

Chapter 6

October 18, 2136

Tam was talking to Maddy on the screen, "So you get the final word today from that Major Miller?"

"He is a full-blown colonel now, this whole thing has shot him up not just in rank but all the politicians are in love with him. He even has an assistant to liaise with me so he doesn't have to. Tucker and I are meeting with her in an hour to get the no or go. This is the final decision if we get the ship or not. How are things with you guys?"

"It's been busy. The tides have dropped enough that science is turning to the astronomers to find an explanation. Jimmi says it is obvious the moon's orbit has altered. But since it's unprecedented no one wants to say it with any conviction. She's been toeing the party line all the while knowing what's going on. I've been busy with the marine rescue, these super low tides are catching critters out, lots of stranding's. And with the marine life headed deep, meat hunters are employing much more destructive methods."

"Keep the faith, things are about to change one way or another today. I'll let you know as soon as I get the word."

Maddy grabbed her bag and headed out for her meeting. This drive was going to be a challenge. She had so many things running through her mind she could easily forget where she was going or even that she was driving."

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Arriving at Tuckers office building she was met at the door by his assistant, who Maddy enjoyed tormenting. "So, Killian Hart, got any good gossip, infiltrated any scout troops?"

Killian gritted his teeth, he hated seeing Maddison. "Again, I'm sorry to have misled you. Mr. Bog is waiting for you in his office. Ms. Knight has not yet arrived."

When Maddy entered she noticed Tucker was not wearing his usual casual togs. His suit was clearly well tailored and made him look thin, which he was not. And he was beautifully accessorized, with tie, cufflinks, shoes and, of course, top end cologne. The man never did anything without a purpose, and this one was obvious. He was outfitted for a showdown and it had nothing to do with the ship. His target was Andrea Knight, Miller's assistant.

She was gorgeous, a black woman with exotic features and flawless skin. Her presence was elegant. It didn't matter what she was wearing or where she was, she was dignified, stately. Add to that she had the power of the military behind her, and there was no way Tucker Bog could resist having her, married or not. He pulled out all the stops.

Maddy had to comment, "Tucker you look fantastic, I'm impressed. Are you thinking this will be a celebration?"

Pride and power protected him from being taken off guard, "Of course, I wanted to shoot the works for this one."

"Do you think the fact they're coming to us is a good sign?"

"Maddy, there is no way they're going to turn us down. This is a win win situation. The funding is done, the corporate world is all for it. You and I both know that the power behind that group flows into politics as well as the military. Now sit down, let Hart get you something to drink and relax."

Hart flinched at having to engage Maddy. "What can I get you?"

Maddy poked him again. "You know me so well, you know from your spying, get me what you think I'll like."

Just then the door opened. Andrea glided in followed by a man in a flight suit. He was fit, the suit accentuated his narrow hips and broad chest. He had Hispanic features, and dark cropped hair. Though his walk was military and purposeful, there was a strain or tension that seemed out of place. He was not happy being here.

Andrea greeted Bog and took her seat at the table. "Shall we get started?"

Tucker and Maddy sat opposite the two and nodded for Andrea to begin.

"First I have to apologize for the Colonel. He's a busy man and was needed elsewhere. In his stead he sent Major Faxon Navarro, he will be leading your mission --- it's a go. We will enter the planning phase today. The goal is a launch in January of 2138. Is that acceptable?"

Maddy was relieved and a bit surprised. The timeline was exactly what she hoped. How often does that happen? "That's acceptable to my people. Tucker, how about the backers, will they approve?"

Tucker flashed his most beguiling smile at Andrea. "I'm sure I can convince them to sign off. It may take some cajoling, but I can handle it. I imagine there are a lot of details to hammer out. Should I have my assistant order some food?"

Andrea gathered her things. "Actually, I'm on a flight back to Washington in less than an hour. Major Navarro will talk you through things. If you have any questions, feel free to reach out. Thank you for your time."

Tucker visibly deflated as the door closed behind her. "Well, Major, I'm sure you and Ms. Bear's Heart would be more comfortable in the conference room down the hall. My assistant will show you the way. Good luck with your negotiations."

