

FALLING

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KATHLEEN HAYES

Love Has No Boundaries

An M/M Romance series

FALLING APART

By Kathleen Hayes

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love Has No Boundaries* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a free gift to you.

What Is Love Has No Boundaries?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what they do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love Has No Boundaries*.

Whether you are an avid M/M romance reader or new to the genre, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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Photo Description

Picture 1: A young man leans his head on his hand. His dark hair spills over his fingers and onto his forehead. He is shirtless and clothed mostly in shadow. His eyes are closed and he appears to be in pain.

Picture 2: A typed note saying “Will you still love me when I fall apart?” with the last word tumbling down the page.

Picture 3: A light-haired man with strong arms is wrapped around the back of a dark-haired man. They are seated in a shroud of darkness, which makes the contrast between their light and dark hair all the more apparent.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

He thinks I'm perfect.

I can't let him see the truth...

...that I'm broken inside

...damaged.

I'd rather he love only a part of me

Than have him leave if he knew the whole.

But the longer I hide the darkness

The faster I fall apart...

Sincerely,

Susan

Story Info

Genre: dystopian future

Tags: cataclysm, second chance, violence, HFN, dark

Content warnings: depictions of graphic, violent nightmare scenes that may trigger some people

Word count: 11,809

FALLING APART

By Kathleen Hayes

The air in the Lower City burned my nostrils as I took a deep breath. It always took a day or two for the headache to go away whenever I was forced to travel to the Depths. I glanced up at the HoloMonitor above the pneumatic doors, just as I was jostled from both sides. From the gathering droves, I knew the shuttle must be arriving soon. Two minutes to arrival flashed above our heads before it switched back to its regularly-playing adverts. A burst of relief flowed through me when all I saw was a busty blonde in an apron, extolling the virtues of cryo-lock Tupperware. I took a deep breath and shook myself. I kept telling myself I couldn't have a nightmare if I was awake. I just had to stay awake.

My head began to swim with the heat of the crowd and poor air quality, so I reached in my pocket and pulled out my Oxohaler. I checked the meter and saw I only had one dose left. I sighed and debated if I should risk it. Finally, I figured if I passed out on the shuttle, I would get shoved out somewhere with better air quality than here, but if I passed out here I was stuck.

I placed the Oxohaler against my lips, depressed the release button, and inhaled my first breath of fresh air in hours. The mist, which had recently been patented by Gonos Corp, contained microbes that would help purify the air before it was filtered by the lungs and delivered to the bloodstream. It only lasted about twenty minutes in the Depths.

I breathed a sigh of relief as the doors of the shuttle slid closed, leaving half of the crowd waiting on the platform outside, myself not included. It was so crammed full that I didn't even need a wall to lean against. I let my weight fall against the wall of humanity surrounding me and, despite the spike of fear at the thought, felt myself seep into a waking doze.

As we rose through Mid City into High City, the shuttle cleared out, and everything outside the windows became conspicuously cleaner, more sterile. I

stumbled out of the shuttle on level thirty-nine of forty-five—not quite the very top, but near to it. I had earned my money rather than being born with it, which would forever exclude me from the very upper echelons of High City.

Ten minutes later, I allowed my security system to scan my left eye and waited the half a breath it took for the front door of my apartment to open with a *whirr*. As soon as I stepped inside, the lights brightened and my telesystem turned on. The HoloMonitor image and sound followed me as I walked through the apartment towards the kitchen—the image never more than three feet away.

I sat down briefly to take off my shoes. While I was seated, I pulled up the HoloMonitor controls and set it to stationary. I didn't like it following me around the kitchen while I was cooking. It was distracting.

I sighed, still exhausted from my trip to the Depths, and leaned against the table to push myself up out of the chair. The only reason I'd braved the Lower City in the first place was to retrieve a data chip. I pulled it from my pocket and looked at it for a second before tossing it on the counter to be dealt with later.

I turned the volume up on the HoloMonitor so I could listen to the dreamy accent of Armand Sirel, my favorite History Channel narrator, as I cooked.

“It was the middle of the twenty first century when humanity began to see the true consequences of their race to advance. Industry and technology had wreaked havoc on the environment, and it could no longer be ignored. There were three major catastrophes that forced their eyes open to the damage being done. The first occurred in 2037 when...”

His voiced droned on, soothing me as I pulled various food items out of the preserver and began prepping them for my cooker. I glanced over my shoulder at a break in the calming monologue and started. My heart sped up a bit when I saw that the advert that had popped up was one of my own. It looked like a clothing advert for last season's fashions. Something seemed off, but I couldn't put my finger on it.

I must have spaced out for a moment, because, before I knew it, Armand's voice was serenading me once more.

"...would have been destroyed if it hadn't been for the timely discoveries made by Gonos Corporation scientists. Their head scientists had been doing environmental research for years. In 2089, their breakthrough finally..."

When his narration broke off mid-sentence, I definitely knew something was off. Another of my adverts interrupted the History Channel stream. This time it was one I knew hadn't been streamed in five years. I walked closer to the HoloMonitor and gasped. The "cool, refreshing, low calorie beer" I was meant to be holding was actually a broken beer bottle that had been stabbed through my hand.

I started to back away from the HoloMonitor and said, "HoloMonitor, off."

Nothing happened.

Then, slowly but surely, the HoloMonitor began to move, as if it were following me, but it was already within standard parameters for distance from me.

Still only slightly freaked out, I turned. It followed me. No matter where I turned, it was ahead of me. I grabbed my keys and ran out my door and into the hallway. As I began the dash towards the elevators, the HoloMonitor started growing. The screen expanded until it covered the entire hallway.

My heartbeat sped up and I began to sweat. It shouldn't be able to do this. I closed my eyes trying to shut out the image of myself with a broken beer bottle shoved into my hand. When I opened my eyes, the image had changed.

I was tangled in a motorboat engine, bloody body parts dripping all around at three times life size. Then I was being raped by a jagged hockey stick. Then I was being stoned by three models throwing bottles of perfume at my battered body.

Sheer terror took over, and I ran. The faster I ran, the faster the images shifted—every advert I had ever done, twisted, with me beaten, bruised, raped, traumatized in every way imaginable.

I ran and ran and ran until my breath came tight in my chest. It was worse than the Depths. I couldn't breathe. No matter where I ran, I couldn't escape the images. I couldn't escape the feeling they were all happening to me at the same time.

