

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a white, flowing dress, is floating horizontally in a dark space filled with stars and nebulae. In the background, a large, faint, purple-tinted face of a person is visible, looking towards the viewer. The overall color palette is dominated by deep blues, purples, and blacks, with bright white stars and nebulae providing contrast.

TRICENTENNIAL

LAWRENCE  
*BURK*

# Tricentennial

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## Introduction

Following *Beyond Providence*, Lawrence Burk begins a new chapter for the citizens of earth. The survivors of Comet Providence formed a new life in the Mississippi delta in the year 2052. Humans had been genetically altered, and a new alien-human hybrid possessing increased intellect, superior physical characteristics, enhanced instincts, and abilities, were the only survivors of the comet's viral release.

Every three hundred years, alien ancestors transfer mysterious and supernatural powers to a new generation. *Tricentennial* is the story of humanity, following the transfer of power, and for the first time, to someone other than a grey. The story begins 150 years after settling in New Providence at the cusp of the three-hundred-year cycle.

Much of the citizen's communication is telepathic, which makes keeping a secret extremely difficult and to that extent, they have naturally formed a more open society. Since establishing New Providence, Hope and Angel have assumed a leadership role in the colony and were often referred to as the mothers of New Providence. With the three-hundred-year anniversary of the founding alien's ascension approaching, the true architects of this new society are to return for the appointment of the new Supreme Counselors, the chosen ones to replace them and help guide their new race of human/alien hybrids into the future. The mysterious powers of the universe became more understandable for those granted a view to the heavens. The ascension to Supreme Counselor was expected to unlock many mysteries of the universe and the spirits of the earth. The responsibility that comes with this ability is greater than the sum of life for which they would preside. These forces and spirits were here before man and will be here long after.

Just as they were chosen three-hundred years prior, Gee and Soo will choose their successors in the Tricentennial

Celebration upon returning through the dimensional gateway on their final voyage home. An interstellar event will soon take place and a gravitational anomaly connecting two distant points in our galaxy will occur, enabling the new supreme counselors to get a glimpse into the mysteries of the universe. Gee and Soo came from a species that typically lived between three and four hundred years and it was customary for the aged leaders to select their own replacements, typically a direct descendant of theirs between thirty to seventy earth years of age.

New Providence has grown steadily since its inception and the people had long believed they were the only survivors. As the ceremony neared, they learned they were not alone on the planet. Gee and Soo had engineered two other civilizations on earth prior to the comet because of the uncertainty that their primary choice would prevail. The earth was too important to lose by relying on only one option.

The appointment as Supreme Counselor, heir to the secrets of the universe, is a great responsibility. The chosen must be able to lead with wisdom and respect. Their advice must be sound and absolute, but no one could be assured of that, yet that was the outgoing Supreme Counselor's commission. In a society where extrasensory powers are common and communication was achieved without words, what kind of power would a Supreme Counselor have to have to influence the masses? Who among us could rise to such high standards? The chosen ones will be honored in grand fashion and all the world will celebrate the contributions of the previous Supreme Counselors. The galactic gala event, as they will soon witness, will become the pinnacle of spiritual experiences.

Hope had many descendants, giving Gee and Soo an enormous lot to pick successors from, not to mention the other two colonies. We begin this story on a sunny Spring day near Angel's 167<sup>th</sup> birthday, a week prior to Gee and Soo's arrival for the Tricentennial celebration.

## Chapter One

“Wake up Grammy, I made you pancakes,” Beta whispered in Angel’s ear. Angel was sitting at the kitchen table and dozing in and out of a dream. Known to Beta as Grammy, she was her great, great, great grandmother. Her head bowed slightly, and eyes peacefully closed, she would often take two to three-minute naps throughout the day. She would reflect on the lessons she’d learned in life and the wonders she’d seen in her children’s eyes. Beta didn’t need to speak, Angel knew she was there, and more so, Beta knew she knew. Beta just liked to hear herself talk. She was always talking, if not talking, singing. Angel once said that Beta could talk a stone to death. Angel still remembered what being young felt like, thought of her early days as a child, and marveled at Beta’s innocence.

Beta’s mother was one of many ancestors named Lisa, after Lincoln’s one and only daughter. She realized the possibility her oldest daughter, Aurora, could become Supreme Counselor. Aurora was thirty-two, felt her purpose was divine and that truth would show her the way. She hadn’t married nor had children and dedicated her life to nature’s studies. Twenty-six years after Aurora was born, Beta came along to steal the spotlight. It was common for their generation to wait twenty to thirty years between children.

“Tell me, Lisa,” Angel asked, “Does Aurora truly feel she was destined to become supreme leader?”

“She does. I don’t feel it, but she does. Did you know she meditates for hours; she says she’s talking with the earth?”

“I’ve only met Gee and Soo a few times when I was very young, but I do recall that you can never really tell how or what they were thinking, they were always two and three steps ahead of everyone. Now that she’s aware of Gee and Soo’s arrival, she might feel this is her calling. By the chance she is not chose, I hope she can accept it with grace.”

“It sounds like you have doubts about Aurora being chosen,” Lisa said with a concerning tone.

“Who are we to question Gee and Soo’s decisions, especially before they even make it?”

“Your right mom, I guess I am a little biased in that regard. Even though I have my own doubts, it just seems logical that Aurora would be chosen. Being the right age, a direct descendant, having dedicated her entire life to this path and feeling the forces of nature would give her an exceptional advantage, wouldn’t you think?”

“Believe me,” Angel said, as she placed her hand on Lisa’s shoulder, “I know all too well. My mother, your great, great-grandmother, sacrificed her entire life for this cause and without being a Supreme Counselor. She is why we can stand here today and talk about Supreme Counselors. All I’m saying is, we all play a part, and everyone’s part is important. We must trust that the right people will be chosen whether we understand the choice or not.”

“How do you know Gee and Soo are coming?” Lisa asked.

“I can hear them; they talk to me. It started about a week ago and has been getting stronger and clearer as their arrival approaches. Recently, they have been talking about other colonies.”

“What colonies?” Lisa asked.

“Turns out, we are not alone. I don’t understand why we haven’t been able to view them remotely after all this time. We used to be able to view things happening all over the world and somehow, we managed to overlook two other civilizations? It doesn’t make sense.”

“Perhaps Gee and Soo could shed some light on that when they arrive?”

“You can bet I’ll bring the issue up,” Angel replied condescendingly.

The days seemed very long with plenty of dreams to ponder. Excitement throughout the city was up in every aspect of the people's lives. They didn't understand why but reveled in the upbeat attitudes and cordial salutations as they interacted within the city and their homes.

The stellar gravitational effects were so subtle only someone with highly sensitive reception could feel its effects, and the closer time got to the Tricentennial, the stronger the force became. Only a handful of the citizens could identify the forces and know what it meant. People would speculate that those would be the people most likely to become candidates for Supreme Counselor, but even the ones who knew Gee and Soo best, had no clue how this would all play out.

No one had an idea what a Tricentennial celebration was supposed to look like. For lack of direction, people took it upon themselves to adorn the city with statues and posters of Gee and Soo. Without specific regard to the Tricentennial, they could still pay homage to their creators, not that Gee, and Soo would expect it, but paid simply out of reverence. Angel, being one of the few who knew firsthand, what Gee and Soo looked like. She shared her thoughts with artists in the city, so their images of Gee and Soo could illuminate the city on every street.

Angel said, "I heard stories from my parents that Gee and Soo's first mission as Supreme Counselors was to develop the gateway here. Their race and ours were both on the verge of extinction but managed to save a little of both, with our creation."

