

FALLOUT  
A Post-Apocalyptic  
Novel

Harmony Kent

Copyright © 2019 Harmony Kent

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher at the web/email address below.

ISBN: 9781070495217 (Paperback)

ASIN: B07S6PJ3L2 (Ebook)

Any references to historical events, real people, or real places are used fictitiously. Names, characters, and places are products of the author's imagination.

Front cover image by Harmony Kent.

Book design by Harmony Kent.

Printed by Amazon POD, in the United Kingdom.

First printing edition 2019.

Publisher:

Harmony Kent Author Services:

<https://harmonykent.co.uk>

[harmonykent@gmx.com](mailto:harmonykent@gmx.com)

For my husband. Without whom, this book would have been finished much sooner! Thanks for making real life better than fiction.

*Books by Harmony Kent*

*Fiction*

The Battle for Brisingamen

The Glade

Finding Katie

Slices of Soul

Interludes

Moments

Backstage

Fallout

*Non-Fiction*

Polish Your Prose

Creative Solutions for the Modern Writer

Jewel in the Mud

Images used in front cover courtesy of Shutterstock.com and Bigstock.com—limited commercial usage license provided. Adapted for cover design.

Cover design by Harmony Kent.



*'Fear is the engine that drives the human animal. Humanity sees the world as a place of uncountable threats, and so the world becomes what humanity imagines it to be. They not only live in fear but use fear to control one another.'*

*Dean Koontz*

*'Totalitarianism [...] extends the civil power beyond due limits; it determines and fixes [...] every field of activity, and thus compresses all legitimate manifestation of life—personal, local, and professional—into a mechanical unity of collectivity.'*

*Alexander Solzhenitsyn*





## CHAPTER ONE

### *1*

#### *Event +56 Days (E56)*

At noon on a swelteringly hot day, thirsty, hungry, and exhausted, Priya saw a dirty young man on the deserted corner of what passed for main street. She walked toward him, intending to ask for help. Not something she would have done, typically. But then, these were a long way from normal circumstances.

Nervous, she stopped a few feet away from the guy. The hard stare with which he'd watched her progress morphed into a slow smile.

'Um, hi,' she said.

He glanced around the area, suspicious, and then continued to watch her.

‘I’m lost.’

The guy shifted away from the wall he’d stood slouched against and moved toward her. ‘Where’re ya headed?’

Priya swallowed around a lump in her throat and crossed her arms. Now she felt silly. ‘I don’t know.’

He shoved his hands in his pockets. ‘Not from around here, are you?’

She shook her head. ‘Zone five. I thought ...’

The guy scrubbed at the days-old stubble on his begrimed chin. ‘The city got too dangerous.’

Priya nodded then plucked up courage. ‘Can you help?’

For a couple of seconds, he stood and watched her. His eyes glinted in the sun while his brain calculated. Then he shrugged. ‘Sure. We have a house ... an old farm. I can take you there.’

Her hunger and desperate need for rest and safety overrode her jittery nerves and doubts. She moved so that she stood by his side. ‘I’m Priya.’

He held out his hand, which she shook, trying to hide her grimace at how sweaty and gritty his palm felt. ‘Jimmy. Pleased to make yer acquaintance. We don’t see too many pretty ladies around here. Not no more.’

Silent, Priya chewed her bottom lip and nodded. What did that mean? Had the virus taken out mostly women around here, or had something else happened to them? More doubts crowded in, but the heat and the thirst and the loneliness of the past weeks, scavenging for food and water, had turned her brain spongy. She reassured herself that he’d said ‘we’ and not ‘I’.

Safety in numbers and all that, right?

Lost in her thoughts, she failed to notice that he didn’t say much while they walked. Not until he broke the long silence at a dilapidated gate.

‘Here it is.’

She hesitated. Alarm bells ringing. ‘You don’t talk a lot.’

Jimmy grinned and shrugged. ‘I guess I haven’t made up my mind about you just yet.’