A thousand pains coursed through me, violating me over and over again. Eventually, I ran out of energy, out of will. I couldn't keep running. I stopped and I let myself fall to the floor with my hands over my head. And still the images flashed before my eyes—as if the HoloMonitor had downloaded itself into my brain.

I began to hyperventilate. The fear coiled throughout me and paralyzed me. My arms and legs wouldn't unbend to allow me to get up and run anymore. The pocket of air between my torso and legs seemed to have overheated, and just as I was sure I would pass out and finally be free, I felt hands grab me from behind—hands I knew, hands I had reason to fear above all else.

I screamed. I screamed until my throat was stripped raw and no sound emerged anymore.

Then, all at once, I was able to move again. I started when I realized my head was resting on my kitchen table. In the background I could still hear Armand speaking about the Gonos Corporation's brilliant contributions, which had allowed human advancement to continue apace without worrying about anything so pesky as the environment.

I shakily tried to stand up and realized my clothes were completely soaked through with sweat. I slumped back into the chair without thinking. I leaned my head into my hands, and fought off the tears. I couldn't take many more of these nightmares.

I was shaking so hard I couldn't move. More than anything, I just wanted Rasen's arms wrapped around me. I wanted his strength to surround me and for him to tell me I wasn't going crazy. But that could never happen.

He'd fallen in love with Markon, the perfect, beautiful, put-together model, that I was forced to play for Gonos Corp. He hadn't fallen in love with the

mess of a man I was right now. I knew I would lose him if I let him see me as I was.

Unbidden, memories of our first real date streamed through my consciousness.

I told myself it was ridiculous to be so excited about bowling and beer with a mere Community Officer. He was so far below those I usually dated. Or more accurately, those Gonos Corp set me up to go out with.

Despite this, I couldn't help it when my pulse sped at the sound of my ComLink notifying me that Rasen had arrived. I double checked with the camera mounted to the left of my front door, and couldn't help the grin that spread across my face as I saw the image of Rasen shifting nervously in the hallway outside my apartment.

He was wearing clean, dark-wash jeans that almost looked like he had ironed them, and a starched, button-up shirt with only the top button undone. I caught myself before I could scoff at his idea of fashion sense, and instead focused on the warm feeling I got knowing he had tried to look nice for me. I almost regretted the leather trousers and loose shirt I had chosen to wear. They seemed a bit over the top compared to his wardrobe choices.

It was too late now, and I knew I looked fabulous. I threw open the door and smiled. A light blush spread across Rasen's cheeks, and it made me feel more than a little mushy inside that I had noticed. I felt like I was going on my first date. In some ways, I was. Back when I lived at the orphanage, I never got to go anywhere. And since I was hired by Gonos Corp, I went out with who my boss told me to go out with.

I laughed at the giddy pleasure of it all. Rasen gave me a questioning look.

"I'm just excited. Come on."

His blush deepened at my words and he stuttered out, "M-me too."

I had more fun that night than I can ever remember having. We were both terrible at bowling, and the more beers we had, the more creative ways we

came up with to get the ball down the lane towards the pins. My face hurt from all the laughing by the end of the evening.

Most of the evening was perfect. There were just a few times when I looked over and saw the look on his face. The look I get from fans—utter adoration that has nothing to do with who I am and everything to do with how I look and how famous I am. Those looks were like bruises on my heart. I desperately wanted this man to know me, but I didn't know if I knew how to let him do that. I wasn't sure if he would still want to be with me.

I tucked those feelings inside a box in my heart and determined that I would have as much fun as I could while it lasted. A part of me already knew I was in too deep for that to work. If he rejected me now, it would hurt more than I wanted to think about.

We traveled in silence most of the way back to my apartment. It was sweet that he wanted to walk me to my door from the shuttle stop.

We stopped before I let the security system scan my retina.

“I had a really good time tonight, Markon.” The stammer was gone, but the blush was back in full force.

“Me too,” I replied, right before I leaned in to kiss him. Apparently he had a similar idea. Unfortunately we both tipped our heads to the left and knocked noses.

“Owww,” I yelped as I rubbed my nose. I heard his groan from less than a foot away. We looked at each other, and after a tense moment we both started laughing. Our eyes locked and the laugh faded.

“You want to try that again?” I asked almost in a whisper. His nod was barely perceptible.

I leaned slowly towards him and gently pressed my lips to his. Warmth bloomed within me and something clicked into place that I hadn't even known was missing. I gave his bottom lip a brief lick and then broke the kiss, keeping it chaste.

I smiled widely as I said, “Call me,” and then went inside.

I leaned against the wall beside the door and let my smile turn into a grin and reveled in that warm feeling. I touched my lips, remembering the feel of his. I started as I heard a whisper through the security system. My head must have clicked it on when it hit the wall.

“I can’t believe *the* Markon just kissed me,” said an awed whisper.

My heart flip flopped in my chest and I tried not to feel the hurt that statement lodged in my rib cage.

The dreams were getting worse. It had been three days since I had allowed myself to fall asleep. It was a damn good thing I was on a hiatus from work. The bags under my eyes and the gaunt, pale set of my face would have sent my agent into fits. Although thinking about why I was on hiatus was the last thing I needed right now.

I sat staring out my window at the cityscape. From High City, none of the dirt and despair of the Depths was visible. It almost appeared as though the towering architecture emerged, pure grown, out of the clouds. Even five levels below, in the upper reaches of Mid City, the view would be obscured by a cloud-like fog.

I let my eyes lose focus. There was a perpetual layer of condensation on the windows at this altitude. It made it look like it was always drizzling. The light shone through the water rivulets, creating patterns on my retinas. Rainbows danced behind my eyes as I felt them drooping, losing even more focus.

Sleep reached out for me like an unwelcome lover come morning. I fought, but its fingers grasped me and held me tight. I lurked in that unknown space between sleeping and waking, flashes of unease and pain the only remnant of my nightly terrors.

I heard my ComLink chirping from far away and tensed momentarily, until I realized it was my actual ComLink notifying me of a call, and not the beginning of a twisted version of my advert for the communications division of Gonos Corp.

I struggled to gather my wits about me before I reached for the earpiece on the table next to me. I put it in my ear and said, “Answer call.” I could have said it to the room in general, and the call would have been linked through my telesystem, but I had been wary of using that automated feature since the nightmares had begun.

