

KENDRA'S JOURNEY

THE REGIME

Book Two

By

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This book is a work of fiction. Characters, names, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to any actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Note: This eBook has a sneak peek of another great book written by Eileen Sheehan at the end.

Notice** Portions of this story may prove too graphic, sexually explicit, or violent for sensitive readers. This novel is intended for mature readers.

This book is dedicated to paranormal fans around the world who enjoy thrills with some romance tossed in the mix.

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The intense heat of the day was far less tolerable than it was over her prior days of travel. Perhaps it was because her slight body was working harder now that she was forced to walk instead of riding her mare. The muscles in Ari's legs were screaming for relief and her body was sweating to the point that she offended herself. She'd lost her sunscreen, wide-brimmed straw hat, and sunglasses at the same time that she'd lost her mare. Her short, flaxen hair was matted to her head from the sweat that seemed to ooze from every pore of her body. Her clothes were so soaked with it that she was certain that if she wrung them out there'd be a goodly amount of liquid released. She needed to find shade and rest, but, when the realization of the futility of her situation sank in, she'd run in a panic without paying attention to where she was going and she was no longer on the intended route. Nothing looked familiar. After her recent overwhelming encounter with a small band of intelligent zombies that managed to take her unaware, she worried over stopping just anywhere. She was exhausted and didn't trust herself to be alert enough should another group of zombies come along. Even so, she knew her body's limitations. It was a dilemma. She hesitated stopping in the event of another zombie encounter and yet she feared not stopping because if she exhausted her body any longer without letting it

rejuvenate she'd be worthless should another crisis such as another zombie encounter occur.

The petite young woman checked her surroundings for something that might look familiar. Even though she was no longer on her intended route, she'd been through this territory hundreds of times while searching for Kendra or others that the council at Center Land had assigned her to hunt and bring back to them. She just needed to find a familiar landmark to tell her where she was and she'd be able to get her bearings back in order.

She cursed herself for not being more observant. Her mare had been so dependable and knowing of the areas that they patrolled that she'd paid minimal attention to things like landmarks to help find her way to and from a location. Now, her mare was gone and she was on her own.

Sinking onto the hard packed soil, she settled beneath a tree that was giving its all to stay alive in such a barren area. Its sparse foliage offered the best amount of shade. She couldn't help wondering how much thicker the foliage on the rugged little tree would be had it been located in more lush surroundings as she rested her back that was thick with sweat against the trunk's rough bark.

The sickening memories of her mare being torn to pieces by the band of zombies tormented her even more than the pounding headache that she'd developed from excessive sun exposure. Memories of the equine's blood curdling screeching as it was eaten alive competed with the

thunderous pounding of a hundred sledge hammers inside her head. Tears of sorrow and regret for not being more observant and aware of the zombie's approach until it was too late mixed with grungy, sticky sweat as they rolled over her cheeks and onto her neck; leaving a telltale path through the dust that had settled on her normally pale flesh that was reddened from the sun.

Hugging her knees, she buried her face into them and closed her eyes. If she could just shut out the sight and sound of her poor mare's demise long enough to rest and relieve her head of the incessant pounding, perhaps she'd be better able to focus on where she was and get herself headed into the right direction again. She was familiar with the area. She knew this. She just couldn't think. She needed to be able to think.

The humming of a drone sent by the alien regime to patrol the land passing overhead caught her attention and she scrambled to make herself as invisible as possible in such a desolate landscape.

Felix placed his hands against the small of his back as he stood up and stretched out the kinks in it. He'd been weeding the garden for so long that he'd practically lost track of time. Surely Eugene would be waking from his nap soon. Since both Kendra and Rex were off hunting, it was up to

him to care for his infant nephew. He smiled at the thought. This was a task that he took great pleasure in and would have probably competed for the right to do even if his parents were home. Giving his work an approving nod, he clapped his hands together to get as much of the soil from them as possible and then headed back to the main house.

At the sound of a drone flying overhead, he quickly slid beneath the porch of the nearest building. This was the first drone that he'd seen in a very long time and the very first that had flown over the compound since their arrival over a year ago. Life had become so calm and complete that he'd almost forgotten that the world was now run by an alien regime and that life outside of his little nucleus was anything but pleasant. The drone was a sharp reminder.