"It's just hard to imagine what challenges we face," Lisa said. "If our ancestors had difficulties, it would only make sense that we would also have difficulties. Our children will inherit this world and we must trust they will be up to the task. I cannot imagine what those people had to deal with when the comet came, and it makes me wonder what our children would have done had it been their obligation."



“You know what makes me wonder?” Angel said, “What Beta has to say about all this.”

Lisa laughed, “Yeah, I’m sure you can get her going.”

“Something I learned a long time ago is that sometimes, marvelous concepts can be understood at the simplest levels, and who better to convey simplicity than the youth. Never discount what someone says because of their age.”

The following day, a few houses down, Aaron woke with a skewed awareness of time. His internal clock had gotten ahead of itself with anticipation. He still had an hour before the sun would rise and knew he wouldn’t be able to sleep. He decided to get up.

Word gets around real fast in New Providence, and with Gee and Soo returning, everyone mentally injected themselves into everyone else’s business, trying to find out as much as they can about the upcoming events. The ones with the strongest mental powers are fortunate enough to be able to block unwanted chatter and concentrate on what was important.

“Why am I so restless,” Aaron said to himself.

“Because you can feel their presence,” Miranda said.

“Damn it, where did you come from? Get out of my head. I was talking to myself.”

“Been here all night.”

“Well, I wish you’d allow someone their privacy.”

“Ok, I’m sorry.”

Named after one of Uranus’ moons, Miranda had a claim to ascension herself. Aaron and Miranda had a similar experience that drew themselves together. They hailed, in a vision, to go to the fountain in the middle of town and drop three pebbles into it and make a wish for something good to happen to someone else. When they got there, they noticed each other doing the same odd thing and were drawn together, out of curiosity if anything else. They pondered the powers of fate and whether they could be

questioned. They were both told in a dream to do the same thing, but why and by whom?

About an hour later, Miranda standing on the patio looking up into the morning sky, “I love a bright big moon in the morning,” she said.

It was Aaron’s turn to sneak up on Miranda, “Who are you talking to?”

“I’m talking to God, do you mind?”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to interrupt, carry on.”

“Just kidding, come here,” as she reached out to him. Miranda was a very complicated person, always deep in thought and often too smart for her own good. Aaron on the other hand was easy to read. You just needed to know where to begin.

“Can you feel their presence?” Aaron asked.

She replied, “For a while I thought I was the only one. So, you feel them too?”

“Great, isn’t it? I kind of feel like a little kid again.”

“That’s because you’re still a little kid,” she poked.

“Ouch, right in the back.” Aaron said.

“I can’t help it,” she said with a wink.

“How about we finish this conversation later with wine? But for now, can we talk about Gee and Soo?”

“Absolutely,” she said. Closing her eyes and pointing her face upward she continued, “I see Grammy and Gee and Soo together. Gee just told Grammy that a group from the colony down south would bring about a dozen people to the celebration.”

Aaron acknowledged, “I heard a group was also coming from the north.”

“When Grammy first mentioned the other colonies, I already suspected something.”

“Me too,” he sighed. “Are we different or does everyone see this?”

Miranda replied, “Oh yeah, we’re different. I talked with a lot of people yesterday, Grammy’s the only other person they are aware of that has communicated with Gee and Soo.”

“There’s got to be more to it. I can’t believe it would be so easy. There must be competition.”

“What are you talking about,” Aaron asked.

“Don’t you feel that feeling? Gee and Soo are touching us from another world. Don’t you think that’s a little supernatural? Why us? Think about it, are we special?” Miranda’s subconscious mind held many secrets, and clues to her story revealed themselves to her one piece at a time. Meanwhile, Aaron began to feel lost as if he didn’t belong in the same story.

“The stories we’ve heard of Gee and Soo seem to cast them in a divine light. I have to say, their return makes me nervous,” Aaron said.

“It doesn’t make me nervous; I think humbled would be a better word. Can you imagine knowing the world could end and you had one chance to save it. The pressure must have been unbelievably enormous, yet they laid out a plan and executed it flawlessly. I think that qualifies for divine,” she said.

“Who do you think they’ll choose?”

Miranda said, without regret, “It really doesn’t matter. The real testimonial will be our actions as a group, not individually. The responsibilities of the chosen ones are great and so is the gift of knowledge. Meanwhile, ordinary people continue to pick and choose and make their own decisions for the rest of their lives, never knowing whether the best choice prevailed. It is how the rest of us live that will ultimately determine divinity.”

“It’s that kind of wisdom that would make you my choice, but I’m afraid I couldn’t match that standard,” Aaron said as he lowered his head.

“No one can, that is what the ceremony provides. The chosen will be given knowledge and power, if they already had it, we wouldn’t need the ceremony.”

“I’ll bet Grammy knows, or will be the first to know, who they choose.”

“I think you should think about other things for a while and not get too obsessed about it.”

Miranda often had a unique way of looking at things, and at times, seemed to come off sounding arrogant or smug, but sarcasm was her primary form of humor and often misinterpreted. She had feelings that her destiny was waiting for her, but assumed whatever it was would find her, she did not have to search for it.

She thought of her great, great, great grandmother, Hope, “She will understand why I’m conflicted,” she thought to herself. “Who better to understand, than someone who has lived it themselves?” Hope was Angel’s mother and the oldest person in the colony. She had been waiting her entire life for this event. Hope was first generation, direct relation to Gee and Soo, who were the last Supreme Counselors, and she was witness to it all. “No one could be wiser than that,” she thought.

“Hope,” she focused her meditative thought, “have you felt pulled toward something before?”

Hope replied, “Obviously.” Hope and Miranda had similar personalities and Hope had often envied Miranda for her youth. Watching her grow let Hope relive a little life she had lost in her early years. Knowing you are to save the world at an early age takes the joy out of childhood. Vicariously looking through Miranda’s eyes, empowered her as if she were young again.

“I’m feeling like I’m being pulled.”

“It’s powerful, isn’t it?” Hope asked.

“Yes, how can I know what to do?”

“You can’t. You just believe, that’s all you can do, believe.”

Hope would receive mental phone calls from people all the time, but her communications with Miranda made her feel as if she were giving direction to herself.

“Sweetheart, my mother knew her fate, she had courage. I thought I knew my fate and would like to believe that I had courage, and I have no doubt that when your time comes, you too will have courage, it’s in our blood. Your ancestors where not just science experiments, they were pioneers. Darling, your time is nearer than you think and mine is shorter than I think. So many people concern themselves with quantity, I want you to concern yourself with quality. Remember, today is the most important day you will ever live.”

“Thank you, Grandma Hope, I love you.”

With that thought, Miranda refocused on her surroundings, “Aaron? If you had a choice to be Supreme Counselor, would you take it?”

“Of course, but I’d probably worry that I wouldn’t be good enough.”

“Yeah, me too.”

She thought of how they met and began to question it. She wondered if Angel or Hope had anything to do with it. “I’ve got to go; I’ll see you later.”

Miranda left Aaron standing there with a confused look on his face. The real problem with communicating telepathically is there is no privacy. Everyone knows one another and everyone talks to everyone.

Just as Miranda left, Aaron received a message from Aurora. “Just checking in on you. Are you excited about the Tricentennial?”

“Aurora, what do you really want?” he snapped. Aurora had a tough time with the idea of privacy.

Aurora claimed, “I know you and Miranda think you could be Supreme Counselors, I think I could be chosen. Don’t you think we should get together and talk about it? Who do you think they will pick and why?”

“You do know that there are two other civilizations the Supreme Counselors could be chosen from, right?” Aaron didn’t

particularly like Aurora, he thought she was nosey and a snob. He did acknowledge her ability to always be in the right place at the right time and her commitment toward leadership was real, but he didn't have to like it.