I shook my head sharply as I registered Rasen’s voice coming through the earpiece.

His voice sounded more tentative than usual, with an undercurrent of something I was too worn out to parse. “Hey, Markon. How have you been?”

Horrible. Exhausted. Terrified. “Fine.”

His voice tightened. “Would you like to come over for dinner? I haven’t seen you in what seems like weeks.”

It had been exactly nine days since I had seen him. Nine days since I hadn’t felt completely alone. Nine days since I had felt safe in his arms. Nine days since Gonos Corporation had stolen normal from me.

I realized I had been silent for too long. “I’m sorry. I can’t.” I paused, steeled myself, and lied. “I have a shoot tonight.”

Instinct wanted me to make up details as to where and what it was for and how long it would last, but that would just get me caught up in my lies.

I could hear the disappointment in his voice when he replied. “Oh. I guess I’ll see you later, then.”

My heart constricted in my chest. I could feel him slipping away. I couldn’t keep him close, or he would find out the truth—and if he found out the truth, he wouldn’t want to stay close. “I’ll call you later this week.” I said it in a rush before I disconnected our call.

I closed my eyes against this totally different sort of pain. I had thought I had gotten used to pain in the past nine days, but I was wrong. My whole being yearned for the balm of his presence—for how it used to be.

We had met at a Gonos Corporation event seven months before. Rasen—Gonos Corporation Community Officer Rasen Jiacek—was a rising star. He

was currently commander of the Mid City branch of the Gonos Corporation Community Officers. That's Gonos Corp-speech for some combination of cop and enforcer. Gonos had thrown a party for some of their up-and-coming Community Officers to make them feel important, and to instill a sense of loyalty and belonging.

I had been required to attend as a part of my modeling contract. They needed some pretty faces to liven up the party. It started out more or less as expected—getting pawed by drunken officers who thought it was their right.

I had noticed Rasen throughout the evening. Despite doing his best impression of a wallflower, he was impossible to miss. He was the tallest man in the room, with shoulders to match. His blond hair was cut short, but not buzzed, and his almost-navy eyes watched everything with a hawk-like intensity. It seemed every time I caught sight of him, he was hastily looking away from me.

Finally, I took a moment to sit alone at the bar and drink a beer. I chose a corner where no one could sneak up behind me and maul me without my permission. From across the room, I saw Rasen push his shoulders off the wall he was leaning against, set them in determination and make his way towards me. The resolve in his eyes was clear.

When he reached me, he looked straight at me for the first time. The impact of his eyes smacked into me like a sledgehammer behind my breastbone.

His first words broke the tension that had come up around us. “Y-You’re Markon, r-r-right?” he stammered, and it was adorable.

He cleared his throat and tried again. “Would you do me the honor of dancing with me?” I smiled at the formality of his request. It was obvious he was a bit star-struck.

“Of course.”

A grin broke across his face, and I was hit with the realization that there was not much I wouldn't consider doing if it put that smile on this man's face.

He reached out his hand, took mine in it, and led me out to the dance floor. Once he had his arms around me, I rose onto my toes a bit and whispered into his ear, “What’s your name?”

He started, and looked embarrassed for a moment before he told me. After that, we danced. I lost myself in his arms and the music for the evening.

When the party ended, we went our separate ways, but I couldn’t stop thinking about him. I had my agent track down his contact information and called him only a week later.

He had slowly grown out of that star-struck puppy love, but he never saw beyond the model-perfect image of Markon. I was very careful to not let him see beyond that perfection. I had grown to need him like the air I breathed. The smiles had been waning of late, as I knew they eventually must. I kept telling myself that if hiding my true self kept them for even a minute longer then it was worth it.

In the distance, I heard my ComLink chirp for the second time that night. This time, it was the call I had been expecting. It was a man I knew only as Anthony. He was the leader of a group of rebels—or terrorists, depending on who you talked to. Their motto was *Veritas Omnia Vincit*—truth conquers all—and they were simply known as the VOV.

“Do you have it?” His voice was raspy, distorted by the modulator on his end of the ComLink.

“Yes.”

“Two hours.”

I sighed at the melodrama of it all as the call disconnected. Then I groaned. I would have to rush to get to the Depths in time for my meeting with Anthony.

I grabbed the data chip I had retrieved a few days before, and placed it carefully in a pocket on the inside of my jacket.

The journey to the Depths and back was an exercise in endurance. I didn’t have another Oxohaler, because if I tried to sign for another at the pharmo-

distributor, it would require me to report when and why I had used my previous one. My movements were not generally monitored, but I couldn't be sure after what had happened.

By the time I stumbled out of the elevators on my floor, I was wheezing from exhaustion and contaminated air, my clothes were covered in grime, and I barely had enough energy to lift one foot in front of the other. Pain was so widespread—real physical pain leftover from nine days ago and lingering phantom pain leftover from the nightmares—that I could barely remember what it might be like to be without it.

I was so concentrated on arriving home before I fell apart, that I did not immediately notice the man sitting in the shadows of my living room. It wasn't until the shadow was rushing me that I remembered that, in a fit of romanticism, I had programmed Rasen's retinal scan into my security program.

It seemed like his voice came from the distant end of a tunnel when he exclaimed, "Oh my God! Markon, what happened to you?"

I registered his arms wrapping around me, catching me as my legs gave out from under me, and then bliss. Somehow, I recognized home and safety. Beyond the brain, deeper than the heart, my whole being knew it was where it was finally meant to be, and it all just shut down.

I woke some unknown time later, lying on top of my bed fully clothed. Rasen walked in the room almost immediately. Emotions flashed across his face nearly too quickly to recognize—but not quite: anger, horror, fear, confusion, heartache.

He just stared at me with silent tears running slowly down his cheeks. I looked down at myself and considered what he was seeing. In a week and a half I had dropped ten pounds from an already skinny frame, my dark hair was scraggly and greasy, my skin was gray and dull. I had dark circles under my eyes and hollows in my cheeks. I had no bruises, but I moved as though I was covered in them. That was the beauty of what they had done to me.

After another moment of staring, Rasen wiped his cheeks, and I saw a mask drop over his face. It was the cold, dead eyes of a stranger that looked at me when he asked, “What happened to you?”

I started to speak, to spin some tale of drugs or a mugging, but the lies caught in my throat, clogging it. The more I tried to push the words out, to say something—anything—that would appease or explain, the greater the mass grew.

