

Chapter 1 from the novella “Logan’s Last Day”

“LOGAN? Logan Miller?” There’s a female voice over my head.

“I think we need coffee over here, Ed,” she calls to the back of the cafe.

A soft thud says she must have taken the seat across from me. I rub my forehead on my sleeve. My head pounds too hard to raise it. *Clunk!* The sound of a cup placed on the table is like shards of glass in my eardrums.

“Thanks, babe. Logan, do you need us to call someone?” she asks.

“No,” I grunt.

“Do you want to go to the hospital?”

“No,” I grunt again. My throat is raw. Coffee sounds good. Water would be better.

“We’re sorry to hear about your uncle.” A warm hand is placed on my elbow.

I pry my crusty eyelids open and stare at my shoes. One of them is untied. With a monumental effort, I pick up my head and try to look at Ellie without crying. I’m not sure why I’m so torn up about my uncle’s death. I hardly knew him, even though we shared a tiny trailer for seven years.

“You ever heard of someone that young dying from cirrhosis?” I rasp.

She winces with sympathy. “Wish I could say no. But, well, you know... alcohol’s a demon to our people. It’s taken many Lakota in their thirties.” Ellie’s voice is as velvety as her skin. Despite her crooked nose and lopsided mouth, she’s the most beautiful woman I’ve ever known. I don’t care if she’s twenty years older than me. I’d go after her, if she wasn’t married to Ed.

I use the napkin Ed brought with the coffee to wipe the gunk from my eyes. I dig my knuckles into the sockets to clear away the film and erase the events of last night. *Oh God, what did I do?*

“Can I get you some clean clothes, at least?” Ellie asks.

I lower my hands to look at my shirt. It’s torn, but that’s not why she’s offering a new one. I’m covered in vomit. Fantastic.

Swimming in embarrassment, I nod. She calls Ed back over.

“You can change in the back room,” she says with a sad smile.

Once I’m standing, I discover I need Ed to help me walk. He guides me through the kitchen and out into the “back room” Ellie spoke of. It’s really just a shed, constructed of corrugated metal and attached to the café. There’s a cot, wedged in the back corner between the boxes of paper cups and toilet paper. Ed and Ellie keep it here for drunks who need to sleep it off before going home to their families. The bedding probably smells worse than I do right now, but I’m tempted to lie down on it.

Ed presents me with a shirt and jeans from a black garbage bag at the end of the cot. I’m weak and disoriented. Ed takes my shirt off. It’s humiliating to be undressed like a little kid. My soiled t-shirt wipes my nose and it reeks so bad I almost hurl. He must smell it too, but he doesn’t flinch. Must be used to the smell of vomit. I guess we all are. Sometimes I think our little piece of the Rez gets showered in puke the way other towns get rain.

I hold up the jeans he gave me. No way these will fit. But it doesn’t matter. My pants aren’t in bad shape. Just a freshly torn knee and a thick coating of South Dakota dust, but no bodily fluids.

“I think I just need the shirt. Thanks,” I tell him.

“I’ll put this in the wash.” He means my ratty t-shirt.

“Nah. It’s pretty wrecked. I’ll toss it.” I shrug.

“Okay. I’ll let you get cleaned up then. There’s a sink over there.” He points to a stainless steel box with a rusted faucet on the back wall. It was probably just an outdoor spigot before they built this shack up around it.

I’m relieved when Ed leaves. He isn’t judging me, but still I’m ashamed. The shirt from the garbage bag is a button up plaid that an old man would wear. But, it’s clean and it will do for now. It doesn’t really fit, too short in the sleeves and too tight in the shoulders. I have to leave it mostly unbuttoned, but it’s an improvement over what I had on. I hope the Higher Grounds Café doesn’t have a “no shirt” policy because I’m not sure this qualifies as being dressed and I don’t want Ed and Ellie to kick me out yet.

I wash up in the bathroom and avoid looking at myself in the mirror. I can’t believe what I did last night. I should have left the party when Oinker and Robert took off. As soon as White Jim showed up, they grabbed their jackets and begged me to go with them. Why didn’t I?

When I get back to my seat, there’s a glass of water and two orange pills next to my coffee mug. I toss the tablets into my mouth and wash them down with water. I sip the coffee. It’s cold, but good. Ed joins me.

