

They lowered a radio to them on a line, and the pilot and researcher told them they would return with a medical team. They stayed on the line the whole time, pressing for details about how they got there and listening to their story.

Harry told them everything that had happened, sparing the more spicy details. Talking to them, they learned that the search for survivors was still ongoing but was happening hundreds of miles to the south.

"We came here thinking the volcano might have opened a vent when smoke was spotted," said the researcher. "If not for that earthquake... these are protected islands. It could have been a hundred years before anyone set foot on it."

A few hours later, as the sun began to rise over the horizon, all four of them boarded the large medical helicopter. The nurse who arrived brought blankets, food, water, and was ready to hook them up to IVs if necessary. The only thing she wasn't prepared for was the open wound on Harry's scalp, which flapped when not pressed down. She said he would need stitches, but otherwise, they were in remarkably good condition. Huddled together on the small seats, all four stared at the shrinking island below them. It looked so small as they rose into the air, and Harry found himself already missing the place.

"I can't wait to take a shower," said Apolline, resting her head on Harry's shoulder and also staring at the island.

He heard the sadness in her voice and knew she was trying to comfort Gabrielle and Fleur. The girls had frowns on their faces as they glanced from each other to Harry, and he could almost read the thoughts flowing behind their eyes.

"Now that we're back in the real world... what will happen to the bonds that formed between us?"

The same thought crossed Harry's mind, but Apolline reached down and grabbed his hand, pulling Gabrielle's and Fleur's hands into hers. There was a certain steadiness in her that hadn't been there most of the time on the island, as if she had made a decision and wasn't going to back down no matter what.

"Let's get you four some vitamins," said the nurse, her voice ringing through the intercom in their headsets. "It's incredible how healthy you seem. The doctors will be thrilled!"

She spoke of the local medical team waiting to receive the miraculous family. That's how the news looked around the world. 180 passengers went missing at sea with no trace of survivors, and then they appeared like a fairy tale. The narrative couldn't have been better written for the 5 a.m. news.

Twenty minutes after takeoff, they spotted a chain of islands. The tall hotels and buildings near the southern end were a shocking reminder of the real world, and Harry heard Gabrielle and Fleur sobbing, so he went to them, pulling them close.

The girls and Apolline were emotional after landing, so Harry had to deal with the doctors and nurses. Luckily, they didn't care about their stories, only about what they had eaten, drunk, and whether they suffered from any illnesses.

They were hooked up to IVs, and blood was drawn while the surgeon stitched three wounds on Harry's scalp and seven on his back. The remaining injuries were small enough to stop bleeding on their own.

"I know all this must be sudden, but the media crew is outside the hotel and would like to talk to you," said the doctor when they finished. "We can turn them away if it's too much right now."

"Please," said Harry. "If we could just find a quiet place to rest."

"No problem," the man replied.

However, it turned out to be a gigantic problem. The hotel was booked, as were all the rooms on the island. While the doctors were busy trying to find accommodation for them, a representative from the airline arrived.

"It's a miracle! A miracle!" A large woman with a strong Midwestern accent burst into the small medical center. "Why are the survivors huddled in blankets on folding chairs? They should be in beds or a hot tub!"

"We were trying to arrange-"

"We're not trying! Move aside," the woman said, lifting Harry and Apolline by their hands, looking them and the girls in the eyes with such deep sorrow that Harry thought she might cry. "The airline will make sure everything is taken care of."

If you need anything, anything at all, just ask for Penelope-Mae, and I'll come running. Now let's get you four out of this cold room to someplace more comfortable."

"Everything is booked, ma'am," one of the nurses began, but the large woman spoke right over her.

"The airline arranged for a lovely young couple to have an extended honeymoon in Paris. They're already on their way to the airport, excited about first-class seats and a paid hotel stay." She winked conspiratorially at Harry, wrapping an arm around him and Apolline, leading them towards the doors and a waiting car outside. "You four will love the presidential suite. I hear the room has a sunken bathtub, isn't that wonderful?"

Turning to a massive gentleman in a suit, Penelope gave him a look, and he turned away without a word, starting to gather blood and test results from the nurses.

"What are you doing?" Harry frowned in concern, but Penelope tugged him along.

"Don't worry about Mr. Gilson. He'll ensure that nothing... inappropriate gets into the papers." The woman shot Harry a sly grin. "We just want to ensure a nice, healthy narrative appears in the news."