With growing horror, I felt hot liquid gather at the corners of my eyes. The words trapped in my throat became a torrent that my body pushed, burning, onto my dirty cheeks. The more I tried to stop it, the faster it flowed. Finally, I let go. I fell apart.

At once, I could both breathe easier and my breathing was hindered by full body-wracking sobs. Rasen’s mask cracked under the onslaught of my tears. He took the two steps from the door to the bed and gathered me in his arms again.

After so long keeping it all in, everything inside me seemed in a rush to get out all at the same time. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I can’t be your perfect model. I can’t... I’m sorry.” Over and over I sobbed my pain and guilt into Rasen’s shoulder. He kept those strong arms wrapped around me and just held me until I stopped.

I felt bereft when he finally moved off the bed to stand up, but almost immediately, he pulled me up off the bed as well and led me into the bathroom. Methodically, he took off my clothes and placed them on the bathroom counter. I was in a daze and just let him do as he would.

He reached in turned the hot water on, testing it with his hand before he gently pushed me into the shower cubicle. I stood under the glorious hot water for a few moments before utter exhaustion made my limbs too heavy to bear. I sat down on the tile, pulled my knees up in front of me and leaned my head on them.

I startled when Rasen’s naked form sat down behind me and pulled me into the curve of his body. He wrapped his arms and legs around me and leaned his

head on top of mine. I had never felt so surrounded, so cared for. The water fell down from above and blocked out the rest of the world while I was cocooned in him.

Eventually, he pulled me to stand up and washed all the dirt and grime from my body. He was careful of places that caused me to wince, despite there being no evidence of injury. Through it all, he was silent.

When we had dried off and re-dressed in pajamas, we climbed into my bed. Just before he ordered “Lights, off,” in a quiet voice, he said, “You will tell me what is going on in the morning.”

I stared at him for a long moment before I nodded. A few minutes later, into the dark, Rasen whispered, “I love you.”

I reached for his fingers, lying on the bed next to me, and spoke just as quietly as he had. “I love you, too.” I couldn’t help but think *I just hope you feel the same in the morning* to myself before I fell into sleep once more.

I woke to the smell of coffee wafting from the kitchen. I had managed to sleep the whole night through without being woken up by a nightmare. If for no other reason, it was a good morning. As soon as I sat up and saw that the other side of the bed had been slept in, that plus the smell of the coffee already being made and my memories of the night before clicked into place.

Rasen was out there waiting for me to tell him the truth. I knew I had no choice at this point. I wasn’t sure what I was more afraid of—that he would wash his hands of me, or that what I was going to tell him would put him in danger.

Rasen turned his navy eyes on me as soon as I stepped out of the bedroom. I paused a few steps into the kitchen and raised my hand before he could speak.

I stared up at him and said quietly, “Can I kiss you? In case, after what I say, you never want to kiss me again.” I pleaded with my eyes.

I saw the assent in his before he even began his nod. I closed the distance between us quickly, reaching out to pull him toward me. I pressed my lips to his, gently at first, and then more firmly. My heart beat almost out of my chest with that bittersweet meeting of our mouths.

Briefly, he took hold of my face and deepened the kiss. Then, all too soon, he pulled away. The slight flush on his cheeks reminded me of our first kiss, but I pushed that thought aside.

I waved my hand at one of my chairs and said, “You want to sit? This may take a while.” He sat down and looked expectantly at me. I sat in the chair across from him. Then I stood and began pacing. I didn’t think I could get all this out while sitting still.

“You know me as Markon—a Gonos Corporation contract model. And I am. But I was born Mark Montoya. My parents died when I was six years old. I was raised in a Gonos Corp funded orphanage, and when I turned sixteen, I was expected to help repay what had been spent on me.

“I was young and eager, and I let the modeling recruiter’s words go to my head. I signed a lifetime contract, with the promise of access to all the latest youth-maintaining treatments and a salary big enough that I would be able to retire with ease after fifty or sixty years of looking twenty-five years old. At least those are the lies I was sold.”

I paused. I could see the confusion seeping into Rasen’s expression. From everything I’d learned about him, he bought into the *Gonos Corporation as humanity’s savior* party line. He proudly served as a Community Officer, and his greatest aspiration was to move up in the company to help them make the world a better and safer place to live. This next part was going to be the hardest for him to take.

“None of us are going to be around in fifty or sixty years, much less retiring in ease. The revolutionary technological advancements Gonos made in the late twenty-first century have a byproduct. The public has always been led to believe that this byproduct combines easily with water to create a non-toxic, biodegradable waste. And for the first hundred years or so, Gonos actually

believed this as well—until that rash of volcanic activity about ninety years ago. It was covered up, and they ‘found the cause’, but in reality, that volcanic activity was caused by their ‘harmless byproduct’ seeping into the earth’s crust and into magma pools underground. It combines with that magma to make it exponentially more volatile. Since then, Gonos has been buying time to create safe areas—places far away from tectonic plate movement and volcanoes—in order to evacuate everyone selected by them to safety before eighty percent of the earth’s crust is broken apart by volatile magma explosions.”

Rasen had gone from looking confused to looking at me with a depth of pity and concern I would have leapt for joy at in any other situation.

“You’re serious about this. That’s ridiculous. And it still doesn’t tell me what the hell happened to you last night.”

I had expected this. “I have proof.”

I walked into the kitchen and got the copy I had made of the data chip I gave to Anthony. I had promised not to make any copies, but I also wasn’t born yesterday, so make a copy I had.

I brought the chip into the living room and inserted it into the coffee table, pressing a button so the HoloMonitor would project the data in front of us. Rasen was high enough in Gonos Corp that he knew what official documentation looked like. He even understood the alphanumeric security designations at the top of each file. I could see the alarm emerging on his face as he read through some of the files.

“It can’t be. How could they do this and no one knew?”

I looked hard at him. “When was the last time Gonos was subjected to any regulation? When was the last time any company that isn’t one of their subsidiaries has released a successful tech advancement or product? They control everything the public knows.”

I could see the dawning knowledge and acceptance of the truth on his face. He looked around, lost. Grasping at something that might help him understand, he asked, “But what does this have to do with last night?”