He peered out from his hiding place as he watched the mechanical spy fly so low that it almost landed in the center green. It looked much larger close up than he'd thought them to be when seen from afar. His breathing grew ragged and his heart thrashed against his ribcage as he watched the top of the drone lift open and a mechanical arm with a camera attached slowly rise out of it. Lights of various colors flashed and a series of loud beeps filled the air as the camera gradually moved in a three-hundred-sixty-degree circle while snapping photos with rapid repetition. It stopped and focused on the building that he cowered beneath. Holding his breath, he flattened himself as close to the ground as

possible and forced his body to be still while he listened to the rapid clicks of the camera as it did its job.

After what felt like an eternity, the camera moved on and then returned to the bowels of the drone. His breath sounded loud and raspy as he let it out when the drone finally lifted up into the sky.

He waited until the alien's spy was out of sight before slowly crawling out from beneath the porch. He took a moment to regain his composure before asking his legs to hold him steady and then take him into the main house. His hands trembled as he turned the doorknob and entered. He hoped that Kendra and Rex would return soon so that he could confer with them about what just happened. He was worried, and rightfully so. From all that he'd heard about the alien regime's drones, having one do what that one just did was not a good sign.

He quietly made his way down the hall. Stopping at the door to Eugene's room, he slowly turned the doorknob and cautiously peeked in to see if the child was awake. A silent sigh of satisfaction was accompanied by a gentle smile when he saw that the tiny bundle was still sleeping soundly. He had a few more things that he wanted to tend to before he devoted all of his attention to his little second cousin. One of which was putting something into his empty stomach.

After closing the door just as carefully as he'd opened it, he made his way back to the kitchen and pulled the remains of the salad that they'd had at dinner the night

before from the refrigerator. A few of the solar panels that they relied upon were in need of repair, so, to cut down on electric consumption, Rex had raised the temperature in the refrigerator as high as he could without having the food that they stored in it spoil. The lettuce and accompanying vegetables were barely cooler than room temperature, but everything was still fresh enough to enjoy.

Sitting at the counter, he greedily consumed the salad. The bowl was almost empty before his stomach felt satisfied enough for him to slow down and savor each bite. With his need for sustenance satiated, his mind returned to the drone that had all but landed on the center green. He looked out of the window at the spot where the alien regime's spy equipment had been hovering while he tried to think why the drone would be snapping pictures like it was. It wasn't in a location that would allow it to see the garden. So, what could it have been looking for?

Movement in the distance caught his eye. He went closer to the window for a better look. A lone, bedraggled looking female was attempting to climb over the fence. Was she an advanced zombie? The advanced zombies had the intelligence of humans who harbored some semblance of resistance to the virus. They were the only ones capable of figuring out how to deal with a fence, but they usually traveled in packs and were few in number. He'd heard about them, but never seen them. Not the really advanced ones, at least. Most of the zombies that he was aware of were fully

overtaken by the virus with limited brain activity and no hint of humanity left in them. He grabbed his bow in preparation to defend himself and his nephew from an invasion while he searched the grounds that surrounded the woman for more like her. He could see no one.

Stepping out onto the porch, he raised the bow with the intention of putting an arrow through the zombie's head, but something stopped him. He couldn't say exactly what it was, but he detected a familiarity about the woman. Taking a deep breath, he steeled his nerves and made his way off the porch; all the while keeping an eye out for more zombies.

As he drew closer to the female, he began to recognize her short and matted, white-blond hair and petite frame. It was Ari.

"Ari! What happened to you?" he bellowed as he rushed to her aide. He put his arm around her waist to help her over the fence while he continued to search for a sign of a companion; only, this time the companion that he was searching for was his aunt, Olga. "Where's Olga? Is she with you?"

Ari was exhausted, but she did her best to get her vocal cords to work so that she could respond to his questions.

"I am alone," she managed to choke out from a throat and mouth that felt like she'd eaten spoonfuls of dirt without the aid of a liquid to wash it down and lips that were cracked and bleeding. "I need water."

“Of course,” Felix said as he lifted her into his arms and carried her into the house. Even with the handicap of his club foot, he managed to take the porch steps two at a time without a moment’s thought as to the fact that he was doing it. “Why are you walking? Where is your horse?”

