

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

A month had gone by since that tragic day on Mount Mission. Kimberly Tanner had died. I'd thought a lot about it over the weeks. Thought a lot about that final tragic scene. Could things have been done differently? Yes. Would it have made a difference in the outcome? Who knew? But I had come to the conclusion if Kimberly Tanner hadn't taken her life on that mountain, she probably would have committed suicide someplace else.

I think she went to that cabin knowing how it would all end.

I'd watched TL closely over the past month. He'd seemed distant, for sure. I hadn't talked to him about what had happened. No one had. I could only imagine what demons he was battling over the whole thing. He'd probably relived and questioned those last few moments constantly since it had happened.

And now as I sat here outside with everyone, I watched TL and Nalani with Zandra. I wondered what all had factored into his decision to leave The Specialists. That's right, I did say leave.

TL resigned. Effective tomorrow he would no longer be living here at the ranch, which was the purpose of today's picnic—a goodbye party for TL. Was it solely Kimberly Tanner that had made him resign? No, probably not. I was sure it was many things. Kimberly, Nalani, Zandra, past experiences. He'd had enough. He was ready to move on. Understandably.

So who would be in charge? Red. It seemed fitting as he had helped raise lost kids just like us. I suspected he needed it, this lifestyle, the change, the activity, the focus. He'd been out of things for too long.

And Red's right hand person? David, of course.

*The Specialists – Fight To The Finish*

“Kelly?”

From my spot on the ranch’s front steps, I glanced up. “Hey, Randy.”

He smiled. “I’m leaving. Just wanted to say bye.”

I stood up and gave him a hug and felt . . . friendship. Nothing more. It made me smile.

“You take care, you. I’m sure we’ll see each other again.”

“I’m sure.”

“Randy.” David approached. “Heard you’re leaving. Wanted to tell you good luck.”

The two guys exchanged a hand shake.

“Take care of this girl,” Randy said, nodding to me. “She’s a bit of a klutz.”

‘Hey!’ I defended myself.

Laughing, Randy saluted us and headed off to his awaiting cab.

With a wave, I watched the taxi pull away before sitting back down on the steps. David took the spot beside me and together we lapsed back into quietly taking in the picnic fun.

Off to the left, Beaker sat under a tree visiting with Parrot and his mother. His mother had moved into a small house in town and they saw each other a couple times a week. She’d gained weight since her return from slavery. Her hair had grown out. She looked happy and healthy. So did Parrot.

To the right sat a long table piled with sandwiches, salads, fruit, chips, drinks. As usual, Wirenut stood nearby grazing on the food. Beside him, Cat said something and he poked her in the ribs. They both laughed and then Cat took off running and Wirenut chased her. He threw a carrot stick at her back, and she sped up. Their goofiness made me smile.

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All the members of Team One, Adam, Piper, Curtis, and Tina were playing a two on two badminton game beside the barn. Although Adam hid it well, he kept cutting sideways glances toward Bruiser. Hmmm . . . I was curious to see how that little romance would evolve.

Jonathan came out of the barn with Dr. Gretchen on his heels. Although I couldn't hear them, their body language spoke volumes. Dr. Gretchen planted her hands on her hips and barked something to his back. He waved his hand through the air in a bug-off answer. She barked something else, and he spun around and got right in her face. Neither one of them said a word as they snarled at each other. And then Dr. Gretchen grabbed his T-shirt and yanked him back inside the shadows of the barn.

I laughed to myself. Wonder what *they're* doing?

A splash had me glancing right to the pool where Mystic had been giving Chapling swimming lessons for the past hour. In that patient way of his Mystic explained to Chapling *again* how to tread water, and Chapling flailed his arms. It was hard to believe Chapling had made it all the way to his mid thirties and never learned to swim.

Beyond the pool TL and Nalani bounced a volleyball with Zandra, Bruiser, and Red. Nalani looked the happiest I think I'd ever seen her. And although there was clearly a lot on TL's mind, he came across happy, too.

"You're going to miss TL." I stated the obvious to David.

"Very much. He's made the right decision. It's time to focus on his family."

"Will you stay in touch with him?" I asked.

David shrugged. "Doubt it. They'll have new identities. Live in a new country."

"I'm sure TL will find some way to keep up communication. Encrypted emails. Secret messages."

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David smiled. “I hope so.” He looked over at me. “Guess who I saw meditating yesterday?”

I shrugged.

“Bruiser.”

“You did not!”

David chuckled. “I did. And guess who was shadow boxing in the barn the other day?”

“Mystic?” I guessed.

David laughed again. “Unbelievable.”

I laughed with him. “Amazing is what it is.”

Mike Share, David’s dad, came out of the house and caught sight of us. “Hey kids.”

We both smiled.

He scooted past us. “Sissy and I are going to the movies later. Wanna join us?” he asked David. “A little family bonding?”