“The other week, I overheard a conversation somewhere I wasn’t meant to be. Gonos Corp higher-ups were at the Advert Branch headquarters to discuss whether it would be prudent to include a handful of models in those taken to the havens, both for breeding purposes and for PR continuity purposes.”

I stopped speaking. My eyes closed and I took a deep breath. This was the hard part.

“They caught me. When I asked what they were talking about, initially they denied everything. But when I wouldn’t give up they knocked me out. When I woke up I was in a lab facility, strapped to a table.”

The memories flashed vividly in front of my eyes.

The table was cold through the thin hospital-type gown they had put me in. Metal restraints held my ankles and wrists in place, and a strap held my head against the table.

I heard a door open and the sound of multiple sets of footfalls walking into the room.

My throat was tight with fear, and the words came with difficulty, but I forced them out. “What are you doing to me?”

“Well, Mr. Montoya, you have presented us with a unique opportunity. You heard something you were not meant to hear, and refused to leave it be. We need someone with that kind of determination and fire to test something on. Our usual pool of test subjects are too docile and defeated, cowed by money and fear.”

All of a sudden, a pair of hands came into my peripheral vision, placing a chip implanter at the base of my neck, just behind my ear. I felt the sharp tip of the needle break through my skin and pressure as a data chip of some sort was injected.

In that moment, every single part of my body lit up with pain.

I knew, in my brain, that I was still strapped to that metal table, but every other part of me was being beaten. The meaty crush of fists against muscle

overlapped with the sharp blinding pain of bones being broken and crushed, entwining with the deep violation of foreign objects being shoved inside me. I was cut, bruised, raped, and broken for what seemed like hours on end.

I knew. I knew they had somehow implanted those experiences in my brain, but no matter how many times I repeated that mantra to myself, the pain overwhelmed me.

I finally looked back up at Rasen, pleading silently with my eyes for him to believe me.

“There is not a mark on me,” I said shakily. “But it still feels like I went through all that. It feels as real as our first dance, or losing my parents, or cooking dinner.”

Rasen jerked his head up and down in a manic impression of a nod.

As emotionlessly as I could I continued, “The next day I convinced them that I was no threat, that they had broken me. I begged for time off to recover. They gave it to me—gloating with their success.”

“That’s when I went in search of proof. The orphanage I grew up in was not a nice place, and most of the people I grew up with turned into not very nice people. I got that data chip from one of them.”

Rasen had moved beyond his mechanical movements and just stared in shock. I walked over to him and placed a hand on his shoulder. He jerked like I had stuck him with a hot poker.

I looked into his wide eyes and murmured, “I’m almost done. Do you want to hear the rest?”

His stilted nod returned, and I decided that was probably the best I was going to get.

“I tracked down Anthony and the VOV.” His head snapped up at that. In his role as Community Officer, Anthony would be one of his most sought after criminals. He was on every Most Wanted list in the country.

I definitely didn't always agree with Anthony's tactics, but I knew I did not have the resources to even begin to sift through all the information I had gotten, much less figure out if, and how, to disseminate it.

"Last night, I went to the Depths and gave him the data chip. In exchange, he won't take any action on the information without my involvement."

Rasen wrenched to his feet and began to pace. Eventually he turned to me. "H-how could y-y-you... I m-mean what... I d-don't even..."

He couldn't seem to get any complete thoughts out, and I knew, especially with his job, how hard it would be to wrap his head around everything I had just told him.

He continued to mutter for a few more minutes before he turned back to me. The sputtering outrage drained out of him, and a look of horror washed over his features. He crossed the room to me in two large steps and pulled me into his arms.

My whole body was sore but I pressed against him anyway. The feel of his arms around me was worth any pain they might inflict.

I gradually noticed that he was whispering into my hair. I turned my head a bit so I could hear what he was saying. It was a litany of, "Oh my God. I can't believe they did that to you. I'm so sorry."

I rubbed his back and whispered back, "It's okay. I'm okay, now." I was so relieved to still be in his arms. A few minutes later, I felt him take a deep breath and back away from me. I immediately felt bereft.

"Okay." Rasen seemed like he was about to say something more, so I waited out the long pause after this word. "Okay. Setting the horrible things they did to you aside, did you just tell me the world as we know it is going to end, Gonos Corp knows about it, and is keeping it a secret?"

I nodded. "Essentially, yes. They have a way to save some people, but they don't want to cause a panic, so they are controlling who they invite."

"Are we talking about months or years or what?"

“From their preliminary perusal of the data I gave them last night, the VOV’s scientists say we’re looking at weeks. This has been building up for almost a century.”

“There’s nothing we can do to stop it?”

“No.”

He collapsed in the chair behind him. “Oh my God.”

As I watched him quietly fall apart, I realized it just made me love him even more. I shook with the realization of what I had almost thrown out by pushing him away.

I knelt in front of him and put my hands on either side of his face. Gently, I pulled his face towards mine and I kissed first his right eyelid and then his left. I kissed both of his cheeks. I kissed his forehead. And then, tenderly, I pressed my lips against his.

I leaned my forehead against his. “I’m sorry. I should have told you sooner. You just always seemed so enamored of the ‘perfect model Markon’, and I couldn’t bear the thought of losing you if I wasn’t really that man anymore.”

He opened his eyes, but we were so close that they were just a blurry wash of dark color. Brokenly, he said, “I would rather be with the real you. These past days have been terrible, but I feel like I have finally made it past your walls, like I have finally met the real you. I’d really like to get to know that guy. ’Cause I think I could love him, love you, even more than I already do.”

With that statement I couldn’t hold back any longer. I pushed up towards him and took his lips. For the first moment it was hot and hard, all bruised lips and clashing teeth, but after that first passionate struggle, we settled into a slow sensual dance.

The flame between us burned hotter than blue embers. Without breaking the kiss, Rasen maneuvered us to my bed and our passion flared bright and strong.

Afterward, I fell asleep in his arms, forcing myself to leave our problems until we woke again.

The next week was alternately nerve-racking and wonderful. Rasen took his vacation days and came to stay with me. We spent our days getting to know each other again—this time with no pretenses—and waiting to hear from Anthony, whose people were digging through the vast amounts of information I had given them as quickly as humanly possible.

Tonight, we sat curled on the couch watching the news on the HoloMonitor. Nothing had come out about the impending environmental disaster, but evidence of it could be spotted if you knew what you were looking for.