She waited for him to position her on the sofa and bring her a large glass of water before trying to speak again.

“I was sent to fetch you all to Center Land. Olga has been given the position of senior scientist in our lab. She’s happy, but she wants her family with her,” Ari informed him.

He looked at her long and hard. Could he believe her? Was that really the case? Or, were they holding Olga prisoner and using this lie to get the rest of them in their trap? Kendra had only recently escaped from there. Convincing her to return wouldn’t be easy.

He decided to take a little more time to analyze the situation before coming to any type of conclusion that could turn out to be life altering.

Taking a deep breath, he asked, “If you were sent by Center Land to fetch us, why were you walking?” Looking at her bedraggled appearance, he added “And why are you in such a state?”

Felix was deep in thought while he slowly paced the porch. He stopped for a moment to admire the brilliant orangish-red sun as it casually set behind the tree line. Being outside to greet the sun when it rose in the morning and to say good night when it set in the evening was a habit that he developed as a young boy. It gave him some semblance of peace to witness such a miraculous occurrence.

To his disappointment, the contentment that he normally felt during this time eluded him. His mind was filled with confusion and frustration. He'd intently listened to Ari's tale of woes about all that occurred while journeying from Center Land to his home and was sorry for what she'd endured during it. A trip that should have taken her no more than two days on foot – less on horseback - had lasted the better part of a week. She'd been so preoccupied with fleeing for her life -as well as traumatized by the sight and sound of her mare being devoured- that she'd gone off her intended route and was lost in a barren area for a significant period of time. Since her supplies were strapped to the back of her mare, she only had the half-empty water canteen that hung, crossbody, on her torso. Food was something that she'd have to rummage for and, in the desolate area that she'd ended up in, it wasn't to be found. She rationed her water while she searched for more and feared dehydration

before she'd accomplished it. For someone whose body wasn't used to the survival rigors of traveling the countryside afoot, she'd fared poorly; as was expected.

He'd given her food and water and then left her sleeping on the sofa. She looked weak and frail, yet he knew better. She was a strong and resourceful beauty who shouldered a responsibility that most men would find daunting. He assumed that the fact that her appearance was deceiving was one of the reasons that the leaders of Center Land favored using her for missions. He was sure that, like him, when people first met her they were deceived into thinking her weak and unthreatening. He didn't know exactly how threatening she could be since the evilness of her late brother, Baelil, had overshadowed all else, but he knew for certain that she was anything but frail.

Regardless of the role that she'd played in delivering misery and mayhem to the life of his family, he couldn't help finding her attractive. At one time, he'd contemplated mating with her. Of course, now that he was a eunuch, that could never happen.

The sun was almost completely set when he turned to find her quietly observing him from the doorway of the house.

"How long have you been there?" he asked with irritation. He was never one to appreciate being spied upon and that's what it felt like she was doing.

“I didn’t mean to upset you,” she offered in a gentle tone. “You looked so deep in thought that I didn’t want to disturb you. So, I just stood here waiting for you to notice me.”

“You’ve been noticed,” he growled. Then, when she simply stood in calm silence, he added, “I expected you to sleep longer.”

Ari shrugged. “Not my bed, not my home... I’m sure you understand.”

“That’s a comfortable sofa, but it isn’t a bed,” he said with a smile as he forced himself to relax and be amiable. “I’ll show you to a room where you can clean up. Do you have a change of clothes in your backpack?”

Ari’s brilliant white teeth sparkled in the sunlight as she grinned. “As a matter of fact, I do. I saw no reason to change while on the road.”

Felix’s eyes locked on her mesmerizing smile as he nodded. “Understandable.”

Ari nervously fidgeted. “Will Kendra and Rex return soon? I’ve been gone so long already. I imagine that Olga is starting to get nervous.”

“They’re on horseback, so they go further than when on foot.”

“Horseback?” Ari repeated with furrowed brows.

“There were several freed up after your raid, if you recall,” he firmly stated.

“I’d forgotten about the horses,” she sighed.

“Don’t expect them back,” Felix quickly said. “They’re the spoils of war.”

Ari tipped her head and looked at him for a long moment. “You don’t like me.”

Taken aback by her bluntness, he sucked in air. “It’s not that I don’t like you. I just don’t like what you did.”