“Yes, of course, but I choose to believe that we were Gee and Soo's first choice. I just know that I would need to have a partner, who would it be, you perhaps, or someone from one of the other groups?”

“I don't wish to have this conversation with you Aurora, don't make me block you.”

Aaron left wondering where he was going to go or what he was going to do.

Meanwhile Gee and Soo are making ready their return. The gateway is close, close enough they can communicate with Angel. Angel had the most powerful and sensitive influence. She would be first to hear Gee and Soo, Hope would be next, then the more gifted of the descendants.

Lisa walked into the kitchen while Angel was sipping her tea. “Good morning, Grammy.” She began, making herself a cup and thought of Beta's father being on the road. “He should be returning home soon,” she said, trying to convince herself not to worry.

“The gateway will soon feel like a magnet, where at some point, the two sides slam together. We shall witness Gee and Soo stepping into our world for their last time, and a new chapter in history will be written. These are exciting times.” Angel suggested.

Lisa turned and asked, “Are you talking to me?” Everyone seemed so lost in thought, telepathically communicating with someone else, that Lisa forgot she was having a conversation with Angel.

“I'm an old fart, I must have been talking to myself. Of course, I'm talking to you, do you see anyone else in the room?”

“Sorry, Grammy, I can’t stop thinking about Sol being away from home and Aurora obsessing about the Tricentennial.”

“Gee and Soo are more than special. No one is looking forward to their visit more than my mother and me. We owe them so much. I don’t want to burst your bubble, but who they choose has nothing to do with you. You can in no way feel responsible for their choice. If Aurora is not chosen, she will be temporarily devastated, but it wouldn’t be your fault, let it go.”

Angel thought to herself, kids don’t listen. Right about then, Beta came running back into the room, after picking up on Angel’s thoughts.

“I’ll listen, Grammy.”

“I know you will sweetheart, you’re special.”

“Lisa, take a moment and appreciate today,” as she handed Beta to her, “she said she’d listen.”

The next day was better for everyone. The news of Gee and Soo’s arrival created some anxiety, but everyone seemed to settle down a bit on day two. Angel had to remind herself that none of her descendants had ever seen the likes of Gee and Soo. In their imagination Gee and Soo may look like Uncle Bob and Aunt Betty. The very thought of it made Angel laugh, this generation has never heard the names Bob and Betty before.

People were gathering in the streets early in hopes of being selected to help with a beautification project. Painting, sculptures, lighting, gardening, anything to make the city look nice. Angel stepped outside and wondered why people didn’t do this for themselves. She didn’t want to discourage them, so she did not point out that respect for yourself is the same process as respect for others.

Aaron spent more time in his saucer than he did in his home. The freedom to step into his bird and fly wherever he wanted was the single most satisfying thing in his life. Second, would be to have someone to share that with. He stealthily flew into the atrium at the center of town and canvassed the square for

a place to hold a rally. He stepped off the front stairs of the atrium across from the fountain and got an image that felt a little *déjà vu*. He imagined the fountain as a centerpiece of a grand celebration, tall statues surrounding the fountain with streamers and banners on all the pillars of the surrounding buildings, and a bright light beaming down from the heavens. He's seen it before in a dream.

He was met at the top of the steps by a group who heard that preparations for decorating the city had begun and wanted to be a part of it. Angel was viewing Aaron's activities while standing on her porch. She knew Aaron felt he had a stake in the situation and would offer guidance if needed. She liked Aaron and would joke around with him every chance she got.

Aaron said, "We need music playing in the background, but it can't be too loud, so we'll need a lot of speakers placed everywhere throughout the city so the sound can be heard without having the volume too high. I need five volunteers to mount speakers." With that request, at least a dozen people rushed him in hopes of being chosen. "Holy cow, this is going to be easier than I thought."

Angel looked over to the fountain steps and back to Aaron, she could feel the visions Aaron was having and realized where those images originated.

"Aaron," she called to him, "This may have happened many times in the past, but it has never happened to us. What you're seeing was someone else's dream, it doesn't have to be that way. This is our celebration, to hold the way we want, we have no one to impress but ourselves. Remember why we are doing this, it's for 'our' future."

Sometime Aaron had doubts about Angel's innuendos. "Duly noted, Grammy," he said.

"Gee and Soo are constantly talking to me now. They will need to talk with you soon about arranging transportation for about a few dozen visitors from the other colonies. In preparation



for that conversation, you should probably double check the air bus to make sure it is in top running order.”

“You mean I’ll get to talk to them?” This made Aaron very excited.

“They will probably pop up in your head while you are in the middle of something. That’s usually when they come to me. I think they know and do it on purpose, just to have a little fun with me.”

Hope entered the conversation from the comfort of her floating recliner, nestled in her cozy living room just to announce, “They’re here.”

“Mother, have you been eaves dropping?” Angel asked.

“Not at all, well maybe a little. Gee and Soo are on the other side of the portal. They plan to wait a couple days before entering the gateway for their last time.”

Aaron asked, “Why are they waiting?”

Hope replied, “They said the barometric pressure and nitrogen levels of our atmosphere are a little too high for their liking at their age. Their bodies are frail, and they have to preserve their energy.”

“How old are they?” he asked.

“At least a hundred years older than me,” Hope said, “believe me, I know what they mean.”

Hope’s husband Justice, and Angel’s husband Valiant, died thirty-six years ago, during the worst tornado outbreak in history. They tried to corral their livestock during a storm while debris rained down on them from all around. By the time help arrived, it was too late, they were buried in tons of debris. That left Hope the only one alive that had firsthand contact with the earlier species of humans. Even Angel’s generation were too young to have understood earlier humans. Hope was the only one who could appreciate what a two-hundred span was like in comparison to her ancestors. All the citizens of New Providence took so many things for granted; it made Hope wondered if she

had done enough to teach them about the past. Hours and hours of training and videos seemed to fade like the memories of a boring movie. They focused so much on the future, and with the Tricentennial so near, she also questioned whether it really mattered anyway.

Time was ticking away; Hope could feel the signs of aging in everything she did. Making it to the Tricentennial felt like a lifelong goal nearing its end and was eager to ‘get to the payoff.’

“Does the atmosphere make you feel like that too?” Aaron asked.

“No, I just feel tired and heavy,” Hope said.

“Me too,” Angel concurred.

On that note, Hope disengaged her presence and left Angel and Aaron in peace. Aaron went back to identifying areas where speakers should be placed, and Angel left to go lay down.

## Chapter Two

Sol returned from his trip up north about the same time they finished decorating the town for the celebration. From every pole, statue, fence and wall, there was no room left for more decorations. Aaron piped in soft but uplifting music throughout his sound system which helped create a festive mood. Seeing all the decorations gave Sol a deep sense of acceptance as he returned and thought that Gee and Soo would surely feel welcome. His meeting up north with investors about the expansion of New Providence went well and brought high hopes back home with him.

As his air taxi dropped him off at his door, Beta was waiting at the window of her second story balcony looking down. She watched as her father walked up to the house, he looked up and smiled at her, she responded with a clever stare and gleaming smile, pointing her finger at him, and said, “You owe me a hug!”

Sol felt like the luckiest man alive when he was around his little pride and joy. His wife, Lisa, met him at the door and gave him a hug. Beta was standing behind her and realized that different people show affection differently. She was happy with the way she was shown affection and wondered why everyone didn’t show it. Then this six-year-old said, “When I am Queen, everyone will have to hug somebody every day and greet them with love.”

“Honey, that’s the sweetest thing I’ve ever heard,” Sol replied.