There had been multiple sector collapses all over the world. They had been blamed on shoddy workmanship and using downgraded building materials. All the executive officers of Gonos Corporation were on a weeklong “Inspiration Summit Meeting” in the middle of nowhere. I would bet everything I owned that they were holed up in one of their havens.

I sat up in frustration and barked, “HoloMonitor, off.” The screen winked out of existence and Rasen looked at me questioningly.

“This is getting us nowhere. I’m tired of watching and waiting. I want Anthony to call already.”

Rasen just looked at me for a second and then burst out laughing. I tried to keep a serious face as I smacked him on the arm. “Come on, I’m serious.”

Still cackling, Rasen replied with, “I know. That’s why it’s funny.” He reached out and grabbed my arm to pull me into his lap. After a bit of maneuvering, we ended up lying full length on the couch with me mostly between his legs, resting on his torso. I could still feel the slight vibrations of his laughter animating his muscles.

“All right. All right. I’m sorry.” His fingers played through my hair and I groaned in satisfaction.

I settled between his thighs more snugly and continued with a game we had been playing all week. “So, what is your most embarrassing moment?”

Now he groaned, but not in satisfaction. “Couldn’t you have asked something easier like ‘favorite color’ or ‘favorite dessert’?”

“You can answer those if you want but my question still stands,” I said with a smirk in my voice.

“Fine.” He paused. “When I was a rookie, I arrived first on scene to a break-in alarm. It was right when 3-D holotechnology was being released. It was dark and I was nervous and I had a ten-minute standoff with a holo-image shooter. It took me years to live that down.”

I couldn’t help myself. I burst out laughing. “Seriously? A standoff with a holo-image?”

“It was dark. Shut up.”

He grabbed me and wrestled me until I was under him on the couch. All of a sudden, I was completely aware of everywhere we touched. Calf to calf, thigh to thigh, hips to hips, chest to chest. I got momentarily lost in the depths of his eyes.

“Make me,” I said breathily.

Rasen stared for another moment, then leaned forward a hair’s breadth at a time until, finally, his lips touched mine. The pressure was infinitely tender. His lips moved slowly down the line of my jaw and neck until his mouth rested on my pulse. His tongue flicked out so lightly I could hardly feel it, but that barely-there caress sent shivers racing through my body. My hips arched into his and my hands reached up to grab his head and force him to kiss me harder.

Rasen resisted, and his mouth continued its torturous journey down my throat until he was kissing his way across my collarbone. Finally, when he reached the divot just below my shoulder, he increased the pressure. His hot tongue smoothed across my skin, leaving a trail of fire behind it, and at long

last, he pressed his lips firmly against me. I knew the suction he was creating would leave a mark and reveled in it. I wanted him to mark me as his own.

I scraped my fingers down his back, hindered by his shirt, and prepared to pull it over his head. I needed more of our skin to be touching, and I needed it now.

I moaned when Rasen let his teeth scrape across my slick skin, and it sent trails of heat blazing their way through my body, towards my groin. He matched my force when I arched my hips into his once more.

My scattered thoughts had gathered long enough to return to my task of removing his shirt when I heard a clear chirping sound coming from the ComLink sitting on the coffee table.

Rasen growled and pressed his forehead where his lips had been just moments before. He grated out, "Identify caller."

"Blocked Caller."

With a quiet curse, Rasen rolled off me to sit on the floor by the couch and said softly, "It's probably Anthony." Then more loudly, he said, "Answer call."

Anthony's modulated voice rang through the apartment as he said, "Two hours," with his usual curtness and disconnected the call.

Three hours later found us being led into a dark alley in the Depths. We had been met by a hooded man just outside the pleasure den I had gone to in order to hand over the data chip only a week before. I couldn't tell if this hooded man was the same hooded man who had met me the last time.

When we arrived, he handed us both an Oxohaler and said, "Let's go," before we had a chance to stop properly in front of the rowdy establishment. Our contact led us on a twisted path through the hovels and alleys of the Depths.

Everything was covered in a thick layer of grime, and that was just the beginning of the dirt that permeated the entire Lower City. Children huddled,

half-dressed on street corners, not even bothering to beg because they knew no one would spare them even a moment of pity. Pale, emaciated teenagers, who had probably never seen actual sunlight, walked the streets, willing to do whatever it took to earn a scrap or a coin.

I had been to the Depths several times and had steeled myself not to look, but Rasen lived in a rosy world where Gonos Corp had our best interest at heart, and if you worked hard enough, you could eventually move from Mid City to High City and give your kids a better life. It was a carefully constructed lie, and he had bought into it. I could see the shock and dismay on his face at every turn.

It seemed like this was almost worse than my revelations earlier in the week. Those had been abstract—pollution, environmental damage, corporate sins. These miserable faces, devoid of all hope, were personal, and I could tell it hit him a lot closer to home.

The first time on our journey that he had slowed enough to get a good look at the human detritus surrounding us, we had almost been mobbed. Our contact fired off some sort of weapon into the air and everyone scattered.

“Don’t slow down or you won’t make it out,” he growled. Despite being close enough for me to smell his breath, I couldn’t make out his face below the hood.

Neither of us made that mistake a second time.

Our contact finally turned into a recessed doorway and punched in a sixteen-digit code. I heard the hiss of hydraulics moving as the door opened. I was surprised that such a door would exist in the building in front of me. It appeared that it had been built centuries before, and had probably been shoddy then.

Rasen reached out and grabbed my hand as we followed the hooded man through the door. I squeezed his hand gently, regretting that I had to let go almost immediately. We were led down a narrow staircase, lit at distant intervals by dim, fluorescent lights.

When we reached the bottom of the stairs and went through another door, we entered another world. The underground workspace we encountered would not have been out of place in any High City office building. It was fully modded with holotechnology, and technical workstations were set up in orderly rows in the large space. At least two dozen people were absorbed enough in their work that we didn't rate a second glance.

Our contact reached his hand up to his ear and then spoke into what I assumed was a ComLink.

"We're here." After a brief silence, he spoke again. "Copy that."

Then, he turned to us and lowered his hood for the first time. His skin was just as pale as all those out on the streets had been, but it had the benefit of being clean. It gave him an ethereal look. The brilliant green eyes and almost-white blond hair did nothing to dispel that impression.

He reached out a hand to me. "I'm Antoine, second in command here. Welcome." I shook his hand and then introduced him to Rasen. It didn't occur to me until then to wonder how he had known to bring two Oxohalers.