Her eyes widened. ‘What? Whether you can trust me?’ Priya laughed. ‘And there’s me won-

dering if *I* can trust *you*.’

Jimmy chuckled with her and stepped onto the dirt driveway. Over his shoulder, he said, ‘You coming?’

Priya shoved her hands into her jumpsuit pockets and followed. The building looked run-down, but loud laughter drifted from inside. It sounded like a sizeable group. Relief relaxed her shoulders. She’d made it. Jimmy showed her into a large kitchen with a range cooker lining one wall.

The occupants fell silent and stared at her while she stood cowering behind Jimmy. He’d said nothing about his group being all men. Terrified, she took a step back, toward the exit. An unknown somebody closed the door behind her with a dull thud of finality.

Jimmy spoke to a big guy seated at the head of the scuffed and worn kitchen table, ‘Hey, Hank, I got some fresh meat for ya.’

Hank licked his lips and rose to his feet. The suffocating silence held. Then arms wrapped around Priya, pinning her limbs. He strolled across the room until he stood in front of her, and

then he reached out a lazy hand and squeezed one of her breasts. She tried to squirm away, but the man behind her held her still.

‘No, please. Don’t do this.’ Her words came out breathless and squeaky.

A large, meaty hand slapped her across the face. Her head whipped to the side. Pain ignited through her cheek and jaw. ‘Now, now, little Priya. You don’t speak unless I tell you.’

Shock froze her. Then she stammered, ‘How do you k-know my name?’ Jimmy hadn’t given over that information.

Hank grinned and straightened his spine, which gave him another inch or two of height. ‘I’m one o’ the ones who got the telepathy. Don’t need none o’ these telling me stuff.’ He nodded to indicate the rough-looking group of guys, and then he grabbed both of her breasts and squeezed hard, making her whimper.

‘No.’

Her weak protest earned her another slap.

Hank leered at her, still squeezing. ‘Just like I don’t need you to tell me you ain’t never had no man before.’ His words elicited a ripple of low

laughter. The menace in the room hiked up to full volume. Priya knew, now, what was coming. Knew that when he'd done with her, he'd make a gift of her to his sycophantic followers. Why the hell hadn't she listened to her instincts?

Until now, she hadn't met an infected who'd developed psychic powers. And she had doubted the rumours. She cursed her ignorance and bad luck. Whatever plan she might come up with to get out of here, he'd know it.

Hank punched her full on the face, and her nose flattened and smashed in a blaze of pain and a river of blood.

Priya saw stars. Her vision went black around the edges, and her consciousness narrowed to a pin-prick.

The guy who'd pinned her arms to her sides pushed her to the cold stone floor. More men rushed in and grabbed her arms and legs. Dazed and helpless, she shivered when rough hands ripped her clothes from her. Then she heard the ugly clang of metal on metal and forced her eyes open all the way. Hank stood unfastening his belt. Priya tried to scream, but only a hoarse,

whistle-like whisper came out.

With his face like thunder, Hank punched her on her broken nose.

2

*E58*

The gloom cleared bit by bit from Kaleb's momentary day blindness. A substantial black rat gnawed busily on something in the corner. Kaleb looked harder. A pile of filthy rags held the rodent's attention. Disgusted, the army special yelled and kicked the ugly brute. With a squeal—more of outrage than pain or fear—the rat scurried away.

Kaleb squatted by the rags to get a better look. Not rags. A dead body. A female. Dirty blonde hair snaked out from beneath a filthy tarp. Without thought, he followed all his years of training and reached out long fingers to check for a carotid pulse.

There.

Thin and thready.

Weak.

But there.

Alive, then.

He rolled her over.

Blood and bruising and swelling obscured her features. The old and dank neosilve throw that had covered her fell away and exposed her nakedness. More blood and swollen bruises marked her torso, her thighs, even her feet. A glance at her hands showed defence wounds, snapped and bloodied nails, broken fingers, a dislocated thumb.