“No, I think the sweetest thing ever is you giving me a hug!”

There was no doubt they shared a bond, and every time Lisa saw her baby play with Sol, she felt the desire for more children. The joy Beta gave them was addictive, but she knew she had to maintain control. The fourth and fifth generations waited

much longer and had fewer children, and the sixth generation overcompensated, now their generation is being tested.

“What do you think about the decorations in town?” Lisa asked.

“It’s amazing, I’m sure Gee and Soo will like it.”

“How was the meeting?”

“Great, everything is in order. We agreed to wait till after the ceremony before moving any equipment, but their anxious to get started.” Sol said.

“Aurora’s confident that she will be chosen,” Lisa changed the subject.

“She has always carried herself as special, and I’m sure it’s my fault. Did I gush all over her when she was young as I do Beta?”

“Oh, yeah. You were incorrigible,” she said.

“Guilty as charged. I guess we’ll just have to wait and see. By the chance she turns out to just be one of us, I’ll stand by to be the good Dad.”

“Yeah, I worry about her, I worry about you too.”

Sol looked into her eyes and said, “Worrying is a sign of uncertainty, trust and believe, that’s my motto,” smiling at her with confidence.

“You’re a good man.” She said as she gave him his homecoming kiss.

“Did you bring me anything?” Beta interrupted.

“Yeah, I brought you a special hug from up north.”

“Anything for a hug, papa.”

Sol looked back to Lisa, “Do you want me to talk with Aurora?”

“Please.”

Moments later, Miranda met Aaron. “Uncle Sol came back this morning, he said they will start building a new town up north sometime after the ceremony. Aunt Lisa wants us over for dinner,” she said.

“Good, Sol has always encouraged me. Unlike Lisa who always makes me feel like I forgot something.” Aaron said.

“Am I alone in feeling warm on the inside?” she asked.

“You mean like sunshine after leaving a cold swimming pool kind of warm?”

“No, more like when you eat something spicy.”

He asked, “Could it be that breakfast burrito?”

“I didn’t eat. It feels like gravity,” she said.

“Now that you mention it, I do feel something like that. I’ll bet it has something to do with Gee and Soo being here.”

“Ok, I don’t want to have to proclaim Da, but...”

“Don’t be mean,” he pled.

Miranda apologized. “I’m a little nervous.”

“I am too, it feels like the earth is talking to me, but I don’t understand what it is saying.”

“I think it’s saying, ‘let it go,’ the universe will come to us, we don’t have to chase it.” She took his hand, “I know I get moody, and I apologize in advance, but who I am is who I am, and whether I’m accepted or not wouldn’t change it.”

“That’s why I listen to you, sometimes the truth can be brutal, but the truth is better than the sugar-coated bull most people spill. Remind me to remember that.” Aaron said, as he touched her face lightly. “After the celebration, I want you to think about our relationship for real. Will you at least commit to that?”

“Of course, I will, you know how I feel, but there are lessons to be learned here with Gee and Soo and the Tricentennial before we can address commitments.”

“Understood.”

In the center of town, the fountain began to glow. While people stopped to stare at the fountain, Gee and Soo walked right into their lives from the atrium above. They looked their age, thick wrinkled skin with a dark gray complexion. They said

nothing as they disappeared again and materialized in Hope's living room.

"My, how you have grown child," Gee looked upon Hope.

"I can't believe you came back. I had missed you terribly for a long time." Hope said with a tear in her eye. "I didn't know what to feel about your return until I now, welcome home!"

Soo spoke, something she rarely did, "It seems like yesterday when we left, yet you have changed in so many ways. We are so pleased."

Gee added, "Two other families will be joining us for the celebration, they do not number anywhere close to you, but then again, they had no genius microbiologist to mass produce themselves."

"I'll take that as a compliment," Hope said.

"You were always an inspiration," Gee said.

"Tell us of the Tricentennial."

"Later," Gee replied, "we have family to discuss first."

Aurora returned home after word of her father's return. "High dad, how was your trip?"

"It went well, but I'm glad to be back."

"Did you see the town?"

"Yes, I did. It's amazing. How have you been lately?"

"Fine, why do you ask?"

Sol was barely able to block Aurora from knowing Gee and Soo were in the living room. "Have you been feeling a strange connection to something lately?" he asked.

"Yes, I have. It's like a heartbeat, a wave of energy that pulses through me."

"Is it getting stronger?" he asked, as Gee and Soo came around the corner behind her.

"It is."

"So, this is Aurora," Gee said.

She turned around startled and bellowed, "Holy cow, you scared me, I knew it, I felt you," she said excitedly.

“And we felt you, all of you. Everyone seems to be curious about this process and by all rights, they should be. That is why we announced our arrival. Everyone needs to know how to believe, not what to believe. Believing is not a matter of right or wrong, it’s truth as you understand it.”

Soo added, “Our legacy doesn’t end with you, it begins with you. The heavens will choose all our fates. If you believe, then the universe just might speak to you, if not, it surely won’t.”

“Honey,” Lisa told Aurora, “Miranda and Aaron are coming for dinner.”

“That’s nice,” she said flatly, as if she hadn’t heard a word and was just responding instinctively. “I want to ask you a million questions,” Aurora said, staring at them in awe like they were exotic animals in a zoo.

“Don’t talk yourself to sleep,” Gee said.

Aurora couldn’t tell if they spoke sarcastically or if they were prepared to listen to everything she had to say. Her inquiry was answered when Lisa asked Gee and Soo if they were tired from there passage.

“Very, we are exhausted,” Soo replied.

Suddenly Aurora felt a little less the object of everyone’s attention. Aaron snickered to himself. Miranda just assumed Aurora would be unphased by their witty retort due to her narcissism and paid it no consequence.

Miranda asked Gee and Soo if they would care for a refreshment out of social protocol and an unexpected, “yes,” was returned. Now being caught off-guard, had to ask what their preference was. “Water, coffee, lemonade?” she asked.

“Tea please, not too hot,” Soo said. “Shall we sit at the table on the back porch?”

She wondered how little grey aliens came to enjoy tea but didn’t want to sound like Aurora by asking.

Moments later, Gee stood at the edge of the porch and asked Miranda, “Will you join me?”

Facing out into the yard, Gee stood with his hands out, and a swarm of butterflies appeared. As Gee waved his hands gently to the left and to the right, the butterflies followed. “Animals, birds, insects, people, we are all creatures. The difference between us is that we know we’re creatures, they have no concept of creation. If we allow them to feel that connection, we can communicate. What do you suppose these butterflies are telling me?”

“I really don’t know,” Miranda said.

“Put your hands out,” Gee said, “can you feel the vibration?”

Suddenly the butterflies circled and went toward Miranda’s hands. She instantly felt their presence. “I feel them, they are welcoming me.”

“Yes, and now you will forever know that there is a harmony to maintain in all creatures big and small. You have grown a little today, what might tomorrow bring,” Gee said as he looked back at Soo and gave her a nod.

“I don’t know, but suddenly I’m excited about it,” Miranda said.

Aaron asked, “Does that mean Miranda’s gifted?”

“You are all gifted,” Gee said, “every one of you came from the same source. The only real differences between you are your learned opinions and what you choose to believe. What you believe makes you who you are. You too, can feel and talk to the butterflies, or cats and dogs if you wish. You just have to be receptive to their energy, comes in many forms, you just have to focus and believe.”

Aaron and Miranda both understood Gee’s implications and hidden direction. Aurora, on the other hand, was still in awe of the butterflies and not being asked to participate, or being the center of attention, bothered her. She would try to control the butterflies herself when no one was looking.