“First time with the needle?” he asks. *How’d he know?*

“I smoked it,” I admit with my chin dug into my chest.

“Gonna do meth again you think?” He’s not really busting on me, he wants to help.

I shake my head and stars explode in front of my eyes, causing excruciating pain. I hold my head to keep the brains from leaking out.

“Good.” There’s a long pause. Why is he still sitting there? “You sure we can’t take you up to the ER? Just to get checked out? I’d be happy to do it.”

“Thanks, Ed. I just want to go home,” I say.

But I don’t want to go home. I want to shower and sleep, but I don’t want to go to my trailer to do it. Maybe Oinker’s grandma will let me sleep there for a few nights. If she’s forgotten—or forgiven—what I did to their family last August.

“You could rest here for a while if you want.” He means the cot in the back.

I don’t have the strength to consider another option. I agree with a single nod and shuffle to the back room. Leaving my full cup of coffee on the table.

When I wake up, it’s dark. The small window above the cot reveals a moonless sky full of stars. A nightlight shows the way to a card table with a lamp. I switch it on. There’s a note, two bottles of water and two more pain pills on the table.

Logan, we didn’t want to wake you. We hope you’ll stay until morning. There’s some granola bars and fruit cups in the blue cupboard if you’re hungry. The door into the café is locked, but you can get out the back door if you need to. The cash register is empty. Sincerely, Ed and Ellie

I’m pissed for half a second. They just assume I’m a thief! But I cool off quick because I know why. I am a thief, among other horrible things. And most people around here know me. A drunk at sixteen, a thief, a liar, lazy, violent. The list goes on. I haven’t done squat with this life. Except score a

few goals for my lacrosse team. Until Coach Brown kicked me off last month for my grades so I don't even have that anymore.

Not that this life has been gentle with me. I came from nothing. The by-product of two teenagers I've never met. They didn't even care enough to give me up for adoption. Just let me float aimlessly through the South Dakota foster care system until Uncle Frank was old enough to take me.

Frank "Bird with Red Foot" Miller. A man who couldn't take care of himself, much less a kid. He didn't hit me or mess with me. He ignored me. From the day I moved in with him, Frank spent most hours of the day asleep. At least he had the good sense to spare the world of his uselessness. In the last six months of his life, the only times he walked out the front door were to drive into Whiteclay to pick up more beer.

Both of the people whose names are on my birth certificate are dead now. She was killed in a hunting accident before I was out of diapers. I don't know how he died. Frank got a letter last year from the city coroner in Houston saying his brother passed away. We didn't go claim the body. Didn't have the money.

So I was dealt a poor hand but still, there are kids around here who come from the same kind of home as me. No parents, no money, starving most of the time and they don't do what I do. Even in the worst of circumstances, there are people who choose to do what's right. But not me. Never me.

I wrap a wool blanket over my shoulders and light a cigarette. I gaze out the window at the stars and consider walking through town, onto the highway, and into the Badlands. I could keep walking until dehydration stops my heart and steals my breath. The coyotes would pick my bones clean and I'd be recycled to the earth. That'd be the honorable thing to do. I think my ancestors would welcome me if I cut my losses and just take myself out. Saving countless victims from the destruction I bring.

I finish my cigarette and stub the butt out on my boot. Only after I've ashed on the floor and put the Marlboro out on the heel of my shoe do I see the sparkling clean ashtray on a shelf next to the cot. *I'm sorry Ellie!* Now I'm a slob on top of everything else. I attempt to gather the ashes with my hands to put them in the green glass, but all I manage to do is make a grey mess on the floor.

My tongue feels dry and my fingers tremble. When was my last beer? The party is the last thing I remember and that could've been a couple of days ago. I don't recall leaving there or how I got to the café. I usually can't go more than a couple days without a drink.

I drain one of the bottles of water they left and lay back down. I lock my knees and elbows, trying to stay as still as I can to quiet the shaking. I close my eyes to muffle the screams starting in my toes. A rumble and a gurgle in my gut sits me up straight. My eyes dart around for a bucket or container I can empty my stomach into. A pristine, white trash can will work. I shove my head into it and throw up. Twice. It's all water, but smells awful. I'll sip the next bottle, slowly.

I step out the back door and locate the dumpster for the café. I toss the whole can in there. I feel bad about throwing something away that doesn't belong to me. I'll buy them a new one.