Pleasantries over, Antoine turned on his heel as he said, "Follow me."

He wove effortlessly through the warren of hallways and workspaces and eventually deposited us in a conference room. A young woman with similar coloring and features to Antoine sat at the head of the table.

Antoine introduced her by saying, "This is Tanya. She is going to brief you on what we've learned from the data chip you gave us."

I nodded. They didn't know that I had made a copy and that Rasen and I had been over as much data as we could in the past week. I preferred to keep that nugget to myself until I ascertained how far I could trust these people.

Tanya talked for a good three hours. Apparently, they had an army of analysts that had torn every iota of data from the files possible. Most of what she told us we had already discovered for ourselves, but there was so much data that there were a few new pieces of information. One very interesting new fact was the exact location and outfitting of the Gonos Corp havens.

Tanya didn't give us any time to process before she whisked us back out of the conference room to another unknown destination. As we walked, I reached out again for Rasen. I needed to feel the grounding reassurance of his presence. As soon as my fingers brushed against his hand, his fingers swiftly grasped mine.

Somewhere along the line, he had schooled his face into an emotionless mask. The only sign of his distress was the fierceness of his grip on my hand. My heart tightened for a moment as I realized he needed me just as much as I needed him.

I flashed him a brief smile and mouthed "I love you" to him just before Tanya opened the door to a large office dominated by a workstation in the center of it. Through the HoloMonitor screens that were up around the entire workstation, I could see a well-dressed man with more typical coloring. This man had obviously spent the bulk of his life at least as high up as Mid City. His suit—which cost more than Rasen's entire wardrobe—suggested it was probably even higher than that.

I assumed this was Anthony. He purposefully ignored us for a few minutes as he finished reading whatever it was that he had pulled up on his HoloMonitor. It was a clear intimidation tactic and it rankled me.

It only took five minutes of conversation to realize that Anthony—he had confirmed his identity—resented my demand that I be a part of any plan stemming from the information I gave him. Our introduction to his headquarters, our debriefing, and our first meeting with him were clearly designed to throw us off our guard and convince us that we had no place here.

Our discussion became quite heated, quite quickly.

"You can't *not* tell people what's going on! There may not be anything that can be done, but people deserve the right to choose how they live the last days of their lives."

A vein in Anthony's forehead twitched as he spoke. "It would be pointless and just cause rioting. People would overwhelm the havens. No matter how

much we might wish it, there just isn't room for everybody. There isn't even room for most people."

"Now that we know about the havens, how are we supposed to choose who goes? Your little band of rebels? Our families? We should open it up. Let anyone who wishes sign up for a lottery."

"We don't have time for that!"

Frustration and anger coursed through me, and with every exchange we raised our voices just a little louder until we were yelling back and forth.

Finally, a louder sound broke through. "ENOUGH!" Rasen bellowed. The echoes of his outburst vibrated through the room as we both stared at him in silence.

He sighed and looked resigned. "It doesn't matter one way or the other. It's not like anyone is going to believe you. Gonos Corp PR will get on stream and claim corporate terrorism or crazy cultists or misinformation or something, and everyone, trusting in the security of their existence, will believe that there is nothing that could ever get in the way of the life they are leading." He paused. "I know if it hadn't been someone I know and love who showed me this information, I would have believed whatever PR had been published to assuage the mass consciousness."

I just stared at him. That was more words than I had ever heard him say all at one time. I had assumed that since he was being quiet, he wasn't following the intricacies of what was going on. I would never underestimate his intelligence again.

In the end, it turned out that Rasen was right. I convinced Anthony to release a limited amount of the data we had collected and to allow anyone who wanted to go to the havens to sign up for a drawing. Gonos Corp didn't even have to try. They published one buried segment on the news and our release was safely filed under "crazy apocalypse doomsday preachers".

With the data I had stolen from Gonos Corp, and the extensive scientific research data that Anthony's group had collected, they were able to more accurately predict the crisis point. The volcanic activity and destruction had slowly increased to where people could no longer ignore it. However, most of the speculation ran towards a cover-up masterminded by a terrorist group.

Anthony had teams in cities all over the world, gathering those who would listen, collecting supplies and researching how to live more primitive lives.

Rasen and I got a crash course in planting and growing food, cooking, and building by hand, as well as what it would be like to live with extremely limited electricity. The data indicated that the havens had massive generators, but most of their power would be used to power the environmental regulators that would be necessary to make the air breathable and the land workable for a long while after the cataclysm. Other than those regulators, the survivors would be dependent upon non-electric means to live.

The idea sounded completely romantic in a *hero of the wilderness* kind of way, until Rasen and I spent our first night ever sans electricity in a specially modded training area. The sun went down around seven in the evening. We barely had time to get our things settled and gain our bearings. My head ached from the candle and fire smoke, and my eyes strained from the relative darkness.

I looked away from the food cooking over the wood-burning stove for just a moment, and when I turned back it had burned and crusted onto the side of the pot. My temper ran through me hot and fast. Without thinking I grabbed the pot off the stove and threw it against the wall. Burned beans made a trail of grossness that dripped down onto the floor.

“Auggghhhh!!!” I screamed in the wake of the pot's loud clang.

Rasen looked up from where he was working on using filters to purify some water for us to drink with dinner.

His eyes widened as his brain processed the scene. “What's wrong?” he asked, strain evident in his voice.

I looked at him in disbelief. I wanted to take everything in this horrible, powerless place and break it. I wanted to free myself through destruction. The muscles in my arms twitched towards the dishes on the table and it was almost painful to rein in my instinctive need to throw things.

“I...I can’t do this. Rasen, we are going to have to live the rest of our lives like this. Everyone else—they’ve been preparing. They know what to do. Me? I’m a model! I live in High City. It’s been an hour and I already know I’m not cut out for this.”

I didn’t notice the tears streaming down my face until Rasen reached out and wiped them off my cheek.

He reached out to gather me into his arms as started to say, “I know. It’s hard but...”

I pushed his arms off me and cut him off. “I don’t want your pity! I just... I want things to be the way they were.”

A storm cloud passed over Rasen’s face. “Well, Mark, it can’t be. It can never be the way it was. Stop being a whiny baby and suck it up. Do you know how many millions—billions even—of people are going to die because they’re ignorant? Because they’ve been lied to and don’t know any better?”