“We saw the decorations in town when we arrived. It all looked very nice,” Gee said.

“That was our hope,” Aaron responded, “we wanted to welcome you and create a festive atmosphere for the celebration.”

Gee glanced around to ensure everyone was paying full attention and said, “It’s a wonderful gesture, and we’re pleased everyone is anticipating a celebration, but there will be no escaping the spirituality of the event. The embodiment of the light is the purest form of truth, we can aspire to many things, but with the light in our soul, we can find peace within ourselves. Everyone present will benefit from its brilliance and in the end, you will be left with a living connection to the wisdom of the universe. I tell you this because this is much more than a celebration.”

Aurora asked, “But you will be appointing your successors? Right?”

“The new oracles have already been chosen; they just haven’t been informed yet.” Soo replied.

Gee added, “The Tricentennial is not a competition, it’s not an award and it is not a rite of passage, it is an understanding and acceptance of a power greater than anything imaginable.”

Hope told Aurora, “When my mother told me stories of her dreams of the Tricentennial, I couldn’t imagine the connection to the universe she was trying to explain, until Angel was born, and I felt the love being shared by all who were aware.”

Lisa added, “I can say the same for when you were born.”

Aurora began to get confused again. “Are we still talking about the celebration?”

No response. They could see her mind was focused on one thing, Supreme Counselor.

Aaron broke up that conversation by asking Gee, “I’m told we need a discussion concerning transportation?”

“Yes, can you transport a couple dozen people here, some as far away as the other side of the world?”

“Yes, I can.”

“Ok then, we’ll talk more in a couple days about bringing some guests to the ceremony. Meanwhile, accommodations for a one-night stay for a couple dozen people would save you from having to stay awake to fly them home afterward,” Gee said.

“You know,” Sol joined in, addressing Gee, “You speak so common and informal for not being around us for so long, I think I’m impressed.”

“We have many years of experience with you. You can thank Hope for our sense of humor. We hadn’t had one till she taught us irony, now my people are more confused, thank you.”

“So where are they,” Miranda asked.

“Our dimension is out there, pointing at the sky, down here pointing at the ground. We are everywhere and we are nowhere. Our people will forever be separated from this world once Soo and I relinquish power during the Tricentennial. We are the last to bridge these two worlds. From here going forward, the earth will be yours exclusively, and we will return to our parallel existence.”

Out from nowhere, Beta walked up to Gee “Where will you go?”

“So, you must be Beta,” Gee said, “We’ll go home.”

“Do you have to remind people to look down every now and then, too?”

Gee and Soo laughed, knowing she was referring to the fact that they were the same size.

“No, we just step on their feet and make a lot of noise.” Gee said.

Beta just tilted her head and pointed at him as if to acknowledge she knew he were pulling her leg.”

“I like her,” Soo said.

“Yeah, everyone loves Beta,” Aurora muttered.

Everyone found amusement in Beta’s entrance and conversation except Aurora. For a woman in her thirties, it was

odd that she found herself jealous of her six-year-old sister. Miranda and Aaron picked up on her resentment as well, which was one of the reasons they found her so unsettling.

Lisa walked up behind Sol and put her hand on his shoulder. “Honey, do you feel that?”

“Ah, it has started,” Gee interrupted, looking at Soo.

“What’s started?” Sol said.

“The stars are beginning their alignment. What you are feeling is a root gravity wave that occurred fifty thousand years ago and is just now reaching us. It will get stronger for the next couple of days.”

Angel brought a pot of warm tea out to the porch and set it on the table. Beta brought a tray of cups. “This is mom’s recipe, but I brewed it to perfection just for you,” Beta said.

Soo asked, “Why would you offer that information,” thinking that Beta was looking for praise.

“Because I want you to feel confident that you are getting the best cup of tea in your life.”

Soo looked back at Gee and whispered, “Six, can you imagine?” referring to her age.

The rest of the day fluently absorbed into night. The spring day was so nice and comfortable no one wanted to take the party back inside. Instead, Aaron put some music on softly to the patio speakers and lit the half dozen Tiki torches in the yard.

“What a perfect night,” Aaron told Miranda.

Miranda was holding Beta, who had fallen asleep in her arms. “It is perfect. I feel at peace. We may be closer to looking into that issue we discussed earlier.”

Sol and Lisa held hands while looking back at everyone. “We must have done something right,” he said.

Seeing Angel and Hope in the kitchen through the window, Lisa said. “No, I think it was Grams and Grammy who did something right.”

Back in the kitchen, Hope and Angel discussed the last memories of Gee and Soo before they departed. Angel had just given birth to Lisa II and the sense that all would be well was attributed to Gee and Soo's intervention.

"I was so tired of telling people about Gee and Soo. They can see for themselves now," Hope said.

"We will soon have new counsel, but you know, we haven't had a supreme counselor since we've founded New Providence, Gee and Soo felt right after we settled. Why is having one now so important?" Angel inquired embarrassingly.

Hope told her, "My dad told me when I was young that he witnessed Gee and Soo's ability to control the forces around them, which they used to protect him and my mother."

"I was thinking more in the line of today's events. We didn't need help. Does their return and the Tricentennial suggest that we may need their help again soon?" Angel responded.

Hope said, "I think we will always need help. The future is the one thing we endeavor without experience. Our new spiritual advisors may awaken our next level of consciousness. These are exciting times, almost exciting as our beginning."

"What do you think of Aurora's issues?" Angel asked.

"I feel bad for her. I don't know Gee and Soo will choose her, but with her desire so strong, she could be devastated," Hope continued, "but I hold out hope that regardless their choice, it would be strong enough that Aurora would accept it."

Angel stepped back outside, Sol had just taken Beta from Miranda and put her to bed. Miranda never considered herself for motherhood, even though she felt she would eventually settle down, it was something she didn't think about often. Angel would often needle her about finding someone to share her life with.

"What is it you're waiting for?" Angel asked Miranda.

"What do you mean Grammy?"

"You know what I mean. You and Aaron get along, don't you?"

“Sure, but what does that have to do with anything?”

“We can’t communicate if all we do is ask questions. You know what I’m getting at. A family is the one fulfilling endeavor that gives our lives value and happiness, yet you resist.”

“It’s all about choices I imagine,” Miranda said, “What if Aaron is not the right one? What then?”

“He may or may not be, that’s your issue, I’m just trying to get you to think about it more.”

“Do you nag Aurora the same?”

“No, I do not,” Angel replied shaking her head.

“Why?” Miranda asked.

“Her happiness doesn’t come from the heart; I doubt she’ll ever be truly happy. Happiness is something for people at peace, Aurora only has dreams of being better than other people and there can be no peace in that.”

While Miranda and Angel’s conversation was finishing, Lisa asked Gee and Soo to talk about the ceremony and celebration.

Gee beckoned people to gather, “In two days-time a gravitational wave from a distant solar system will reach us. As with any wave, it comes in intervals and this one will be carrying information with it from 50,000 years ago from a different world. The revelations you will receive by simply be amazing and for the chosen ones, it is even more powerful.”

“What kind of power are you referring to?” Aurora asked.

“Knowledge, and not just any knowledge, knowledge no one else could understand. It is an unbearable burden but a beautiful gift. Our experiences will soon be a gift to you as we pass down our responsibilities. Of course, the future is unwritten, but we have a prediction. The forces between these two worlds will meet and guide you in your participation and position here on earth as well as in the universe. It will be within this Tricentennial that you take the ultimate risk of dispatching the first permanent society to live and travel across the open universe.

A travelling society on a mission to find suitable planetary bodies and worlds to settle.”

“Why would we leave? What happens to Earth?” Miranda asked.