The stars dazzle, seeming to blink with ferocity. The sky is too big and noisy for me to handle right now. I might sacrifice myself to the Badlands someday, but not tonight. I drag my boots back inside and collapse on the cot.

I light another cigarette and put the ashtray on my chest. I ride the waves of frustration inside me. I cross my ankles, my fingers, my toes. I grit my teeth. I almost shout. I almost cry. There has to

be more than this. It can't be too late for me. I don't want to die young. I don't want my life to end in a hospice bed at age thirty-one like Frank's did. My face as yellow as an Easter Egg. Tubes running into my arms and up my nose. Nurses and orderlies clucking their tongues and whispering, "Isn't it a shame? He has no one to mourn him."

I sigh in defeat. If there is a way for me to change, to live differently, I don't have it in me. Someone would have to lead me, tell me what to do. And I'm willing to go. I am willing to change. I just need someone to show the way.

Chapter 2 from the novella "Logan's Last Day"

Vanilla. What's Ellie baking? Smells good.

Blurry light. Dark shapes. I shut my eyes. This cot is more comfortable than I remember it being last night. It almost feels like a real bed. And the pillow seems wider, and smells like some kind of flower. Was it like that last night?

I turn onto my other side, and pull the blanket over my shoulder. But it doesn't feel like rough wool. It's soft and thick between in my fingers. I open eyes again. A stone wall greets me instead of corrugated metal.

What the hell?

I flip over and sit up. The room spins.

"Hey there, not too fast!" A towering blob thunders towards me.

"Where am I?" I whisper. My throat is dry.

"Just lie back..." The blob turns his head. "Ma! He's awake!"

"Who are you?" I lean back on my elbows. I can't get his face to focus. He's so high up there. Am I on the floor?

"It's okay, it's okay," he says. Who is he trying to calm me or himself?

Another pillow is shoved behind my head, ripping some hair out.

"Ouch!"

"Ooh, my pardon please!" he says, and moves away from me to a hazy doorway. "Ma! Ma! Are you down there? Logan is awake!"

A muffled voice calls back to him. It's female. She yells something about "gone to town". My head hurts. My tongue feels thick. Everything's so fuzzed out. I really must have gone on a bender this time.

"Tell her the second she gets back!" His excited voice causes a throbbing at my temples.

I groan. "Okay, dude. I think the whole neighborhood knows 'Logan's awake' now."

He clomps back to my bedside. "My pardon please!"

"You said that already. I'm gonna sit up now." I reach up. "Wanna give me a hand?"

"Sure!" He grabs my hand and I'm shocked by its size. Who *is* this guy, Paul Bunyan's little brother?

He helps me sit up and plops two more pillows behind me. The scene in front of me is still distorted, but it's getting better. I can make out a dresser. Side table. Rug. Another bed, on the wall

opposite me. Okay, I'm in a bedroom. The ceiling is peaked, but pretty tall. I'm thinking it's a 10-footer. Wooden beams stretch across it. Stone walls. This place looks like a setting for a fairy tale. So, I'm probably off the Reservation. But where? There aren't too many stone cottages in South Dakota. At least, not the parts I know.

My gigantic host hovers over my bed. His features have sharpened some. Sunbeams stretch through a skylight, making it look like he has gold streaks in his hair. Or I'm hallucinating.

"So, Big Guy, what's this? Rehab?" I ask.

"Yes!" He grins like I just won a prize. "You're here to rehabilitate."

"Oh great." I roll my eyes. But part of me is relieved. How'd I get into such a fancy place? Did my parole officer pull some strings? That wouldn't make sense, she hates me.

"What are *you* in for?" I ask.

"In where? For what?"

"You an alky too?"

"A what?"

"Al-co-hol-ic. You a drinker?"

"No." His face is almost in focus now. He looks super lost.

"What 'cha in rehab for then?" I ask, patting myself down, looking for cigarettes.

"I'm not in rehab."

"That's right." I smirk and nod. "Just keep telling yourself that, man."

"All right, I will." *Is this guy a moron?*

"Hey, do they let us smoke in here?" I ask.

"I don't understand the question."

"Cigarettes? Can I light up in here?" I emphasize each syllable.

He shakes his head, but the dumb look on his face tells me he might not know what I'm talking about.