David smiled. “Sure.”

Mr. Share continued on, crossing over to the tree to join Beaker, Parrot, and his mom.

“How long’s your dad in town?”

“Just for the week. IPNC’s sending him to Alaska on Sunday.”

“I’m glad for you.” I was glad for all my teammates. We’d arrived here quite the hodge-podge group. And look, just look, at the interesting twists and turns our lives had taken.

We’d grown, we’d developed . . . coming here, joining The Specialists, was hands down the best decision I’d ever made. I finally had a family.

“GiGi?”

“Hm?”

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David turned to me. “I’ve been trying to figure out how to say what I want to say and . . .” he sighed. “I’m just going to be blunt.” He took a deep breath. “I want you back. I don’t want to be just friends. I miss you.”

My heart paused a beat, and my insides went to liquid mush. “Oh, David.”

He reached out and took my hand. “You’ve got me all twisted up inside. I don’t quite know what to think of you, Miss GiGi.”

I smiled. “I never wanted to be just friends to begin with.”

Closing his eyes, David brought my hand to his lips. Slowly, he pressed a kiss to each knuckle and then rubbed his cheek across the back of my hand.

I stared at the side of his face, drinking in his slight stubble, his handsome dark features, his delicious scent. My stomach whirled as he opened his eyes and stared deeply into mine. They did that sexy crinkly thing and I fell a little more.

“Whadaya say,” he whispered, “when I get home tonight from the movies, you and I go on a late night picnic in the moonlight.”

I swallowed. “Sounds great.” Sounded heavenly, actually.

The sound of an engine had us glancing away from each other and down the driveway to the gate. It swung open and a banged up beetle bug drove through. It putt-putted up the driveway and came to a stop in front of the ranch house.

I tried to see who was inside, but the windows were unusually dark tinted. The door opened, and a tall blonde woman climbed out.

She propped her sunglasses on top her head and gazed at me across the top of the beetle bug. “Hello, Kelly. I’m your sister.”

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I didn't move from my spot on the front step. I couldn't move. Numb with shock, disbelief, and joy, I stared across the driveway at my older sister. *My older sister.*

David nudged me out of my staring trance, and slowly, I got to my feet.

I didn't remember crossing the gravel. I didn't remember rounding the front of her Beetle Bug. I didn't remember anything as I stood in front of her staring up into her familiar eyes.

She shut the door of her car and turned to me. One corner of her mouth tilted up in a half smile as she returned my stare. She stood taller than me with a slender, athletic build. Her blonde hair was darker and her skin tan. Her face was similiar, yet different. She wore no make up, only a slight sun burn.

Swallowing I held out my hand. "Hi."

She took my hand. "I'm Sandy."

"Sandy," I repeated, and then we both moved at once, pulling each other into a warm, snug embrace.

A good solid minute later, we pulled apart, and I gazed back up into her face. "You look like dad."

She smiled. "So do you." Shaking her head, she huffed out a laugh. "Unbelievable. I have a baby sister."

"You didn't know?" For some reason I thought she had and because of top secret reasons chose not to have a relationship with me all these years.

"I didn't even know I had a dad until a few years ago."

I furrowed my brow. "What are you talking about?"

“Our dad and my mom were married. They got divorced and she moved to Europe. She never told him she was pregnant. She had me and raised me in Germany. From day one she told me my dad was dead. That’d he’d died in a car accident.”

“That was a lie.”

Sandy nodded. “She didn’t want me to go looking for him, I guess. When I was eighteen she broke the news to me that she was a secret agent for the German government. She recruited me into the life.”

Sandy took the shades off her head and slipped them on over her eyes. “Years later I figured out I could make more money working independently and so I broke from the German government.”

“How did you find out about dad?” I asked.

“I decided one day to research who he was, his death. And that’s where it all unfolded. I found out about his connection with the IPNC, Eduardo Villanueva, and I discovered he had a wife. I also found out they’d died in a plane crash. I never knew about you, though.” She smiled. “Good job leaving clues in cyberspace so I’d find you.”

I grinned. “Thanks.”

Sandy shook her head. “And to think of all the years we could’ve had together.”

“Well, just think of all the years to come.”

We both smiled at that.

“So you never knew dad?” I asked.

“No, I’m sorry to say.” She reached out and took my hand. “But I’m looking forward to knowing you.”

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I squeezed her hand. “Me, too.” In my periferial, I saw everyone standing around staring at us. With a big smile, I turned to them “Hey, everybody! Come meet my sister!”

THE END

*Thank you to all my fabulous readers who made this series such a success. I hope this installment brought you what you were hoping for in this final book. I’m sad to say goodbye to GiGi and all her friends, but all good things do come to an end. Keep your eyes on my website for next year’s release, tentatively titled EM.*

*~Shannon Greenland*