“Nothing, it is still here and will be for eons. You take to the stars because that’s what you are destined to do. Greater and greater societies will come to be, it is inevitable.”

“So, what does Supreme Counselor have to do with all this?” Aaron asked. A question Angel had as well.

“The earth is alive, and we are living on it. The planet has its own life to lead and will throw a tantrum every now and then. A Hurricane, tornado, a flood, or volcano, sooner or later these events will take place and the Supreme Counselor will have the ability to feel these things. To know when and where these events take place, and can determine the level of hazard, can potentially save everybody’s life. You recently had a comet, didn’t you?”

“The Supreme Counselors are not the Chieftains, Generals or Presidents, they are the oracles, the prophets, the seers,” Gee said, with all modesty.

“Which were you? Aurora asked.

“Neither, we were just friends,” Gee said.

“With oracle, prophet, seer status,” Soo added, with a silent snicker.

“Will we be able to tell when the peek force is upon us?” Miranda asked.

“I will ask you the same thing in two days-time and if you can answer me, you will have risen to a conscious state worthy of ascending to the next level. There is a language of the universe, and being able to talk and listen, is all the Supreme Counselors need to be able lead.”

Sol stepped in with a remark, “If it seems like there’s a lot of attention be paid to being chosen Supreme Counselor, I think it’s because we know everyone so intimately and our curiosity is

trying to match people's personalities to one that might be revered in such high regard."

"Well said," Lisa added.

"We do understand your interest and curiosity," Gee said, "The force that comes is traveling through space, altered only by electromagnetic interference or other gravitational waves. If there are any of you capable of turning into that frequency, they shall be the chosen ones. Therefore, technically, the choice has already been made and we'll just have to wait for its arrival to see who can hear it."

"But as Supreme Counselor, don't you have the ability to see who it will be?" Miranda asked

Soo told Gee, "Someone was paying attention."

"Yes," Gee said, "but you'll have to wait for the light." With a smile on his face, he looked to Miranda, "Nice try, but knowing in advance will ruin the surprise."

"Oh no."

The group laughed.

Gee continued, "We have only seen one other Tricentennial, our own. Each is different. I can say that all your senses will be hyperactive. Seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, thinking will all be stronger than normal, and the instincts, intuitions and premonitions will be heightened as well. It will be a time when time itself can stop and restart at will. However, it goes without saying, that not all information is good news, so beware."

Hope returned from the house. She stepped out to the patio and met Gee and Soo waiting on her.

"Come have a seat," Gee said.

"We are getting old. Look at you, all wrinkled and withered," Hope said.

"It took years for us to see your humor, now we don't want to imagine a time without it. I trust your life got better after we left."

“It has been wonderful. Look at all these friendly faces. They are all mine, thanks to you.”

Gee and Soo were such proud alien parents. Hope was the first child they had a biological attachment to.

“We are pleased we could be together one last time. Our destinies are intertwined in the reoccurring cycle of creation and as such, we’ll experience an unprecedented level of consciousness. We can hear the earth’s hum, as it spins in orbit, creating high level winds screaming, whistling, and roaring. It’s a very distinctive sound from space and makes us wonder what it will sound like during the event?” Gee said.

“Forgive him,” Soo said, “He is going to miss being here but doesn’t know how to say it, so it may appear that he’s rambling incoherently.”

“It’s not rambling, it’s reminiscing.”

Hope smiled; she’d never heard them talk so personally to each other. “I have wondered and worried about you for many years,” she said. “I also want to thank you for caring for my dad back when I was born. After losing my mother, he needed someone and you gave me a gift that allowed me to comfort him, otherwise his loneliness would have consumed him. But, thanks to you, I can now remember the greatest man ever. Thank you.”

Sol and Lisa were sitting together on the other side of the patio and heard a scratching sound off to the left.

“What was that?” Lisa asked.

“That scratching noise?” Sol asked.

“Yeah, it sounded like a cat climbing a refrigerator. They looked over and saw Beta kneeling at her bedroom window.”

“We have a creature in the window Sol,” she declared.

Beta opened her window, “Look up.”

“What?”

“Look up at the moon.”

Sol and Lisa turned around and saw the largest moon they had ever seen coming up over the trees.



“Ooh,” Lisa gasped in awe. “That’s huge.”

The commotion got everyone’s attention and they gathered on the patio and bonded with the harmony of the earth for a spell. Around midnight, Miranda and Aaron left, Aurora had to be asked to go home, while Hope and Angel went to bed. Sol and Lisa stayed up at the kitchen table and talked for another hour about all that was happening.

## Chapter Three

Seven o'clock arrived with a brighter than bright glair through the bedroom window. "What's that noise?" Lisa questioned.

"Birds," mama, "little birds," Beta said running to the window to get a better look. "I saw them from the window upstairs, they're flying through the leaves in the trees."

"That's weird," Lisa said as she made her way to the door. She opened the door and witnessed about thirty sparrows flying in formation around the yard and in and out of the oak and pecan trees that were at the corners of the yard. She closed the door and told Beta, "go get daddy."

"Honey, take a look at this." She opened the door and again they saw the birds going crazy outside.

"It almost looks like they're playing a game, chasing the leader," he said.

Lisa said, "This is almost as weird as the butterflies yesterday," as she turned and walked back into the house.

Sol followed her into the house commenting on the Tricentennial and the animals are probably connected. "There must be some kind of environmental disruption they are able to pick up on due to the Tricentennial."

"Yeah, but I would have thought we may be able to feel something ourselves. Miranda seemed to be able to address the butterflies, maybe we just need to concentrate more."

No sooner than Lisa finished that statement, Beta called for her from the bath.

"Mama, come see."

Those are three words she hadn't recalled Beta shouting out before so in a concerning manner, she ran to the bathroom to see what was going on. "What it is?"

"Look." She was sitting in the bath slowing waving her hand above the bath water and the water under her hand rose an

inch or two like her hand was a magnet and the water was liquid metal. As she played in the water waves were forming as she went from one side of the tub to the other without touching the water. “Is this supposed to do this?” She asked.

“No honey, this is strange, very strange.” Lisa put her hand down near the water expecting to cause waves herself, but nothing happened. Even more confused she told Beta not to make a mess and left to talk with Sol.

“Sol, there’s something you should see.”

“Where?”

“Betas in the bath and she can make the water move without touching it. I tried, and nothing happened. It’s like she has special powers.”

He stepped into the bathroom and asked her to show him and sure enough she created waves by moving her hand over the water. He tried and nothing happened. “That’s amazing sweetheart, don’t make a mess.”

“Why does everyone think I’m going to make a mess?”

Sol left and told Lisa his findings. They looked at each other, with confusion written all over their faces, “we should keep an eye on her,” Lisa said.

“With the Tricentennial nearing, there sure are a lot of weird things going on, we should probably keep an eye on everything,” Sol concluded.

Aurora telepathically connected with Lisa and asked, “Mom, can I come over? I need to talk to someone.”

“Sure, come over anytime.”

She must have been waiting outside the house because the doorbell rang within a minute.

“What’s the matter?” Lisa asked.

“I couldn’t sleep last night. I was up all-night thinking about Gee showing Miranda the trick with the butterflies.”

“Ok, why does it bother you?”

“I got the feeling Miranda was Gee’s favorite. Do you think Gee is going to pick her?”

“You do realize you’re obsessing over this, don’t you?”

Aurora said, “I don’t know. If I felt I was truly the chosen one, would it be obsessive to acknowledge it? Why would I feel that it is my destiny? I’m confused, because I don’t know what I am or what I’d do if I am not to be Supreme Counselor.”