"Damn. Thought most places let addicts keep nicotine and caffeine at least. You know, since we gotta give up everything else."

His face comes into sharp focus as he raises an eyebrow. A gold eyebrow. Does this freak use make-up? And his eyes...they're green, but he got contacts in or something that make them sparkle. I thought just chicks wore those. His lumberjack plaid shirt, and tan workpants don't exactly say "Drag Queen." What's going on with this guy?

An enthusiastic shriek echoes up to the room, followed by fast footsteps on the stairs. A tall, tall, tall woman runs into the room and makes a straight line for me. She takes a seat on my bed, and picks up my hand without an invitation. Putting her hand to my forehead, she checks me for a fever. Was I sick? Am I sick?

"Hello, love. How are you feeling?" She has them shimmering green contacts, and gold eyebrows too. Sweat breaks out on my upper lip.

"Uh, okay. I'm kinda thirsty."

"Chayton!" She turns her head and yells. "You haven't given him any sana?"

The big guy hangs his head. "My pardon please, Ma Fala." And he goes to the dresser and pours something from a pitcher into a cup.

Tsk, tsk, she clucks her tongue. Chayton runs over with the cup, spilling a little on the way. He jams the cup into her hand, and she passes it to me.

The water seems to twinkle with tiny blue-green lights. Is my mind is playing tricks on me? I'm too embarrassed to ask about it. I throw the stuff back in one gulp. It tastes like strawberry Kool-Aid, and tingles in my mouth. Is it possible to hallucinate taste?

"Get him another," she orders. This woman scares me, but something about her makes me want her to hug me.

Chayton obeys and I down another glass. Tastes the same as the first drink. I'm totally wiggling out.

"I'll have one of the girls bring you up some broth. Dr. Wigatow said broth only until he approves you for solid food," she says.

"I'm not really hungry," I say. And that's the truth, I'm not hungry. Weird. I'm always starving. I've must be sick. She did say I need a doctor.

"All right, love," she says with a smile as warm as sunshine.

"He was asking me some questions, Ma," Chayton says. His forehead is wrinkled and he's shifting his weight. What's got him so nervous?

"Yes, yes. I'm sure you do," she says tucking me in. "But you aren't ready for a lot of information. For now, just know you're safe and welcome here."

"Can I ask one thing?"

"All right," she grins.

"What do I call you?"

"Ma. Ma Fala."

"Okay," I say with a sheepish grin.

Ma Fala pats my head and stands up. "Chayton will get you anything you need. I have to go now and supervise dinner." And she's gone before I can even think.

This is the most bizarre rehab I've ever been to. Of course, I've only tried to get clean once before, and I ran from that place two days after I checked in. Silver Pines Recovery Center. Piss colored walls, concrete floors, tiny cell-like rooms that smelled like someone puked up bleach. Screams and yelling, all night long from other residents. It was more like a juvie hall than a place to rest and recover. Silver Pines was nothing like this place. This place is like Betty Crocker's house. I'm not sure if I love it or hate it.

"So buddy, you can get me *anything* I need?" I ask.

"Yes. What would you like?"

"A beer," I snort. "Can you score me one of those?" And I'm more than half serious

Chapter 3 from the novel "Tenderfoot"

"ARE you thirsty, Logan?"

“Can I get you another plate?”

“How about dessert?”

“Are you too warm?”

“Should we get a little fresh air?”

The girls are always talkative, but tonight the word count is over the top. Tons of words and most of it blather. How can they say so much and nothing at the same time?

I’m cornered on a milking stool in the back of the barn. They placed themselves in front of me, like a string of paper dolls, so I can’t look anywhere but at them. Not that they make for ugly scenery. They’re a gorgeous set of honey colored hair and “come and get me” green eyes. And they ain’t bad below the neck either. Kind of skinny for my taste, but the dresses they wear cinch at the waist and flare to the knee, giving them at least the illusion of curves. I could get any one of them on their back if I want to, but I haven’t. Pretty as they are, their jabbering mouths kill my engine quick.

Also, Pa Jolon would kill me.

I secretly nicknamed these five girls, “The Bumbles.” Always busy. Never quiet. A constant, buzzing presence. I hate to admit this, but I don’t remember all of their names.

“Logan? What’s wrong?”

“Nothing, darlin’. I’m great.” I wink at her and receive the standard “Bumbles” response: a plastic doll smile.

