

Chapter 13

January 17, 2138

Sophia was sprinting down the hall, Jimmi shuffling behind her mumbling expletives as she did. She burst through the door to Tam and Jimmi's cabin. "What happened?"

Jedda kept her eyes on Tam. "I don't know, we were just talking and she crumbled like someone hit her. I can't see any injury, but she seems to be in a lot of pain. Can you help her please?"

"Step back and let me try."

Jimmi finally made her way into the room. Gasping for air and drenched in sweat she ran to her partner's side. "What's wrong with her?"

Sophia was focused on Tam. "You need to let me work here. Please leave us."

Jedda grabbed Jimmi, helping her into the next room. Seeing the condition she was in, Jedda sat her in a chair and covered her with a blanket. Then she called Maddison up on the screen.

After a few minutes Maddy's face appeared. "Hey, what's up? Jedda why are you there?"

Jimmi jumped up and faced the screen. "Maddy, it's Tam, something's wrong. Please come now I need you."

"I'm on my way."

Jedda got Jimmi settled again, forcing her to sit and have some tea. Eventually she was able to catch her breath and relax a bit. She got herself cleaned up and put on some dry clothes when there was a knock on the door.

It was Maddy. "I came as quick as I could, what happened?"

Jedda answered, her voice unsteady. "We don't know. I was with Tam and we were talking, then she was on the floor. She was in pain. I called Sophia, and she's in there now. I didn't know what else to do."

Maddy could see Jedda held it together for Jimmi, but it was her turn to break down. She sat Jedda on the couch next to Jimmi and got another blanket and more tea. "You two sit here and I'll see what's going on."

Entering the room Maddy could see Sophia was arranging Tam in the bed. She returned to the other room to wait. When Sophia came out, she looked perplexed, a rarity for her. She didn't say anything for a long while.

Jimmy's patience was pushed to the limits. "Well, what's wrong with her?"

Sophia sat down and looked at Jimmi. "Nothing, nothing at all."

Jedda reacted, "What do you mean? I was here, she went down hard, and she was really hurting."

"I'm not denying that. Just that there is no injury or damage or illness. Her heart rate, breathing, all her systems are reacting as though she was injured, but she isn't."

Maddy was as confused as the rest of them. "What are you saying?"

"I'm not sure. I've never seen it, but I think she's reacting to someone else's pain. Gaia speakers tend to be empaths. It's not common but it does happen. Is she close to anyone that stayed behind?"

Jimmi didn't have to think long. "Yes, she and Zyhna got very close. They talked at least once a day up until we left. They really bonded."

"No wonder, Zyhna is a strong empath. Something has happened to her. We have to find out what's going on."

Maddy was concerned, "How can we do that from here? They're on the move and have no access to communications."

"It'll be difficult but if Tam is up to it, she can find out. It'll challenge her physically, and emotionally it may be beyond what she is willing to risk."

Tam was standing at the door. "Anything to help Zyhna, anything."

Jimmi approached her partner, "Are you sure my love?"

"I felt what's happening to her. I have to stop it. No matter what it takes."

Jimmi put her arm around Tam. "You don't run from a fight and neither do I. How do we do this?"

Sophia tried to seem confident. "First you two get some food and some sleep. You'll both need to be at full strength for this. I'll meet with the other healer, Izumi, and formulate a plan. We're under a time restraint here as we don't know what's going on with Zyhna. I suggest we meet here tomorrow morning first thing."

Everyone nodded in agreement except Jemma. Maddy could see that this was not something she felt comfortable with. "Are you okay?"

"I don't think I'll be here. I've had a kind of experience like this before. It would be best if I'm not present."

Sophia was intrigued. "What do you mean?"

"It's not around people but the animals I work with. Sometimes I feel their pain. It can help me treat them, but it's certainly not comfortable."

"You're right, you shouldn't be here but perhaps you can help Izumi and me if you're willing."

“Anything I can do.”

