

Chapter 15

January 21, 2138

Emory stood in the place he had visited so many times with his grandmother since he was a little boy. Standing alone without her was something he had never anticipated. The feelings swirling around him were beating him down. This moment was supposed to feel triumphant, jubilant, complete. All he could feel was undone, deserted, broken. How could he face what was yet to come?

Perri Gibbs was of a better mood. "This is beautiful Emory. There's almost an electrical tingling going through me. We made it. Word is coming in that the rest of the groups will arrive at their destinations before morning. We have to start preparing for the ending. I have no idea what to expect."

"I have the predictions my grandmother gathered. We should use those to set up here. There is a lot of work to do, no time to congratulate ourselves. We have to just get on with it."

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Maddy sat at a table, a military guard standing just behind her. The door opened, and Faxon walked in closely followed by Tempest. They each took a seat across from Maddy. No one spoke for several long minutes.

Maddy was the first to break the silence. "How long are you going to hold me here?"

Tempest leaned forward. "You don't get to ask questions. You don't get anything. You need to understand you're a prisoner here."

Maddy pushed her chair back and stood up. "I've had enough of this, I've done nothing wrong."

The guard slammed Maddy back in her chair. Faxon jumped up. "You will sit there for as long as I say, and you will answer every question put to you. Colonel Miller has already thwarted your plans back on earth. The woman you and your friends hurt is safe. I want to know what things you've done to my ship. Most importantly, I want to know how you're communicating with your co-conspirators."

"I have nothing to say."

Gen spoke up. "Sir, if I may make a suggestion perhaps Ms. Bear's Heart needs some time to contemplate her situation. I know of an empty room where she could spend a few hours formulating the answers to your questions."

Faxon got up to leave. "Take care of it, lieutenant."

Gen's face dripped malice. "Soldier, bring the prisoner."

Maddy followed Gen down halls she had never seen before. She thought she knew all the rooms in the ship but had no idea where they were headed. Sensing Maddy's concern gave Gen even more satisfaction in her plan.

Finally Gen reached for a door. Opening it released a cloud of warm damp air. "Get in."

Maddy backed away. "It has to be over 100 degrees in there."

"Just pound on the door when you're ready to answer our questions. Now either walk in or be thrown in."

Maddy walked in.

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Dr. Ethan De Palo checked on Tam. She cooperated with the examination but did not answer any questions he asked. Her wariness of people and anxiety at being touched prodded the doctor to open himself up more to gain her trust. He tried various avenues, always sharing more about himself as he spoke almost absentmindedly as he ran his tests and saw to her injuries.

"I don't know if you have any kids. I have two, Amelia is seven and Elijah is four. My wife Hannah is so good with both of them. This is the first time I brought them with me. It's been great. I know the whole ship knows about our dog Sasha; she runs away nearly every day. You must have seen her. Well, it doesn't matter. I see from your file you're from Hawaii. I'm originally from Cuba. That's an island, too. You must enjoy the water. I know I can't get enough time in the water. We live in Florida now. I have to be near water."

Tam whispered, "I love to dive."

Dr. De Palo didn't react; he just kept talking hoping it would encourage Tam. "I dive with my wife, we hope the kids will take it up when they're older. I have seen some amazing things. I did run into a shark once. I was frightened but I think the shark was, too."

Tam engaged. "I've done shark rescues. They were all very grateful."

"What does a grateful shark look like?"

"They give you a big toothy grin."

"Excellent. You have a good sense of humor, Ms. Akana."

“You can call me Tam.”

“Thank you, Tam, you can call me Ethan.”

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Sophia moved close to Andrea in the food line. “I know we shouldn’t be seen together, but there is something very wrong. Maddy’s in trouble. You have to let Faxon know.”

Andrea didn’t indicate any acknowledgement of the encounter. She continued to her table and began eating, hoping no one would join her. She had to get out of there as quickly as she could without giving herself away. Swallowing was a challenge.

Finally able to make her way to Faxon, she had to will her feet to walk, not run. His office door seemed miles away. Hopefully he would be there when she arrived.

Her knock on the door was more intense than she intended. When Faxon opened it she nearly fell inside. “Where’s Maddy? Sophia says she’s in trouble.”

“Damn it, Gen must have done something. This has gone too far. We have to call it off.”

“I told you when we started there were risks. We’re in too deep we can’t stop. Now go find Maddy.”

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Faxon walked into Gen’s office. “Where’s the prisoner?”

“I thought I would sweat her a bit, she should be more cooperative.”

“What exactly does that mean.”

“I locked her in one of the cooling rooms.”

“Are you insane? Those rooms are there to dissipate heat from the ships systems --- they can get over 100 degrees. How long has she been there?”

“About two hours.”

“What were you thinking? Our orders were to arrest and question her. We’re supposed to be the good guys here. Get a med team down there right now. There is going to be a reckoning for this lieutenant.”

“I thought Colonel Miller wanted information. I’ve heard he uses whatever methods work. I was just doing what I thought was best for the safety of the ship.”

“Damn it, Gen, I thought you were better than that. Get the med team and go get her out of there.”