I remove my jacket and one of the girls takes it from me without my asking her to. I roll up my sleeves and fold my arms across my chest. The material pulls tight at the shoulders. I’ll have to ask Ma Fala to make me new shirts again. Not that I’m complaining. I’ll keep working six days a week on the farm if I continue getting paid in muscles. I’ve never been so bulked out in my life, and I’m liking it.

The Bumbles are still talking. Still. Talking. To me. To each other. To themselves. I look at my boots, and then the wall. I stare at the rafters and answer their questions with grunts or a single word. But the girls don’t get the hint. How can I get away from this?

I peek between their colorful skirts. I glimpse an arm, a shoulder, half a face in the crowd behind them. One of them gives me a pinched frown that turns my ears hot. I must be doing something wrong. Not sure what though. Now two more of them are giving me the stink eye. The burn from my ears spreads to my cheeks. I lean over to rest my forearms on my thighs and study the floor as they continue to hover and buzz over me.

Then the noise comes to a halt. I buck my head up. What power in the universe could have possibly interrupted the word parade?

Five expectant faces peer down at me. They want something. An answer probably. I missed the question and I’m not sure what to do. I feel like I owe them for kinda taking care of me all the time. It bugs me to feel indebted to them. I never asked for all their love and care.

“Sure.” I bob my head. Please, let that be right.

“Sure to what Logan?” a Bumble in the middle asks. I know this one’s name, it’s Yanna. She speaks for the others.

“Whatever you girls say.” My left leg tingles, so I straighten up again.

They throw their heads back and laugh together.

“I asked, which casserole you liked better, Eamola’s or Suyanni’s?” she asks with her hands on her

hips.

Two of The Bumbles lean in. Anticipation drips from their faces like my choice means a death sentence for the loser. So irritating. I keep on grinning though, to hide how much they're getting under my skin.

"No way to choose." I pat my stomach in appreciation. "All mixed together now."

They giggle at my lame attempt to avoid the vote. I bug my eyes out in order not to roll them.

"Tell us, please?"

"Yes, which one?"

"Come on, we have to know!"

They chatter on, peppering me with pressure. The insides of my ears itch. I feel like I'm wearing a wool suit with no cotton shirt to protect my skin. The buzzing gets louder and sharper until I can't take it anymore. Buzz. Buzz. Buzzzzzz!

"Girls, girls! Back off!" I bark.

Heavy lashes blink. Puffy lips quiver. Great, now I'm a jackass. I don't want to hurt them; I just want The Bumbles to fly off for a while. Give a man some space. After a stiff swallow, I dive my chin and lift my eyebrows to plead forgiveness. They go all melty and gooey. Gross.

"I'm sorry ladies. Just a little tired tonight. Can you give me some room to digest my food?" A half smile tugs at the corner of my mouth. I have no shame.

"Of course, Logan," Yanna says.

"We don't want to bother you," another chimes in.

"We'll be over there if you need us," one points to an area, near the food table.

"Or if you want to dance!" the tallest one giggles.

The Bumbles promenade as a unit to a bench next to the buffet and sit neatly in a row. Right ankles crossed over left, hands neatly folded in their laps. Positioned like that the girls seem to transform into a multiple headed creature. A terrifying monster who can kill a man with conversation. Or worse, smother him with love, and attention, and casseroles, until all the breath is expelled from his lungs!

It's The Bumble Beast!

I snicker at this new nickname like a kid who farted in Church. With the girls secure on the other side of the barn, it's safe for me to move. I rise from the milking stool and flash them a cockeyed smile to apologize again for being rude. They sigh collectively. Ugh. They've got no shame either.

I make my way through the barn, veering away from the buffet and The Bumbles. Walking through this crowd I'm like a little kid at the State Fair, craning my neck and rising up on my toes to see anything. The Harawak people are tall. Really tall. Like NBA tall. I'm 6'2" and towered over everybody I knew in South Dakota, but here the men have a good six to eight inches on me, and the women are around my height, give or take a couple of inches. It's weird for me to stand eye-to-eye with a lady. And even stranger to look up at many of them.

A heavy post near the back wall proves to be a good spot to park myself and check things out. I step up on a crate so I can actually see the party over the giant people.