Maddy called Nikau to come and get Jedda and made sure Jimmi and Tam got a hot meal and sent them off to sleep. She needed to get back to her room and ponder the implications of this new disturbance. It can't be a coincidence that the most knowledgeable person in this coming crisis level event is the one that is being attacked. The problem is she has a good idea who's behind it.

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At 2:30 a.m. Maddy's screen flashed on. It was Jimmi. “It is happening again, you need to come now.”

Maddy was up and getting dressed before the screen went dark. She almost flew down the hall, still buttoning her shirt when she arrived at their door. She could hear loud voices inside, so she went right in. The scene was chaotic. Jimmi was holding Tam who was cradling her arm in pain. Sophia and Izumi were trying to organize a staging area with Jimmi shouting at them to do something to help Tam.

Maddy didn't waste any time. She jumped in with both feet. First order of business was to get Jimmi under control. Facing her directly, Maddy got Jimmi to focus. “You need to pull it together. Stop yelling. Your only job is to support Tam and do what you're told. Can you do that?”

Jimmi gritted her teeth but understood what Maddy was saying.

Next step was to help Sophia get herself ready. She was clearly hesitant, which was not a good place for her to be. Maddy pulled her aside while Izumi continued to prepare the space.

“Are you sure you can do this?”

Sophia wanted to sound sure. “I know what's happening and I know how to enhance the connection, but I have no idea what Zyhna is experiencing on the other end. What if I join them and something takes them both?”

“Can that really happen?”

“Yes.”

“Does Tam know.”

“Yes.”

“Then we have to do this.”

Maddison and Sophia helped Jimmi move Tam into place. Maddy and Jimmi shifted themselves into a corner as Izumi and Sophia got to work.

Sophia leaned over Tam as Izumi put his hands on the arm she was cradling. She seemed to relax a bit as though the pain subsided. Sophia spoke slowly and softly. “I’m going to help you fall into a light sleep. You’ll still be able to hear us, but your mind will be open to see and hear what Zyhna is seeing and hearing. Izumi will help ease any pain you may feel. Do you understand?”

Tam just mumbled her agreement as she drifted off.

Sophia's eyes lost focus as she held Tam in a gentle drowse. Tam seemed to be listening intently, head turning and body tensing. She tried to pull away from some unseen force then screamed in pain as she grabbed her arm again. Izumi reached for her, grasping the arm gently in his hands, again easing her pain.

Tam did not relax. She became more tense and began struggling as if she was being held somehow. Sophia spoke in a whisper. “Can you see her?”

Tam's response was worrisome, her voice tense, shaking. “They have her, they’re hurting her.”

Sophia encouraged Tam to continue. “Can you see who or where?”

“I see them, they want...” her voice trailed off as she held her head in pain.

As Izumi reached for her, so did Sophia, putting her hands on Tam's head to quell the bleeding. Sophia's hands were shaking. "We have to stop this."

Tam grabbed Sophia's arm. "No, no don't. There's more. I can hear Zyhna."

"This is too dangerous."

"She wants me to know."

"Who's there?"

"Bog, men in uniforms, they're worried, angry."

"Why are they doing this?"

"Miller."

Tam's head snapped back blood flowing from her mouth. Sophia placed her hands on Tam, one on her head and one on her chest, laying her into a deep sleep. She and Izumi quickly worked on her injuries.

Maddy leapt up, her eyes focused on the wounded Tam, and ran from the room mumbling as she left.

"What the hell."

Running down the hall she could hear her own heartbeat pounding in her ears and feel tears flow down her cheeks. She reached the cabin she sought and pounded on the door with both fists.

The door opened revealing the nightgown clad, half asleep, Andrea Knight. "What's going on Maddy it's five a.m.?"

"I can't believe you did this. You had to have known and you didn't say anything. How could you be a part of this?"

Andrea's husband pulled her back into the cabin and faced Maddy. "Back off, you can't talk to my wife like that."