Maddy was happy to leave Tucker's office as she could imagine his fury at being rejected by the lovely Ms. Knight. At the same time, she was not looking forward to spending time alone with the obviously cranky Major Navarro. At least he was pretty to look at.

Killian Hart directed the pair to the conference room, quickly closing the door after they entered.

Major Navarro took a seat just inside the door addressing Maddison. "He seemed eager to get out of here."

Maddy smiled, "That may be my fault, we have a rocky history. He lied to me, spied on me and betrayed my friends, so you know, a typical corporate relationship."

Navarro leaned forward, tapping his finger emphatically on the table. "You need to know from the outset I expect nothing but honesty. This is my mission. I am responsible for the lives of my crew and the wellbeing of my ship. You are required to keep your people, plants and livestock in line. Is that something you can handle?"

"Interesting that you value your crew and your ship and not my people. Why is that?"

That question seemed to intensify Navarro, "Cargo, you are simply cargo. Problematic cargo at that. I prefer the kind that is in boxes and quiet, not the kind that moves around causing headaches."

"So, is it that you don't like the mission, or is it my people, or maybe it's just me?"

"I don't like being taken off important work to be a taxi service for a bunch of troublemakers that have friends in rich places."

"Well aren't you just a treasure. Let me tell you what I expect. My people are amazing on a level you or I will never know. They will be treated with the respect they *more* than deserve. You're not a taxi service, you have the honor of being part of one of the greatest adventures of a thousand lifetimes. Now, is that something you can handle?"

Navarro chuckled as he sat back in his chair, "I don't know about the greatest, but it will definitely be an adventure. I look forward to working with you Ms. Bear's Heart."

"You can call me Maddy."

"My name is Faxon, but my friends call me Zon."

"Well Zon, shall we get down to business? I think I'm going to enjoy these negotiations."

"Indeed."

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Jimmi and Tam appeared on Maddy's screen, "I have good news. We're a go. There's a great deal of work to be done. The ship is on a mission and needs to be reconfigured. There are hoops --- lots of hoops --- we need to jump through, but we should be ready to go by January 2138. Do you think that'll work?"

Jimmi was encouraged. "I think it's perfect. Gaia speaks of the movement of the planets like a musical composition. Slow and deliberate."

Tam sighed, "Here she goes."

"Come on it has to be plain even to you. Jimi Hendrix wrote a song called Angel about the sweet love between the moon and the deep blue sea."

"I told you she can relate anything to Hendrix."

Maddy laughed, "She wouldn't be Jimmi if she didn't."

“Does the ship have a name?”

“The Fitzgerald.”

“Is that someone famous?”

“It was the name of an ancient water vessel. It traveled on what was one of the Great Lakes before they sold the water.”

“Did they retire the ship?”

Maddy hesitated a bit. “No, it sank.”

“Comforting thought.”

“Apparently someone wrote a song about it.”

Jimmi weighed in. “I can guarantee you it wasn’t Hendrix.”

“Thanks again, Jimmi. Tam you said you have information?”

“I’m not sure. She’s spoken to me but I’m having trouble interpreting it.”

Maddy was confused. “Can’t one of the others help you?”

“Absolutely not, her words are for me. I have to figure it out. It will come to me.”

“Sorry, it’s not my place.”

“It’s okay, like Jimmi said, it’s personal. It’s just this is different than ever before, but then these times are new for us all.”

“So tell me about this major, he sounds pretty interesting. Or is that just pretty?”

Maddy was a bit embarrassed. “I wouldn’t kick him out of bed. We really did hit it off, though. He’s no nonsense and seems to care about doing things right. Best of all he hates Bog. The one thing he asked that I had no answer for was supply lists. We need to know what Adelphi has for us and what she’ll allow us to bring. He gave me some general information on flora and fauna, weather patterns, all of that. But we will literally be invasives. We have to make sure we’re not bringing any destructive ones with us. That would mean a visit with Greer.”