Faxon waited till Gen left before contacting Andrea. “Get Sophia to the med bay now. They’re taking Maddy there. How much longer is this going on?”

“My contact said they are getting close.”

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Sophia raced into the med bay. “Dr. De Palo, have they brought Maddison in yet?”

“No, Dr. Bentham, but they’re on their way. I’ve prepared a cool bath.”

“You know what happened?”

“The medic on scene said it looks like heat exhaustion.”

“How did that happen?”

“I’m not sure but I believe it has to do with her arrest earlier. It seems she has gotten on the wrong side of Colonel Miller. That never ends well.”

“It sounds like you know something about that.”

“Let’s just say our paths have crossed.”

Their conversation was interrupted by the med team with Maddy. De Palo guided them in and helped get her into a bed. He and Sophia began to work on the semi-conscious woman. Both were focused on their patient, each in quite different ways. Sophia laid her hands on Maddy, her eyes closed. De Palo got her ready for the cool water bath and took her vitals.

“Her temp is 104.3, pulse is fast and weak, respiration shallow.” De Palo realized Sophia couldn’t hear a word he was saying. He watched as she laid her hands on Maddy’s forehead. Realizing he had seen this before, he stepped back and took in the event.

Maddy’s color began to return to normal before his eyes. He repeated his vitals check and found they were hugely improved. He proceeded to make Maddy comfortable and prepare an electrolyte enriched beverage for Sophia, he knew she would need it.

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Miller returned to Zyhna's cell. This time his mood was very much darker. "Whatever you and your people think they have, they're wrong. I'll be the hero when I thwart an attempt to destroy the power grid. Nobody will care about the skeletons they're digging up about me."

Zyhna threw her head back and laughed. "You sad, sad little man. You have no idea what a place of power really is. It has nothing to do with running all your little toys and gadgets. Power is at the sacred places, it emanates from hope, truth and right. It is the strength of this planet and it fuels the people that would give their lives to save her, to save Gaia."

"What the hell does that mean?"

"There is no attack on your grids. My people kept you running around chasing your tail long enough for those more powerful than you to find out what you've been up to. Owen, they are coming for you, and your little friend Bog. I can't wait to see that."

Miller fell back against the wall. "You bitch. You won't live to see that. And just so you know, I made sure your friends will never make it to that planet."

"Do not bet on it. They are onto you now. They will make it."

Miller drew his weapon, aimed, and fired.

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Tam cried out and fell to her knees. Still in the med bay, Dr. De Palo and Sophia heard her scream and ran to her side. Sophia knelt next to her and touched her hand, pulling it back with a gasp "Oh, no!" They fell into each other's arms.

Dr. De Palo was at a loss for what to do. Then he felt a hand on his shoulder. It was Maddy. "It's all right, we've got this." She dropped to her knees and became part of the embrace. They held tightly as they wept for the death of their dear friend.

Faxon and Andrea burst into the med bay at a dead run, both sliding to a stop as Dr. De Palo held up his hands. Faxon tried to push past him. "I want to see Maddy."

"You need to give her some time."

"Why, what's wrong with her?"

"She's fine, your healer saw to that. But there's something else going on. I don't really understand it. Is there anything either of you would like to tell me?"

Faxon and Andrea just looked at each other.

De Palo got it. "I see, you can, but you're not willing to, trust has to be earned. Would it help to know that when you put the word out on Miller's illegal activities, the special services division contacted me for information on his nefarious acts."

Andrea grinned. "Yes, that would help."

"Miller gave me this assignment. He must have found out I was gathering information on him. That's why I brought my family. I wouldn't dare leave them where he could get to them. He's really a piece of work."

"Then you'll be happy to know he's in custody as we speak. And you'll be sad to know he has done something to this ship to insure we never make our destination. Anything you know about him may help us figure out what he's done."

Their conversation was interrupted by Jimmi. "Where is she?"

Faxon blocked her progress. "She's safe, Maddy and Sophia are with her."

"I don't care, I want to see her."

Tam stood in the doorway. "She's right here, old woman."

Jimmi ran to Tam nearly knocking her down. "What happened? I could hear you call out even from our cabin."

"It's Zyhna, she's gone."

"Oh, my love, I'm so sorry. I can't imagine what that felt like."

Sophia and Maddy appeared in the doorway behind Tam. "Are we to assume Miller is under arrest?"

Andrea offered an answer, "He is for the time being. But my familiarity with the corporate military machine leads me to believe he's too much of a threat to those above him to allow him to give testimony at a trial. I imagine he will just disappear somehow, never to be seen again."

Maddy endeavored to sound triumphant but her voice was weak and trembly. "I'm just glad this is over. I want nothing more than to get back to my cabin and crawl in bed."

Dr. De Palo intervened. "If memory serves, your cabin is an empty room isn't it? What's more you need to be under medical supervision for a day or two."

"No, no, no, I'm fine. I'll gladly grab a blanket and sleep on the floor."

Maddy attempted to leave the med bay, her hand on the wall to keep her upright. Faxon swept in and scooped up the wobbly woman. "Okay, Doc, where do you want her?"

The group found a small reason to smile as Faxon carrying the struggling Maddy was escorted by the doctor to a bed.