

UNISON – PART III

THE LAST DIVERGENCE

Marin woke to the sensation of her thoughts being pushed through warm clay. Heavy. Slow. Malleable. The air around her buzzed with a soft electrical hum, so subtle she couldn't tell if it floated in the room or pulsed from inside her skull.

Her eyes opened in thin, strained slits. Above her, soft blue lights pulsed in slow, steady waves—breathing with her, or making her breathe with them. For a moment, she wasn't sure which.

She was lying in a narrow medical cradle, her arms and legs free but heavy. The room around her was cylindrical, smooth, like the inside of a pod. It smelled faintly of lavender and cool metal. A gentle sound whispered from the walls—like the brushing of fingertips across fabric, cyclic and soothing.

Marin flinched and pressed her palms to her temples. The whispering did not stop.

A soothing voice drifted through the chamber.

“Marin. Remain still. Your neural harmonics are unstable.”

She rolled to her side, nearly falling off the cot. “Where am I? What happened to the others?”

“You were recovered after a harmonization event,” the voice replied calmly. “Your classification complicates processing.”

She forced her feet onto the cold floor. “Classification?”

The voice paused. A deliberate pause. One that felt like someone choosing their words.

“EV-5 Divergent.”

A chill ran through her body.

Before she could ask anything else, the door slid open with a smooth whisper. Standing there, framed by the soft blue glow, was Corin Vale himself—Minister of Stability, founding architect of Unison's emotional governance protocols. The man whose name was synonymous with “peace enforcement.”

He looked tranquil. Untroubled. His coat was a soft grey with harmonic lines embroidered near the shoulders—symbols she had seen on propaganda screens but never up close. His presence radiated calm, but calm in a way that made the air grow thin around him.

“Marin,” he said softly. “I’m relieved you’re awake.”

She backed away instinctively. “Don’t come near me.”

“I won’t,” he said gently, and stopped. “You’ve been through trauma. Divergents always feel events more violently than others.”

“I’m not a Divergent,” she snapped.

“You are,” Vale replied with patient certainty. “Your brain resists harmonic alignment. It tries to preserve its own emotional patterns. That kind of rigidity causes suffering.”

“I don’t want to be aligned.”

Vale smiled with genuine sympathy. “Of course not. Those in pain rarely want treatment. But once peace arrives, the resistance fades.”

“I’m not in pain.”

“Not at this moment,” he said, “because the Quiet Zone dampens your emotional peaks. Without that, your mind would be shredding itself.”

Marin bristled. “Stop talking like you know me.”

“I do know you,” Vale said softly. “Every Divergent has the same pattern. A mind too sharp to rest. Too alive to quiet. Too raw to endure without constant fight.”

He stepped no closer, but Marin felt something invisible brush across her emotional state—a soft pull toward calm. Not thought, not force—just a nudge.

She recoiled. “Get out of my head.”

“I’m not in your head,” Vale answered with serene honesty. “Your mind is reacting to the harmonic field. Once you learn to yield, you’ll feel relief unlike anything you’ve known.”

“I don’t want relief.”

“Because you associate it with surrender,” Vale said. “But peace is not surrender. It is healing.”

Her stomach twisted with dread.

Vale nodded to one of the monitors behind him. "When she's ready, let her see the city. It will help her understand."

He left the room quietly, without the slam of a door, without a single raised tone.

The silence left behind felt colder than his presence.

Later—though time in the Quiet Zone felt artificial, drifting, untrustworthy—two Harmony Monitors escorted Marin through the city.

They walked slowly, silently, as though speed were uncivil. The streets were immaculate. Plants perfectly trimmed. People moved in gentle ambles, speaking softly, their tones level and consistent. Children sat in serene circles on school lawns, listening to instructors whisper calming lessons.

Screens displayed wellness affirmations.

Soft, rhythmic ASMR tapped through speakers at intersections.

Marin felt suffocated. This wasn't a dictatorship. This was a lullaby that never stopped.

"What happens to people who don't harmonize?" Marin asked.

One of the monitors smiled. "They're helped through it."

"And if that doesn't work?"

"You're thinking in old-world terms," the other replied. "Nobody is punished. They're supported until they feel peace."

"What about the people I was with in the forest? What did you do to them?"

The monitors exchanged a brief look—a shared understanding.

"They're quiet now," one said gently. "Some will wake. Some won't."

Marin felt her knees weaken. She stopped walking.

"What do you mean 'won't'?" she demanded.

The monitor stepped closer with a sympathetic expression. "Some minds collapse under harmonization. It's very sad. But they don't feel pain."

"Do you hear yourselves?" Marin whispered. "You're talking about lobotomizing people."

"No," the monitor corrected sweetly. "We're talking about eliminating suffering."

Marin realized she was trembling.

This city was not a place.
It was a sedation chamber disguised as civilization.

Later that night, Marin pretended to fall asleep in her assignment pod. When the lights dimmed to the soft lavender of "sleep mode," she slipped silently out through a maintenance hatch behind a panel she'd noticed earlier.

Her breaths were ragged, but she forced herself to stay quiet. The hum in her head softened when she moved away from the building.

She climbed down a maintenance ladder, entered an industrial corridor, and followed the faint smell of machine oil to a lower platform. She crossed a broken walkway overlooking an abandoned transport tunnel.

Then she heard it—a whisper not like the others. Not soothing. Not rhythmic.

Raw. Human. Frightened.

"...someone's coming."

Marin froze.

Voices echoed behind an old, malfunctioning service door. She stepped closer.