His voice rose with each phrase and by the end he was yelling. He paused, and when he spoke again, it was in a fierce but quiet voice.

“I would rather live in these shit circumstances with you than have died out there, never knowing the truth.” His eyes blazed with something I barely caught. “It’s going to be hard. It’s probably going to be worse than either of us can even comprehend. But it’s going to be together.” His flashing eyes stared into mine for a long second before they shifted away.

Rasen glanced around for a quick moment, grabbed a spare pot from the table, and dropped to one knee. Mirth was apparent on his face before he even spoke. “Mark Montoya, will you survive the apocalypse with me?” He held up the pot as he would have a ring if he had been proposing.

The ridiculousness of it all broke my mood and I burst out laughing. I smiled as I pulled him to his feet. “Of course, Rasen Jiacek. I will be your apocalypse buddy.” A warm bubble seemed to start from my heart and spread through my whole body. I was a little bit giddy and so glad I had this wonderful man by my side.

I kissed him hard. “I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

When I stepped back from him, I looked around the “practice cabin” that we were staying in for the night with different eyes. I sighed. “Come on, Rasen. I’ll clean up the mess I made if you’ll start on Dinner 2.0.”

“Sure thing.”

That night, we were beyond exhausted when we crawled into the little bed in the corner. I fell asleep almost immediately after settling myself next to Rasen.

It seemed only a moment later when I woke up screaming. Rasen was standing over me, his hands on my shoulders as if he had been shaking me awake. His face was drained of all color, and his eyes filled with shock and terror.

My throat burned from the screaming and I had drenched the bed in sweat. Fear coursed through my veins, even though I knew it wasn’t real. As soon as I got my breathing under control, I panted, “I’m okay. Bad dream.” I shuddered. I hadn’t had a full-blown nightmare since Rasen came back. I had naively thought they were a thing of the past.

He reluctantly let go of my shoulders and walked over to the table. He wet a rag in a bowl of water we had left out. He then came and sat down on the bed next to me. The water felt cool against my overheated skin as Rasen carefully washed the sweat off my face, arms, and torso.

By the time he had finished his ministrations, I had come down from the terror of the nightmare enough to speak. “It was the same as the others except this time you were always dead and mutilated alongside me.” I shivered at the

memory of Rasen bruised, battered, and abused. It was bad enough to experience it when it had just been me.

Rasen returned the rag to the table and climbed back into bed. He wrapped his arms around me and held me until I fell asleep again. Thankfully, I was nightmare-free for the rest of the night.

Three days later, we got the call from the VOV. It was time to move out. The nearest haven was a day and half drive away. Anthony had gathered all those who were willing from three hundred miles around into a caravan with trucks full of supplies. It was a paltry two hundred people, but it was better than no one.

The weakest part of the plan, to my mind, was that we were just going to arrive at the haven and use any means necessary to gain access to the haven in our region. Anthony assured us that he had a spy placed on the inside who had guaranteed us entrance, and also promised that our numbers would not overwhelm the capacity of the haven itself.

The supplies included dry food, building materials, fuel for lamps and fire, a limited amount of water, a much larger supply of water filters, and something even I boggled at. Somehow, the VOV had found animals—chickens, goats, cows, horses, and cats and others. There hadn't been naturally-occurring livestock in almost one hundred years. I could only imagine where Anthony had stolen these animals from.

A little over a day out on our journey, the first shock wave came. The ground shook under us for a good two minutes before the earth settled.

Far off in the distance, the sky filled with fire. It had been hours since we had driven out of view of the city skyline, but I could imagine the buildings shifting on their foundations, and story upon story falling as those below them collapsed into nothingness.

As fire roared in the distance, a red light and dark ash took over the sky, and I imagined I could hear the screams of millions as the Earth took her

penance on a humanity who had turned their back on her. Her cruel maw opened and swallowed her children whole into the burning pit of her gut.

The heat reached us, even at this distance, and fine, dark ash fell out of the sky, covering us in the remains of the only life we had ever known.

Through it all, the caravan forged forward. By the time the silhouette of the haven made its way into our line of sight, we were driving in complete darkness. The ash cloud covered the entire sky. The caravan lurched to a halt as the driver of the first car stopped to gain entrance for all of us.

Anthony kept his radio on broadcast to all the vehicles so we would know what was going on.

“You’re here. Thank God. We thought no one had escaped when the others didn’t show up.”

“We are two hundred strong and have brought supplies enough for twice that.”

“Welcome.”

A great cheer went up as the caravan began its slow progress into the haven. We were in a vehicle near the end of the caravan, so by the time we got out, most of the refugees were gathered in the central unloading area.

Rasen grabbed my hand as we joined the others. The darkness seemed to cover everything. Someone began to circle the courtyard area, lighting lamps with a torch of some sort. With each lit flame, a pool of light revealed hollow eyes and grime-covered faces stained with tears.

As the minutes passed, it became clear that the environmental regulators were holding. The growing pools of light allowed families and loved ones to find each other. Everywhere I looked, people embraced, and slow smiles filled with bittersweet pain spread through the crowd.

Anthony stood up on the hood of one of the trucks and spoke into the slowly brightening darkness.

“Tonight we mourn for those we have lost. No one here has not been touched. Tonight our tears run free, cleansing the dirt from our faces and the

pain from our hearts.” He paused. “Look around, because grief does not rule us. Grief does not direct our path. The world has fallen apart, and we are the pieces left with which to rebuild. Look around, because we are the pieces from which the future will be forged. We are the future.”

Around us the crowd roared its hope and determination, but my attention was on Rasen. I tightened my grip on his hand, looked into his eyes and saw my future reflected there.

THE END

Author Bio

Kathleen Hayes is a bit of an all-around geek. She has mastered the art of procrastination, is owned by two crazy cats, and is excited to have just added a fellow super geek to her clan. Kathleen loves to explore worlds—whether in her head or on page. She welcomes you into her worlds and hopes you have as much fun there as she does!

She writes M/M Romance short stories and poetry. Other works by Kathleen include Broken, Life in Chaos, Like So Much Hot Air, Christmas Tradition, and Perfect. You can also follow her serial, True Love's Kiss, on her blog and find a selection of shorter ficbits.

She loves to hear from y'all so if you have questions/comments/feedback comment on her blog, message her on Goodreads or email her.

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