and running ASAP, which means the refab job is getting ramped up. Vanessa, shoot me a text when you are free to talk logistics - Brent said you're in the best position to take on the refab project for the dorms. Harri, this doesn't change too much for you in the short term, but you're about to have a lot of neighbours again and some of them are going to remember what was going down outside the compound. They should understand a lot better now that they are partnered up themselves, but it's still something to keep in mind."

"Noted," I said. "When did you and Vanessa trade numbers, though?"

"Oh, we all have her number," Kyla said. "In case of emergencies."

"Oi vey," I sighed. "Another person to plot behind my back."

"Don't worry about it, Harri," Miriam said.

"Whatever you say, Colonel," I retorted with a smile.

“You ever try to use my rank against me on a private phone call again and I’ll add a chocolate sunday to your tab. At this rate, you’re going to need to hire a chef.”

I snorted and smirked. “Anything else we should know?” I asked. “Anything we can do for you?”

“Just stay out of trouble,” she said.

“You should see the trouble he’s been getting into,” Vanessa said. “She can benchpress more than him.”

“What?” Miriam asked.

“She’s joking,” I said, shooting Vanessa a look over my shoulder as she grinned teasingly at me.

“Alright,” Miriam sighed. “I’m sending another care package down; more ammunition, and those badges you asked for. You’ll need to lay up on the shooting practice once there’s people on site though. We can’t have the whole thing come to a stop because some idiot walked between you and your practice target.”

“Noted,” I grinned. “When *are* you going to make it up here again, by the way?”

“Whenever it makes sense,” Miriam sighed. “Which might be in a week, or in a few months. I won’t know until I know.”

“You sleeping?” I asked.

“... yes,” Miriam said.

“Miriam,” I said sternly.

“I’ll get eight hours tonight, I promise,” she sighed. “Now stop badgering me, Laura is shooting me a look.”

“Talk to you soon,” I said.

“Bye, Harri. Bye, ladies.”

They called their goodbyes and we hung up.

“She-” Vanessa started, but I cut her off.

“Don’t say it. We’re just friends.”

“*Just friends*,” Dani teased from the back seat, lowering her voice to mimic me. It came out terrible due to her accent, but the other two laughed anyways.

It was June 16th. By the end of the month, I could only hope, the vaccine that had changed my life would start saving the world.

* * * * *

“Hey, Mary,” I said, picking up my phone. “Erica’s with me. We were just thinking of doing a grocery run, you need anything?”

“Hey, Harri,” she said. “Am I on speaker?”

I thumbed the button and held the phone up. “You are now,” I said.

“Hey, Mary,” Erica said. We’d just climbed into the truck after finishing a run to the pharmacy picking up items for the Valkyrie Falls women. Erica had been delighted to have a project to work on and keep her busy, and it had only taken a day for her to make a list of stops we needed to make. We’d already phoned in a big order with Fuller at the butcher, and would grab the groceries tomorrow before heading up, with a pit stop at home to wash and change to reduce any risk we’d bring something to the athletic compound.

“Hey, Erica. So, I’m glad I caught both of you, and I’d love it if you could pass this on to the others. I am so thankful to you guys for everything you’ve been doing for me and the kids, especially the other night with the looters, but I’m not going to need it anymore. I’ve been invited to join a safe, quarantined community that will be a better spot for me and the kids while all this is happening.”

I blinked, surprised at this coming out of the blue. “Oh,” I said.

“Are you sure, Mary?” Erica asked. “We’re really very happy to keep helping out.”

“No, I know. And that’s why I’m so thankful, but this place is sort of- It’s like a commune, which sounds silly because I sound like I’m becoming a hippy. But that’s what it is, and there are other kids there, and I’ll actually have something I can do and feel needed other than just being Mom 24/7.”

“I- Mary, if you aren’t feeling great about where you’re at, we could try to figure something out if you want to come live with us,” I said. “Ivy would love to help with the kids, and I’m sure Dani would as well.”

“Me too,” Erica cut in.

"No, no," Mary sighed. "I'd love to spend more time with you all, you've been wonderful friends, but a construction site doesn't sound right for the kids. And, based on the... activities you girls have hinted at I don't think it would be fair for us or you."

I gave Erica a look, and she sighed and shook her head. Mary was probably right, even if we didn't like it.

"OK, Mary. Just promise me that if you need anything at all, even just to chat and catch up, you'll call," I said.

"I'll remember that, I promise," Mary said. "Thank you again for everything. I'll find a way to pay you guys back eventually."

"Don't you even dare try," Erica said. "We love you *and* the kids, girl."

"Thanks," she said. "Now, I need to go. We're getting picked up soon and I need to pack some more and get the kids ready."

"OK," I said. "Bye, Mary. Talk soon."

"Bye guys," she said and hung up.

We were quiet for a long moment.

"I don't like it," Erica said.

"Neither do I," I said. "But she isn't wrong."

"I know she isn't," Erica sighed. "But the whole thing gives me a weird feeling. She's joining a commune? How did she even get in contact with them?"

"I don't know," I said.

We sat for another long moment.

"I feel like we should call her back," Erica said.

I took in a deep breath and blew it out. "She's her own woman, Erica," I said. "We can't make decisions for her, and she sounded pretty set on this. I get her reasoning, even if I don't agree with it."

"Fine," Erica grunted. "Fine."