Sean was an imposing figure, athletic and fit. Not a man that angers easily unless his wife is threatened.

Andrea stepped into the hall pushing Sean back into the room. "Stop it, this is Maddison, she's a friend. Now come in here and tell me what's going on."

Maddy sat down, tried to wipe the tears from her face and took a deep breath. "It's Zyhna, your Colonel Miller has taken her. He's hurting her. Why is he doing this? What does he want?"

"Maddy, you aren't making any sense. Are you in contact with Zyhna?"

"Is that what this is about, trying to find out how we communicate with each other?"

"You need to stop. I'm a friend here. I already understand the communication, remember? You need to start from the beginning and help me catch up."

Andrea put on water for tea, sent her husband back to bed, grabbed a robe and pulled a chair up next to Maddy. "How did this all start?"

"Okay. A few days ago, Tam wasn't feeling well. When things kept getting worse Sophia discovered she was manifesting the pain that was being inflicted on Zyhna by Bog and Miller. What do you know about this?"

"Maddy, the last time I talked to Miller was the day we left. He asked what was going on and I told him preparation stuff, nothing more."

"He didn't talk about Zyhna?"

“He didn’t. Oh, no. No, no, no.”

“What?”

“Bog. Bog was there. He asked about Zyhna.”

“What did you tell him?”

“Nothing really. Just her age, and about Emory. But then Bog asked about her position or power. I can’t really remember. I just said that I thought she was powerful. That was bad, wasn’t it? Oh god, I’m so sorry. You have to know I didn’t mean to cause anyone pain. What can I do? How can I help?”

“Andrea, I don’t know. How can anyone know how to deal with this? What could possibly prepare you to deal with kidnapping and torture. This is sooo beyond me. Tam is bleeding and broken. Who knows what they’ve done to Zyhna? I don’t even want to imagine what they’re capable of.”

“I’m sorry to say I’ve seen what they can do. We need to act now. Let me fix you something to eat. We can check on Tam and formulate a plan before I contact Miller.”

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Maddy knocked on the door. Jimmi opened it, and immediately flung her arms around Maddy. When she spotted Andrea, her fists clenched, and her face went red. “Did you do this?”

Maddy stepped in. “Down, girl, she’s one of us and here to help. Where are Sophia and Izumi?”

“I had Sophia’s husband Daniel come and get them. They were exhausted.”

“We need to talk to Tam, is she able?”

“She insists on passing the information on as quickly as possible, come in.”

Tam was sitting up in bed. Her eye and lip swollen. Stitches went through and extended beyond her eyebrow. Her right arm was in a sling affixed to her body effectively immobilizing it. Jimmi was fluttering around her, fiddling with blankets and rearranging pillows.

Maddy’s first order of business was to give the battered woman a gentle but relieved hug. “You had us all worried. Don’t ever do that again.”

“I have no plans, I assure you. Jimmi, stop hovering and sit. I’ll be fine.”

Jimmi immediately stopped her fidgeting. “Well then, scooch over and let me in there I’m beat.”

As Jimmi wiggled herself into the bed. Maddy and Andrea pulled some chairs close. Maddy took a breath as if to speak, but Tam held up her hand signaling Maddy to wait. The three of them watched as Jimmi fell instantly to sleep, snoring slightly as she did.

Tam looked at the two women. “I can talk more freely without her, she’s so worried. Not that she doesn’t have cause. This is beyond terrifying.”

“We need you to tell us everything you saw and everything you heard. Andrea is going to use that information to poke at Miller and get what we can from him.”

“I know he’s at the heart of this and Bog is just a tool, a nasty vicious tool. They took Zyhna because they think she’s at the heart of some great conspiracy. They’re afraid the ship was just a ploy and there’s a bigger plot afoot.”

“But there’s nothing going on. I don’t understand why they didn’t just ask the questions and move on.”