Harry felt his cheeks heat up but couldn't think of a response.

"There's a small press conference tomorrow morning," said Penelope. "The world is dying to hear your story. The real-life Robinson Crusoe family!"

They entered the elevator, and Penelope raised her hand, stopping the nurse and two hotel employees from joining them.

"I'd like to speak only with Harry and the survivors, please," her smile was warm and friendly, but Harry felt the hairs on the back of his neck and arms rise as the doors closed, and her eyes took on a sharpness he hadn't noticed before.

"I want you to know that the airline will take care of all of you. Whatever you need, I'll ensure you get it. Money, jobs, help transitioning back to your old lives... I understand, this will be a difficult time for all of you. But we don't need to make it more difficult, right? We don't need to explain every little detail," her eyes flicked from Harry to Apolline and back with a meaningful look, "of what happened out there."

Harry and Apolline frowned, and Penelope raised her hands.

"I'm not judging, heavens know if my boyfriend looked like that," her eyes danced over Harry's silhouette in a way that made him feel like a piece of meat, "I'd have done the same. But if this gets out, the consequences for all of you could be tragic. And frankly, I'd prefer if the airline's name wasn't dragged into it either."

"Excuse me," said Apolline, frowning nervously. "I'm not sure what you're referring to."

Penelope raised her hand to cover her mouth: "Oh dear, they haven't told you yet." As the elevator stopped, she took Apolline's hands in hers and said warmly, "They took blood and tested it for everything. I saw the lab results and intercepted them before the doctors found out... Apolline, you're pregnant."

****Ding!****

The elevator reached their floor, but Harry could barely take in the lavish surroundings. Bellboys and hotel staff bustled around, leading them to their rooms, but the whole time Harry and Apolline stared at each other with a mix of shock, fear, and, at least for Harry, elation. The thought of being a father terrified him, but the idea of starting a family with this wonderful, amazing woman was electrifying.

As he entered the large room, he noticed the crestfallen expressions on Gabrielle's and Fleur's faces and realized this affected them too. What would happen to the girls if this came out? What kind of life could they expect with the shame and controversy tied to their names?

A cold reality settled in Harry's gut as he thought about the consequences of what they had done and their future ramifications. Penelope and the hotel staff presented a spacious suite. There was a small bedroom for Harry and a larger one the women could share.

Numb, Harry collapsed on the bed and pulled the stiff comforter over himself. The sheets they got from the hospital were comfortable but not warm, and the room was chilly. The noise outside quieted as the staff left, but his eyes remained wide open, his mind whirling.

The mattress was too soft beneath him. He shifted and turned, but no matter how he lay, he couldn't get comfortable. Eventually, he pulled the sheet off the bed and curled up on the floor.

An hour later, he was still awake, his mind unable to quiet the swirling thoughts when there was a knock at the door. He lifted his head and peered over the bare mattress to see Apolline standing in the doorway.

"I couldn't sleep," she said.

From the softness in her voice, Harry could tell she was anxious. He lifted the sheet and made room for her. The smile that spread across her face melted his heart, and the cold in the room seemed to diminish a bit.

"Neither could we!"

The sound of a door opening was followed by the patter of light footsteps, and then Gabrielle and Fleur squeezed in beside Apolline. She frowned at her daughters, but the wrinkles disappeared in an instant as she saw them crawl in and cuddle up next to Harry.

"You girls are impossible," she whispered. She looked over her shoulder and slipped into the room, carefully lying down beside Harry. "Penelope said they'll have assistants outside in case we need anything... people ready to gossip to the newspapers if they hear anything unsettling."

"We can't let that happen," Harry said, his small smile matching Apolline's. "We should talk about..."

"Not now," she said, a worried expression crossing her face. "We'll talk, darling... but not now. It's just too much to handle at the moment."

"I think it's a miracle," Fleur said, reaching out and grabbing her mother's hand.

"I miss the island," Gabrielle said, her jaw creaking as she yawned. "I wonder how my plants are doing."

"We'll talk about it in the morning," Apolline said, her eyes closing as she held Harry's hand.

Harry wanted to argue, but as awake as he had been five minutes earlier, he suddenly couldn't keep his eyes open. Gabrielle yawned, and within minutes, all four were asleep, limbs intertwined as they cuddled together for warmth.