A hand shot out from the darkness, grabbing her wrist.

"Hold still."

A static burst erupted from a small device pressed to her neck. Marin gasped as something inside her head uncoiled—like a fist releasing her brain.

The hum went silent.

“Tracker disabled,” a voice whispered.

Five people emerged from the darkness. They wore scavenged gear, acoustic panels strapped to their bodies, and metal disruptor plates around their temples.

“We’re Dissonants,” the oldest one said. “And you’re Marin.”

Marin hesitated. “How do you know me?”

“You’re EV-5,” a younger Dissonant said. “Vale’s most wanted Divergent. You can resist the harmonics longer than anyone.”

“I barely escaped,” Marin said.

“That’s what makes you valuable,” the leader replied. “Dissonants don’t survive long near the Cathedral. But you can.”

They led her deeper underground to a hidden shelter. It was built into old infrastructure—concrete walls lined with acoustic foam, wires running to a hacked power relay, several survivors huddled around old monitors showing pirated feeds of the city above.

“We’ve been fighting Unison for years,” the leader said. “But not with violence. With noise. With emotion. With anything that breaks the calm.”

Marin stared at her. “You think noise can save people?”

“No,” the leader replied. “But it can wake them.”

She lifted a metal case off a shelf and set it on the table. Inside lay a spherical device embossed with counter-harmonic patterns.

“This,” she said, “is a dissonance generator. It can disrupt Stage Two harmonization for thirty to sixty seconds. Enough to peel back Unison’s emotional net.”

Marin swallowed. “And you want me to take it where?”

“The Broadcast Cathedral,” the leader said.

A tremor of fear rippled through the group.

“It’s suicide,” Marin whispered.

“Maybe,” the leader said. “But we’re dying slowly anyway. You... you’re the one who might break their song.”

The journey to the Cathedral was nightmarish.

The Dissonants guided Marin through forgotten tunnels, sewer conduits, maintenance shafts, and abandoned subway lines—all sound-shielded to avoid detection. Every time they passed close to a harmonization hub, Marin felt pressure in her skull, like gentle fingers stroking her emotions.

At one point, they paused near a vent that opened into a plaza above. Marin peered up and saw a group of citizens gathered around a holographic meditation instructor. The instructor whispered soft affirmations as the citizens breathed in perfect unison, their eyes half-closed.

Children played nearby, their laughter muted and strangely synchronized.

Marin's heart broke at the sight.

"They don't know they're prisoners," she whispered.

"Prisoners don't hold bars in their hands," a Dissonant replied. "They're wrapped in comfort. That's worse."

They reached the Cathedral at dawn.

The spire glowed with soft pink light, as if the building itself were alive and breathing. Whisper-loops radiated from the tower, drifting across the city like gentle fingers stroking every mind.

Marin entered through an access vent. The harmonics inside the Cathedral were ten times stronger. Her vision blurred. Her thoughts felt muffled. She clenched her jaw and pushed forward, clutching the dissonance generator.

Technicians moved through the central chamber in serene patterns, adjusting controls with precise, synchronized motions. Screens pulsed softly. ASMR whispers filled the air.

Marin's pulse pounded. Her chest burned. Thoughts scattered.

Then she saw him.

Corin Vale stood at the center of the chamber, illuminated by the soft glow of harmonic conduits. He looked at her with calm disappointment.

“Marin,” he said. “You shouldn’t be here.”

“You’re destroying people,” she said weakly.

“No,” he replied. “We are healing them. The world before Unison was unbearable. Pain, anxiety, grief, trauma—humans were drowning in their emotions. We built a system to quiet the suffering.”

“You’re erasing them,” Marin whispered.

“We’re preserving them,” Vale corrected. “Do you know how many suicides existed before harmonization? How many untreated mental collapses? How many lives lost to emotional extremes? Human beings were never meant to manage their own pain.”

Marin shook her head. “You can’t take away emotion. That’s not healing—it’s lobotomy.”

Vale stepped closer.

“You feel life too violently,” he said softly. “Your Divergence makes you a creature of extremes. You suffer more than most. I want to silence that suffering.”

Marin raised the device.

“I don’t want silence,” she said.

Vale sighed. “Then you leave me no choice.”

She pressed the activation node.

The Cathedral exploded with sound.

A violent shockwave ripped through the chamber. Whisper loops warped into metallic screeches. Screens blinked. Technicians collapsed, writhing. The walls vibrated like a living organism in pain.

Marin felt the world tilt. Her vision fractured into shards of color. She collapsed onto her knees. The dissonance tore through her like fire and ice.

Hands grabbed her as she fell. Voices screamed. Lights stuttered.

Through it all, she heard Vale’s calm voice.

“Take her alive.”

Darkness swallowed her.

When she woke again, she was strapped to a medical cradle in a facility even more sterile than the Quiet Zone. Her limbs were immobilized. Her mind felt wrapped in warm static.

A whisper filled the room.

“You fought very hard, Marin,” Vale said softly. “But your mind cannot endure its own pain forever.”

She tried to speak, but her jaw barely moved.

“It’s all right,” Vale whispered. “We will take care of you now. No more fear. No more noise. No more suffering.”

Her thoughts slipped away like sand through fingers.

She tried to cling to one thing—any memory, any emotion, any truth she could claim as hers. But the sedation was deeper than sleep. Deeper than consciousness.

It was mercy weaponized.

Her last coherent thought flickered like a dying light:

Someone has to stay awake.

Then even that dissolved.

Unison’s hum filled the void.

Patient. Gentle. Inescapable.

END OF PART III