“I understand you’re confused, but the only advice I can offer is, you need to let it go. It is something you have no control over, something that does not belong to you. I suggest you find something to do to keep you busy, something you can find satisfaction in that can take your mind off it. If it is meant to happen, it’ll happen.”

“I wish I could say that helped.”

“I’m sorry honey, I know you’ve felt that you were destined for something great, even if Supreme Counselor is not in your stars, it doesn’t mean you’re not going to fulfill some grand design. Remember sweetheart, it’s not who you are, it’s what you do. Find something to do.”

“Thanks, mom. I’ll try to take your advice and not to let it bother me.”

Aurora left unsatisfied and went back home. After thinking about what her mother said, she was able to relax a bit and go to sleep. Her sleep didn’t last long. After only an hour, a subsonic roar undetected by even her dog woke her up. She felt the vibration of the sound waves rising through the floor. Not realizing they were so subtle that no one else could feel them, she jumped out of bed and ran to the window expecting to see something big move along outside, but nothing.

She focused on Aaron, “Did you feel that?”

“Feel what?” he asked.

“A rumble.”

“No, I didn’t feel anything.”

Aaron told Miranda of Aurora’s inquiry.

“No, I didn’t feel anything.”

About then Beta interrupted, “Yeah, I felt something weird like a rumble.”

“I thought it felt like an earthquake far away,” Aurora said.

They didn’t realize it at the time, but the earth was literally stretching at the equator and what they were experiencing was the energy being released from the tear. The gravitational forces from the approaching event were beginning to form a stronger bond.

Gee piped in, “We have a day and a half before maximum attraction, you need to arrange accommodations for our guests.”

Miranda offered, “Let’s ask Grammy if we can meet at her house to make the arrangements.”

She contacted her and of course, she said yes. Within ten minutes the whole gang was at Angel’s house. Hope and Angel shared a house ever since their partners perished and for the past year, Hope had spent most of her time either in bed or in a chair. Angel was much more active.

“Grammy, did you feel the rumble and the roar?” Aurora asked.

“No.”

Hope added, “Just got word from Gee, he said it was Kavora 237 and Earth’s gravity at odds with each other. It will peak at the height of the ceremony.”

Even though Aurora had hardly gotten any rest, she felt pleased and rejuvenated knowing she was able to feel something most people couldn’t. Maybe there was hope after all, she thought.

Without warning or mention, Gee and Soo stepped through the portal and disappeared. They would meet with the other two colonies while the gang hashed out the plan to furnish rooms to the visitors. With as many children that have grown and left their parent’s house, there were plenty of rooms available, they just needed volunteers to host them. Hope and Angel held

hands and put out a general calling to people of the city, in and around the central square for volunteers to sponsor the guests. New Providence had grown to 44,000 people while the other two colonies only had about eight thousand between them. They didn't have a head start like Hope did. But more than that, Gee and Soo dedicated much more time to Hope's line.

According to Gee's calculations, the probability that all three cultures would survive and end up meeting after a 150-years was less than 3%, he couldn't be sure how the three societies would interact.

Gee and Soo appeared through the portal to the colony in Columbia. "Welcome home," Nene said to Gee. Nene was Hope's counterpart in the Columbia colony. "I never gave up hope to see you again," she said. "The people will be so happy to see you."

"We've returned to take a dozen of your wisest and more able youth to a celebration like no other. The balance in the world and your way of life may depend on your ability to advance your species and join with another colony," Gee told her.

Nene asked, "What is this celebration for, and what colony are you referring?"

"Two other colonies survived the great plague, and a great event is coming that will bring changes to the earth you must be aware of. Soo and I are nearing our end and will be passing down our powers. This is a gift of universal freedom and knowledge beyond comprehension and is necessary for us to continue our journey. All the people of the world deserve to witness this event, however, there is simply inadequate accommodation. Therefore, among your group, you must choose a dozen people to witness and take part in the celebration, some of whom may receive special powers, so choose wisely. There will never be another Tricentennial in your lifetime."

"Who shall I choose and where will this celebration be?" Nene asked.

“Who you choose is up to you, they may be the ones to acquire the wisdom and knowledge, you will then rely on their advice. I can advise you to gather the family heads to choose, and trust your collective wisdom,” Gee said. “As far as where it will be, a transport from the north will arrive tomorrow and take your group back north with them for a couple days. Friendly townspeople have made accommodations for you.”

After a half hour meeting with Nene and her immediate family, Gee and Soo headed through the portal and reappeared in Newfoundland.

“It’s been a very long time, but we’ve returned with news,” Gee said to John as they passed through the portal.

“Oh, my,” John blurted out. “Look at you, here in the flesh. He turned and shouted out to Sarah, “look who’s here!”

“John, we have good news, you are not alone. A couple other colonies survived the comet and will be meeting in less than two days to celebrate the passing of the knowledge to the next Supreme Counselors. Tomorrow we will return with transportation to take twelve of your people to witness the Tricentennial ceremony where Soo and I will pass down the scepter and our powers to the chosen few.”

Sarah and John were like Nene, they started with just two, unlike Hope who created two thousand at once. “We shall send our elders so they may teach our youth.”

“Youth would be important to bring to the Tricentennial, after all, the knowledge must be maintained and promoted for all. You cannot deny it is the young who will carry the message into the future. There is a truth in the universe, we just have to believe.”

All three of these societies experienced civilization differently and had different environmental conditions. Choices were different because circumstances were different. Gee and Soo wondered, “How will these people get along? For their final experiment with the remains of humanity, they would force

alternative thought, philosophies, and culture upon the inhabitants to challenge their ability to conform. The universe is more different than the differences people have among themselves.

“You must accept yourselves before you can accept your source or destination,” Soo said as she took Gee’s hand.

“We’ll be back tomorrow to pick your group up. Have them record everything so all of you may experience this historic event,” Gee said right before they walked back through the portal.

Meanwhile back in New Providence, Aaron finished tuning up Freedom 5, his one hundred passenger flying bus. He used to fly it all the time, mainly to gain credits in town for taking people on scenic tours. Freedom five was sleek and fast yet very comfortable. It could fly from coast to coast in two hours. It was as large as four buses side by side and could hover over ground and turn in place before disappearing within seconds. He took it for a spin and gave Miranda and Beta a scenic tour of the delta.

Aaron tried to explain the additional power the airbus had compared to the last time he flew to Miranda. “The Tricentennial must be affecting its power. It’s never flown better.”

“When will you leave to get them?” She asked.

“When they tell me to, I guess.”

“Can I go with you?”

“Me too,” Beta said.

“Sure, I’d enjoy the company. Be ready when I call,” he said.

Accommodation has been agreed upon with more than enough volunteers to sponsor the guests. As the clock was ticking down, so were the extracurricular events throughout the globe. Sea levels began to rise as the earth was slowly stretching at the equator, animals of all persuasions were instinctively reacting to earth’s changes and naturally, humans were the last to feel it.

A bridge connecting opposite sides of a river in Columbia, was pulled three inches apart by the connecting forces and caused



it to collapse. Tides rose across the northern seas and beat the shores relentlessly. The same was happening around Cape Horn, where the highest waves every recorded were found making passage impossible. Temperatures rose sharply around the equator and dropped significantly at the poles. Only Hope could remember a time when these events would have decimated populations but since the comet, none of these events were prevalent.

Hope and Angel shared old time conversations at the kitchen table over a cup of tea and realized they felt younger, stronger, and more energetic. A wonderful fountain of youth experience as reward for their years and years of dedication and fortitude. Angel even noticed the skin on Hope's face seemed healthier and younger.