Andrea patted Maddy on the shoulder. “You are an innocent, aren’t you? You can’t prove the absence of something, not to the satisfaction of someone as paranoid as Miller. There’s no way they’ll stop till they get something.”

Tam's voice was sullen. "Zyhna knows that. She's keeping the focus on her with intent, putting herself in harm's way to keep the others protected. They'll soon be at the sacred places and safe. Then..." Tam's voice drifted off.

Maddy looked at her. "Then what?"

Andrea answered. "Then she'll be of no use to them. But let's not focus on that now. I need to know what questions they were asking and who was there."

Tam targeted her thoughts on the facts. "Bog, of course, and that little rat that licks his boots. There were four, no five, soldiers. Bog asked the questions, and the military men did the punishing. He wanted to know where they were going, what their target is, and how they're communicating. He believes they have sophisticated technology, and he wants it. This is all about greed and hate, again. It never stops."

"What has Zyhna told them?"

"That they're in communication but not how or why. She has a plan that will keep them "working" on her. She knows how this will end. She also said Andrea, you'll help."

"She's right, I will."

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Maddy stood behind the screen and nodded to Andrea. She hit the control and Miller's face burst onto the device.

Andrea was calm and natural. "Sir, I hope this is a good time. Just wanted to give you a quick update. Do you have a minute?"

Miller's eyes looked eager, but his tone was flat. "If you make it brief."

“Sir, I have some concerns here. I’ve been keeping an eye on the Bear’s Heart woman like you asked. She’s become sloppy with her secure communications. I’ve been able to pick up many of her conversations with key people.”

“What are they talking about?”

“It’s perplexing, she’s talking about the people they left behind. The woman you asked me about in particular, Zyhna.”

“Are they in communication?”

“I don’t see how that’s possible, sir.”

“I don’t pay you to guess, I pay you to know. Now what have they been saying about this woman?”

“Sorry sir, the word going around is that this woman is missing or out of communication. They seem to need to find her before they can proceed.”

“Proceed how?”

“That I don’t know. Is there some information I should be looking for?”

“I need to know what they’re up to, how they’re communicating. I want to know why that woman is important.”

“If the answers are here sir, I’ll get them for you.”

“I want progress reports every 12 hours.”

“Yes sir, thank you, sir.”

When the screen went dark Maddy stepped out. "Well done, that should hold him off for 12 hours, and give Zyhna some rest, and the others some time."

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Killian Hart woke Bog who had fallen asleep on a couch outside the interrogation room. "Mr. Bog, Colonel Miller wants to talk to you, he's on the screen in the next room."

"Let me clean up. I'll be in in a minute."

Bog splashed water on his face, slicked back his hair, and put on his suit coat. He was not looking forward to this conversation. He had no news for the colonel.

Entering the room, he was surprised to see the colonel chatting with Hart. He has never seen Miller chat. "Sir, I'm surprised to see you. I really don't have any news for you."

"But I have news for you, Mr. Bog. I want you to stand down your interrogation for the time being. It seems we are blocking their plans simply by holding the woman."

"That's good news sir, how do you know that?"

"I have a source aboard the ship that I trust."

"The ship, sir that means there is some kind of communication going on that we have no way to trace. Do you know what that means, how valuable that would be if we got our hands on it?"

"I'm aware. That's why I need you to stand down for the time being. Perhaps sitting in a cell for a few days will encourage our guest to be more willing to answer questions."

"I'll take care of it."

As the screen went dark Tucker Bog contemplated the ramifications of what he just heard. Who is he talking to that he trusts so much? What's really going on aboard that ship? Was he taken in by Maddison? What are these people planning? How can he profit from it all?

He walked across the hall to the interrogation room. "You all need to stand down. Get a medic in here to clean her up and get her in a cell. It seems you have had a reprieve, old woman."

One of the soldiers approached Bog. "I'm sorry Mr. Bog, but we have our orders."

"This comes directly from Colonel Miller. We're to wait for further instructions."

"Understood."