Tam jumped to life, “That’s it. Now I understand what she meant. You need to take Zyhna with you when you see Greer. And Sophia along when you meet with Isa.”

“Since when am I meeting with Isa?”

“Since you were just told.”

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Getting to Shetland Island is no easy task. Zyhna at 72 is not a young woman, but she’s up for anything and thoroughly enjoyed the trip. She wasn’t very vocal, but her smile and awe at the landscape was uninterrupted.

The Croft was not what Maddy expected. The dearth of trees was quite foreign to her. The house and the outbuildings were weathered, but sturdy and well used. Sheep dotted the distant grass-covered hills. Small rock outcroppings added character to the land. The smell of

the breeze held the moisture of the sea surrounding the island. The long horned, long-haired cattle were engrossed in the feeding ring filled with hay, and the chickens wandered around at will. It was a place filled with life.

The Leask family was well prepared for their visitors and immensely welcoming. Greer, of course, had hugs for everyone. "I've missed you both so much, I can't wait to show you everything!"

Bram tried to rein in his daughter, "They've traveled a long way, maybe we can have some sandwiches and let them rest before we take a tour. Why don't you go help your mom get things ready?"

Once Greer ran off, Maddy could check in with Bram. "How've things been going? Life settled down a bit?"

"Living with Greer, life can never be settled, but we've gotten back to what passes for normal. Knowing what we know, everything feels different. I've been keeping records --- tides, births, crop production, temps, rain and snowfall. It gives me a sense of control, not that I have any, but I feel better doing it. Greer has been speaking to Adelphi more this last year. She has things to tell you. You should know she told us you and Zyhna were coming before you called."

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Greer settled herself on the large rock overlooking the sea. "This is one of my favorite places. It's where Adelphi talks to me most of the time. She keeps repeating, some will go and some will stay, it must be so. She wants to see many and hopes they will choose to see her, too. There are things you can bring. Gaia will tell you. There will be much for us there if we seek it with respect and care. It's important to listen, and she will speak to others now, too. I'm going, my family is going. Maddy you must go."

Zyhna quietly added, "I will stay."

Greer smiled, "She knows, but she wanted you here so you and I could speak to her together. Maddy you can go now. You have to meet Sophia and go see Isa. There's information there that needs to be shared."

"Seriously, all this way and that's all I get? Why?"

Zyhna put her hand on the escalating Maddy. "You must trust her, child. Adelphi and Gaia care for you very much."

Maddy was not calmed but made her way back to the farmhouse.

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Sophia occupied her time reading while she waited at the Russia Apatity airport for Maddy. She was a tall woman, with her long brown hair secured in a tight braid. Even with the lanky fit body of a runner, her clothes were loose fitting and casual. This was a woman not concerned about putting on airs, she was real.

Looking up from her book, she spotted Maddy and waved her over. "How was your flight?"

Maddy's voice reflected her exhaustion. "Long, it was a long flight."

"I've arranged transport to Joha and Isa's. It is a bit of a drive so you should be able to get some sleep on the way."

"I'd rather talk and pick your brain if you don't mind."

Sophia didn't seem surprised. She simply led Maddy to the transport.

Once Maddy was settled in, she opened her line of inquiry. "I have the feeling that I'm not just out of the loop but so far away I can't even see the loop. I get bits and pieces, just enough to set me on a path, but no more. I take Zyhna to see Greer and then I'm sent away while they talk. I'm here with you to see Isa and I have no idea why. It's starting to get to me."

"I'm sorry you're struggling with this, that's how it must be. When she talks to us it's not like friends meeting over coffee. There are words, but it's more ideas, images, feelings, sensations, like that. It's easier to communicate the information to someone that she speaks to as well, but you are, for lack of a better word, challenging. If it helps, we're all struggling with talking to you."

The exhaustion and this revelation left Maddy dazed. "Well maybe it would be better if I just got some sleep."

"Before you do, I should tell you something you need to know. First, I'm a healer."

"A doctor."