Tonight we're celebrating the spring planting season here in Harawak Territory. My adopted family are the hosts tonight. Our barn is almost unrecognizable, lit up with dozens of colored lights, and decorated with wildflower garlands. The place doesn't look like a house for animals, more like a fancy

reception hall. I'm proud to say, I spent my morning mucking out the stalls, so all our guests can smell are the sweet grasses drying in the loft.

My eyes wander over the people and hit the buffet. Piles of meat, perfectly seasoned and roasted just until the juices started to flow. Breads and rolls, baked only hours ago, kept under wraps to hold their heat. Casseroles. Salads. Sweet and sour relishes. Cakes and pies. Creamy drinks and tart ones too. I've been to the food table once already, but that was over twenty minutes ago and I'm hungry again.

My Harawak family feeds me so well and so often, I've almost forgotten what hollow insides feel like. Almost. In my nightmares, I still feel it. The emptiness that picked away at me, day after day, until I did things I won't admit to now, not even in whispers. I've had a full belly for six months, but every night I steal downstairs to the well-stocked pantry for a midnight snack. Just because I can.

A long arm is waving me over to the dessert section. Ma Fala smiles when she gets my attention and points vigorously at a cake stacked three levels high. My adopted mother's one mission in life is to fatten me up. Which makes her my favorite person in this new life.

I take a step towards the buffet, but my eye catches one of The Bumbles starting to stand up. My desire for freedom trumps my stomach. I grin at Ma, shake my head, and lean back on the post. The Bumble shrinks down to the bench with lips flattened in disappointment.

The band is almost situated on the temporary stage my brothers and I built yesterday. Popular Harawak music is like a mix of Bluegrass and Techno—if such a combo is possible. It's unusual, but growing on me. There are never any words to their songs. Don't know why.

The music starts and the dance floor fills up. I've never seen the Harawak dance, so I want to watch for a bit first. I usually do all right in the dancing department, if I've got the right partner to help me look good.

The Harawak begin to move and I'm not sure if they're dancing or being attacked. In time with the music, they wrench and flail their bodies like a gangster is spraying the room with a tommy gun. I press my fist into my lips to keep from laughing.

A slower song plays next and the comedy show continues. Now they look like cooked spaghetti, swaying into each other with their arms over their heads. I bite my thumbnail and try to look elsewhere. But it's like an accident on the highway, I can't tear my eyes away.

Through the noodle-dancers, I notice Yanna and the rest of my fan club bent forward in my direction. Waiting for me on the edge of their seats. Balls of white knuckles in their laps. Their eyes look like they might explode if they open any wider. Even from the other side of the room, they're annoying.

I decide to head up to the loft and watch things from above for a while. More privacy up there. But, just before I step down off the crate, a girl standing in the doorway demands all of my attention. I'm stunned by this angel, forgetting where I was going and why.

Beautiful isn't the right word for this girl. Hot doesn't fit either. I need a new word for her.

Gorgeousful. The girl is gorgeousful. I can't breathe.

Her vivid eyes flick my direction and my heart stops beating. Does she see me? She looks away and my pulse resumes, slamming through my veins harder than before. I drag an index finger across my chin and find my mouth hangs open like a rabid cartoon character. I clamp my jaw shut, making my

teeth click. I hope she isn't taller than me.

She's surrounded by a pack of giggling girls, but leaves them to walk around the outside of the dance floor. She looks at lights rather than people. Pays attention to the flowers instead of the band. She stops near the buffet and chats with a woman. I bet she's saying something cool. Lips, full and round. I could forgive her anything for access to those. She laughs and tosses back her silky, auburn hair which is gorgeous . . . but strange. Every Harawak I've met has the same sparkly green eyes and light brown hair with gold strands. She's got the emerald eyes, and the golden highlights, but the darker, reddish tint is an unusual color. Is this girl from here? Could she be one of the "Others" I've been told about? If she's an Earther too, this is my lucky day.

A fire lights in my chest as I outline her figure with my eyes all the way down to her pointy boots. I wish her skirt wasn't so long. A bat of her lashes and I practically fall over. She tucks a lock of her hair behind her ear and I break a sweat. I want to hold her hand. I want to make her laugh. I want . . . I don't know what I want. No chick has ever flipped me inside out like this.