Ari looked away. “I was following orders.”

“Well, your orders suck,” he grumbled.

“I won’t argue with that,” she said with a soft sigh. “Much of what they ask me to do is distasteful.”

“If you don’t approve of what they ask of you, why do you do it?” he asked.

She shrugged and looked off into the distance. “If you want to live in Center Land, you have to earn the right. I find the roles for females far more distasteful than what they ask me to do as a soldier. It’s the lesser of the evils.”

“What roles for females are distasteful?” he asked with curiosity. “Are you saying that you’re not domestic?”

Ari giggled. “I haven’t a domestic gene in my body, but it’s not that.” After filling her lungs with air and then slowly letting it out, she said, “If I wasn’t working as a soldier for the council, I’d be expected to enter into the breeding program.” She visibly shuddered. “I have no desire to become a baby factory.”

Felix suspiciously eyed her. “Enforced breeding is something the aliens do for food supply. Why would they be doing it in your land?”

“It’s not enforced,” Ari said. “It’s elective, but expected. Our reasoning is different, of course. We aren’t cannibals. Our goal is to drive the aliens off the planet and we can’t do that until our numbers are up. There are far too few of us right now.”

“Do the aliens know about your little community?” he asked with sudden interest.

She shook her head. “If they did, we’d be wiped out by now. We use a machine that creates a holographic covering over the village. So far, it’s proved effective.”

“So far,” he mused, more to himself than to her, “but with a breeding program in play, the community must be growing quite large. How long will the holograph be able to cover it?”

“We send the children to our sister community in the center of the earth where they are raised and given proper training in preparation for when we go up against the aliens. They have plenty of room to grow and no need for disguise like we have,” Ari offered.

Felix scowled. “So the mother gives birth and then relinquishes the child? Egad, that’s awful. They really are just baby factories.”

“Olga is close to remembering the formula for the cure to zombiesm,” she eagerly offered. “It’s been a lot of years, but it’s slowly coming back to her. We expect to be manufacturing it very soon.”

Felix scowled. “Will curing the zombies take care of the alien problem? No, it won’t. You’ll still need numbers to go up against them.”

“We won’t need to send the children away, though. They’ll be able to stay with their parents and be raised normally,” she said with a pensive tone.

“I don’t see how,” he said with a shake of his head. “The zombies aren’t the reason you’re hiding your community, the aliens are. You’ll still have to be careful to keep the village small.”

Ari shook her head. “The elders say that when the zombie’s are taken care of, we’ll have no more reason to hide and I believe them.

Felix pursed his lips. “I don’t understand why Olga didn’t come forward with who she was and what she could do before this,” Felix grumbled. “It would have been nice to know.”

Ari looked surprised. “She never told you?”

He shook his head. “We had no idea who she was until Kendra stumbled into you while hunting and she felt it necessary to tell us.”

“She was hoping that the virus would attack the aliens and wipe them out. Also, she was worried about the aliens getting their hands on her. She’d be their science slave if they did,” Ari said. “I can’t blame her for not wanting to tell anyone.”

“Yet, she told you,” he said with a hint of bitterness.

“We want the same thing, Felix,” Ari impatiently stated. “Can’t you see that?”

Felix looked at Ari long and hard before turning away. “It’s difficult for me to separate what was done to me from the lot of you and just blame Baelil. It is your village’s practice, after all.”

“It is,” she admitted, “but only to prevent severe mutations from being passed on. It shouldn’t have happened to you.”

“But, it did,” he snarled.

“I’m so sorry,” she said in a breathy whisper.

Felix warily eyed her. Was she truly sorry for the horrific deed that her brother had done to him or was she simply giving him lip service in order to gain favor? He just didn’t know.

“Did Olga send you to fetch all of us or just Kendra?” he asked.

“All of you,” she said with a smile that she hoped would help to melt the cold barrier he’d put up.

To her disappointment, instead of softening toward her, his body visibly stiffened. “I need to know what will happen to Eugene if we go there.”

“Eugene?” Ari repeated with curiosity.

“Your nephew,” he replied with a tone of disgust.

Ari looked away. Things just hadn’t gone well since she’d left the village. She was more than sorry to have accepted the assignment. “The children are sent to…”

“Oh, hell no!” he bellowed before she could finish her sentence.