Kaleb swallowed the bile that had risen to his throat. He didn't need to ask who could do such a thing—rape and beat a woman and leave her for dead—not in this day and age. The virus ...

He shot to his feet. Right, the virus. His mission was to find the lost vial, which supposedly held the only known cure, not to get side-tracked rescuing damsels in distress. Annoyed, he wiped his bloodied palms on his black army jumpsuit and took a step toward the door. On the floor, the woman gave a soft groan. Then he noticed a single tear tracking down one disfigured cheek.



A sudden vision invaded his mind—his pet puppy, Oscar, getting torn apart by a raptor. The creature had come out of nowhere and gutted the tiny Labrador within seconds. Then it had loped off, laughing much like the Hyenas that had populated Earth. It hadn't even hunted for food. Just for pleasure. Why Exxon had brought *every* creature up to the terraformed planetary system when they settled it, he had no clue. What possible purpose could they *all* serve? The humans had enough on their plates dealing with the native predators such as the raptors and the tubers—the former made you think of dinosaurs while the latter resembled Earth ferrets, only much more aggressive and dangerous.

Emotions grew around the visual memory like mould. Unwanted and poisonous. He had been but a boy. Young and weak and ignorant. He hadn't known the way of the world. Not back then. And still, the old feelings held him prisoner so that he could not simply walk away from the woman bleeding out on the dirt floor.

Pity and remorse squashed his logic into a dark corner. He had to help her. The responsibili-

ties of his mission—what they meant for mankind—warred with his desire, his need, to help the young victim.

Duty pulled his left leg toward the exit. Pity drew his right toward the woman. If he didn't make up his mind soon, he'd end up doing the splits. With a sigh of frustrated annoyance, he squatted by the beaten body again. Only then did he notice what the rat had been chewing on. Her left little finger was missing, gnawed down to the lowest knuckle joint in a mess of bloodied flesh and gristle.

A grin lit his features. Bitter, but a grin all the same. If he played this right, he could have the fries and the burger. It didn't have to be one or the other. What if he fixed her up and then enlisted her help? He wouldn't have to compromise the mission at all. He could get her scavenging for him while keeping her on a strict need-to-know footing.

Dreams of glory set his heart racing. His grin turned into a full-on smile. It transformed his features into those of the young and carefree farm boy he used to be. If he found the lost vial,

he would also find redemption in the eyes of his superiors.

His rapid rise up the ranks had ensured that they would send him on the initial recovery mission for the downed helipod. After all, he'd earned their trust. Had proven his loyalty. But then he'd failed to find any traces of the antidote. Due to the extreme durability of the neoplast, which encased the vital liquid, it seemed highly unlikely that the crash had damaged the vial, let alone obliterated it so completely it left no trace.

Not only had Kaleb failed to secure the antidote, but he'd also been unable to locate and identify the body of the lead scientist who'd been charged with transporting the vial in the height of the initial crisis. No matter that all the bodies had burned to an unidentifiable crisp. Worse still, he couldn't even confirm whether this crash site was *the* crash site or just some other misfortune fallen.

Happy now that he'd found a workable solution, Kaleb wrapped the victim in the discarded neosilve throw and then completed his search through the cellar of the derelict farm building.

Other than a few packets of dried provisions, his scavenger turned up nothing useful.

Next, he fashioned a travois, using a couple of metal poles he found in a corner and more neosilve tarp, together with the everseal that he carried with the rest of his essential supplies.

+++

It took him an hour to get her back to his temporary base ... an old farmhouse well away from civilisation. Far enough out that the roving gangs left him alone. There, he settled her in the back downstairs room, which would once have functioned as a sitting room, and did what he could for her injuries. He would need to report the existence of another gang to the major so that the patrols could eradicate it. President Terrence had imposed a curfew and banned any groups from forming. Kaleb gritted his teeth. Perhaps fewer people would end up like this young woman if they could come together for protection.

By the time she began to stir, the light had