She finally shows me what I'm dying to see, her smile. But, it's just a thin polite one. And it's directed at a boy who just asked her to dance. He takes her hand and anger punches me in the chest. As he leads her to the middle of the floor, my jaw sets tight enough to break teeth. All I can think about is knocking his head off his shoulders. Never felt such hate for a guy I've never met.

This girl is dangerous.

I really should go outside. Cool off. Get a hold of myself. But I can't leave her in some other guy's arms. Not to mention, The Bumbles would certainly follow me if I left. So I'm stuck, seething and spinning, on Indecision Road.

There's a commotion near the food table. A kid over does it with his freaky dance moves and knocks into a farmer passing by. The farmer spills his full plate of food on two of The Bumbles. All five girls become occupied cleaning the mess. I'm saved! I sneak along the wall toward the tack room. I should be able to escape unnoticed through there.

I'm almost at the door when I turn back to take one last look at my girl. She giggles at something her dance partner says making me so hot I might explode. The whole barn can probably hear the rage boiling between my ears. I duck behind a large piece of harvesting equipment to keep myself from launching a wicked brawl.

"Kimimela sure has your attention."

I'm such a mess I didn't see Chayton, one of my adopted brothers, come up to me.

I make a shaky effort to come off mellow. "Oh, hey Chayton. Just taking it all in. Never seen dancing like that before."

"Don't lie." His lips crack open so wide, I could count his teeth. "I saw how you looked at her."

"Who?" I'll pull this off if I can just stop sweating.

"Stop it! You were staring at my sister." He playfully pretends he's going to punch me in the stomach, but I don't flinch because the last thing he said sent my mind reeling.

"What? Sister? She doesn't live with us," I say.

Pa Jolon and Ma Fala's farmhouse is huge, with ten people living under their roof, but I wouldn't have missed Kimimela. Maybe she's married? My insides begin to churn.

"No, she's the daughter of Pa's third wife. They live in that little white house near the back forty.

You've never been there?"

"Third wife? Pa's been divorced?"

Chayton scrunches his eyebrows together like he's worried about me, "No, Pa has five wives."

"Five? Five wives? How come I don't know that?" I say this more to myself than to him.

"Hey, don't worry," he says, tagging me in the arm. "When your people first arrive in Enova, you have a ton of new information to process. Don't be so hard on yourself. With everything you've had to learn since you woke up? You're going to miss a thing or two."

"Yeah, I know that!" I spit when I talk. My head is killing me and my stomach has soured. But I don't want Chayton to think I'm mad at him, so I relax and lower my shoulders. "Still, that's a heavy-weight detail to miss."

"You know, Kimimela was chosen to be your Guardian in the virium mines." Chayton beams.

It feels like my brain melts and slides down my spine. What the friggin', frackin' world is he talking about?

"What mines? Where?" Sweat trickles down my back.

"In the Beautiful?" he tries.

I shake my head. My collar feels like it's choking me.

"You haven't been told about that yet, have you?" he asks. "My pardon please. I thought they'd have told you since you'll be leaving for the Grand Hall after the harvest."

"No. Nobody told me," I whisper.

The barn seems to be darkening and my limbs feel like jelly. This feels like side effects from the Deep Sleep, but Doc Wigato pronounced me fully recovered last time I saw him. I'm thinking he might have cleared me too soon.

"Whoa, Logan!" Chayton catches me as I fall forward. "We should get you back to the house."

"Yeah. Okay," I agree quickly to avoid puking in front of all these people.

Chayton guides me through the tack room door. Another one of our brothers, follows us out into the starry night. I wretch a couple of times on route to the farmhouse, losing all that delicious food I stuffed myself with earlier. I grow so weak they have to carry me. It's humiliating, but most of me is too messed up to care.

Later, tucked away in my bed, I flip over a dozen times and endlessly wriggle around while Chayton snores a few feet away. I sort through all the outrageous stuff he sprung on me tonight. Pa with multiple wives and my gorgeous sister being my bodyguard or something. I want to match up what he told me with everything else I know about Harawak Territory and Enova World, but none of it makes sense. I haven't felt this lost since I first arrived.

In the skylight over my bed, stringy clouds stretch thin across a quarter moon. The face of that incredible girl I saw tonight, Kimimela, seems to float along with them. I separate the one good piece of information away from all the confusion rattling in my skull: My girl and I will cross paths again.

Hopefully, it will be very soon.