"No, a healer. Gaia has given me the gift of healing. There are times I can feel her working through me, a power or energy beyond my own. Isa has it as well. I think that's one of the reasons you've come here with me."

"One of the reasons?"

"Yes, the other is about Joha. Isa is extremely ill, I can't help her anymore. She wants me to tell him, and he'll not take it well. She wishes to speak with you, I can't tell you why. That's for her and you."

Maddy simply leaned back and closed her eyes.

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Joha met the travelers at the vehicle, wearing a beautifully embroidered bright blue shirt. "Isa's inside, she's having a good day today. She made some snacks for us."

The house was old but well cared for. There was a wall of windows overlooking the Barents Sea, which was glass calm today. The water reflected the sun into the living room creating a calm serene feeling. Isa hurried in with a tray of tea and sweets. Her shirt was once brighter than Joha's, but time had dulled the color. It was a well-worn garment, the kind that makes one feel soothed, safe in the embrace of an old friend.

Isa greeted her company, "Please sit, I was so excited to hear you were coming. We always look forward to Sophia's visits, but now Maddy is here too, how wonderful. I love my husband, but he can be such a grouch some days, it's good to have a distraction."

Joha agreed. "For me as well."

Joha's comment prompted a hug and kiss from his wife. "He's right, I can be difficult. Being ill has worn me down. I can't do the things I want and that has taken its toll. I have to come to terms with this, we both do."

That statement hit Joha hard. "None of that talk, woman, we have company. Let's have some tea."

"That kind of talk is exactly why we have company. We need to say the things that have to be said, now, today."

Joha walked out the door, Sophia set down her tea and walked over to Isa and gave her a long embrace, then she followed Joha.

Maddy looked at Isa, not knowing what to do.

Isa did. She poured tea for them both and sat close to Maddy on the couch. “I know Sophia told you what to expect today. But as always with life there’s more. My time is nearly done here. That’ll be hard for Joha, he’ll need all the support he can get. You should know my passing will be felt by them all. Gaia connects us in a way that few people understand. It’s like the trees and plants. They’re linked to each other.

“All life is connected through the soil, the air, the water, and now I understand through space. Tell me, do you remember when you were a child and you were very ill, a serious infection? The doctor could do nothing. Then there was a woman from a neighboring town that treated you and the fever broke. Do you recall that?”

Maddy looked shocked. “That was you?”

“No, but I was there with that healer. We were there in total because we’re connected. When you first encountered us all, did you have a feeling you knew us, of recognition or familiarity?”

“I did, like I met you before.”

“That’s because you have, many times. I know you feel like you’re on the outside but trust me that’s not true. You have to see through her, with her, be open to Gaia. It’s a hard road but we’re with you, as you are with us.”

Isa sat on the coffee table in front of Maddy, taking her hands. “Sophia will stay here using her gifts to help Joha and me. She will ease my passing and do what she can to give Joha the comfort and support he needs. The others will feel the end, as will you now. Know that there is no sadness. Feel the joy and hope of a life lived in Gaia’s love.”

As Maddy’s eyes welled with tears, Isa opened her arms and enfolded the young woman and they wept as one.

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Arriving back home Maddy wanted nothing but a hot bath, some food and sleep. Traveling was always difficult for her, safety protocols did not ease her fears or tensions. Slipping into the tub she could feel the warm water start to loosen the taut muscles, but nothing could ease her thoughts. Since her encounter with Isa, she has been connecting with things in a disquieting fashion. She actually felt a premonition before the door sensor alerted her.

The screen showed what she already suspected, Tam and Jimmi were there. They both smiled at her and held up a bag of food. Friends and nourishment, both were needed today.

Jimmi made herself at home in the kitchen getting the food ready, giving Tam a chance to see how Maddy was holding up. "Your travels were difficult."

"That's an understatement."

"But they were necessary. The information that came to you is in preparation for what is on the horizon. Your connection is intensified, we felt that. You will gain data and knowledge expeditiously, comfortably and efficiently. We are interconnected, you are part of the fabric. Now let's eat before Jimmi picks out all the shrimp."