"I feel pretty good for an old lady," Hope said.

"You look good too, bright and fresh," Angel said.

Lisa and Sol tried not to eavesdrop, but the subject was so compelling they couldn't help but feel the effects themselves. Seemed everyone was experiencing a warm and exhilarating presence. "It's a shame Aurora can't relax and simply enjoy this," Sol proclaimed.

"I'm sure, whatever it is that makes her tick, it will be in hyperdrive very soon," Lisa chuckled.

"Are you looking forward to that?" he asked.

"Bet the farm," she said, "I wouldn't miss it. I've always wondered what really made her tick and maybe now, I get to find out."

"Do you remember when she was only five or so, and she'd walk around the yard talking to the trees and plants?" He continued, "She's probably a little more legitimate than we give her credit. Maybe we shouldn't be so hard on her."

"Spoken like a good father, but I don't see it as being hard on her, I see it as an attempt to keep her in the real world," she said.

“Spoken like a good mother.”

Gee and Soo returned from their extremely brief meetings with the other colonies. They brought everyone around them closer by their simple presence. “Nine hours from now, you will bring the other colonies here, eleven hours later the ceremony will conclude in grand fashion,” Gee told Aaron.

Hope approached Gee and Soo and asked for a word in the kitchen, where she felt comfortable. “Many things are happening because of the Tricentennial, are any of these effects dangerous? We’re not canaries you know, we’re well past the experimental stage,” Hope insisted.

“Of course, the earth is alive and being stretched. It doesn’t like it, things heat up, but imagine the peaceful impasse as the wave subsides. This is life beyond the skin of the earth,” Gee said with a pragmatic overture.

“My goodness, you’d think we had enough catastrophe with the comet,” she paused, “what shall we prepare for?” Hope inquired.

“You are safe, there may be many dangers because of the event but they are far away. All you have to prepare for is to be amazed by the euphoric powers of truth.”

“What will a Supreme Counselor do for us that we can’t do for ourselves?”

“Hope, you have always been able to ask the hard questions. I have thought of you first with each decision made. In your culture, it might constitute love. Our love is that of logic and calculation, a learned process over many years, but that doesn’t alter the fact that we want the best for you. That is what a Supreme Counselor will do for you, except they will have powers at their disposal.”

“This event has already given me and Angel a gift. The feeling of youth we lost has returned, even if only temporary, it feels good again.”

Suddenly, they heard a light thud followed by pitter, patter. A few squirrels jumped from a tree onto the roof and chased each other across the yard.

“Miranda, come with me outside,” Gee said as he walked past her toward the patio. “Tell them everything is going to be fine, they’re a little on edge and acting out.”

“Talk to them?” she asked.

“Yes, they are waiting for a little reassurance that the world will not end.”

Miranda thought about it and concluded that she was lost, she didn’t know how to talk to them, then she dropped her hands to her side and resigned to say, “Hey you, talk to me,” and they did. One at a time, the squirrels, and birds even the insects competed for her attention, clamoring away.”

For Sol and Lisa to be watching from doorway to see Miranda and the animals communicating amazed them but also made them feel a little more concerned for Aurora.

Aurora was sneaky in her approach. She walked around the corner of the dining room just in time to see Miranda gesturing to the squirrels and birds. Sol and Lisa looked at each other with a typical, ‘oh no,’ look on their faces as they realized Aurora was there. Aurora said, “Its ok, mom, dad, I’m ok with it. It’s just like Grammy said, “we all have a part to play, regardless of what it is, I’ll find out mine soon enough.”

“That’s a very mature position, I’m glad you feel that way,” Lisa said with a little hope.

Aurora said, “I can feel greater activity in the southern pacific plate, and I feel that a new land mass is being born. Even if Miranda has favor, I still feel things happening, maybe my part is closer to the ground.”

Gee looked at Lisa, shook his head, and indicated they did not tell her. “She can also hear the songs of the whales echoing off the clouds from miles away. In fact, both Miranda and Aurora should be able to pick up on that one.”

Changing the subject, Lisa asked Gee, “Will you miss us?”

He sighed but did not answer. Instead, he looked at her as if it were to be their last photo and smiled.

Hope said to Gee, “It seems so brave for you to come back and give your last measure for us. I understand how people would be compelled to worship you.”

“No, your mother gave her ultimate devotion, she deserves the admiration of all that come after her, not us, we are just messengers.”

“If messenger is a title you wish to associate, I contend you are a messenger of God or the messenger of Love. You are much more than a messenger to us.” Then turning to Angel remarked, “Even being over 160 years my father’s pain from losing my mom haunts me. Even emotions are stronger,” she said.

Angel agreed, “I miss dad and Valiant.” A tear rolled down her cheek.

Hope wiped it off for her and said, “me too.”

## Chapter Four

Aaron's five-a.m. alarm woke him and started his day with an excitement he hadn't felt in a long time. He jumped out of bed and into the shower, then out the door to the back yard where his eighty-foot air bus was waiting. He called out for Miranda to hurry, "Are you almost ready? We still need to stop and pick up Beta."

Lisa agreed to let Beta go with them and told her, "Mind yourself and have a good time."

There first stop would be Columbia. They plotted their course from Gee's directions and set off to meet their mysterious neighbors. The airbus was extremely quiet, the only equipment making any noise was the crystal core generator powering the positron capacitor. The high pitch whining settled to a calm hum once they achieved enough lift to fly. Using the earth's electromagnetic field enabled them to fly extremely fast. It only took about an hour to fly the 1800 miles, between the smooth and consistent acceleration and flying at 70,000 feet, they couldn't tell they were travelling over twice the speed of sound, it felt like any other ride.

Upon their arrival they stepped out of the craft and were met by hundreds of citizens lining the airfield, waving, and cheering as if to welcome their Olympic champions home. Four people stood reserved on the tarmac, waiting to greet them and lead them to their council of elders.

"Welcome," Maria said, not knowing what language the visitors spoke and unaware of their telepathic abilities. Luckily for both, the mind doesn't work with words but with concepts and images, so communication was not an issue. They understood each other just fine and gradually learned more with every exchange.

"We had recently learned of your existence," Aaron said.

“And we have just learned of you,” Maria said. “May I introduce Marsal, Raul, and Pita, we’ve been expecting you since Jefe told us about you. Please follow me, would you care for a beverage?” she asked, while leading them toward a large gazebo in the center of town.

It was nearly one hundred degrees outside with hottest part of the day yet to come. “Yes, please, anything cold would be lovely,” Miranda said, “who’s Jefe?”

“Short, gray, big eyes, you know,” Maria said.

“Oh yes, we call them Gee and Soo.”

Before leaving the tarmac, Miranda told Beta to stay close to us and take her hand, but that didn’t last long. She let go of her hand and scurried ahead when she saw the heavily decorated structure. She had never seen so many flowers of nearly every color of the rainbow. Miranda let her go.

On the far side of the gazebo was a long, covered hanger where a collection of antique flying machines was housed. The collection, dating as far back as the beginning of flight, are all replicas built from historical records. Aaron was in awe, he studied aviation and found ancient aircraft a true test of character and culture. For an avid fan, he was extremely excited to see such a collection.

The elders sat in waiting under the gazebo while Aaron desperately wanted to veer off toward the hanger. Miranda asked Maria, “Why hadn’t any of the elders meet us at the airfield?”

“It is out of respect. We meet and greet you then present you to the elders. The introduction to the elders is always formal. They in turn, acknowledge your reception and officially welcome dialog,” Maria said. “It may seem old fashioned, but we’ve never had visitors from other cultures, just from a couple other villages. They know no other custom.”

After formal introductions and greetings, the entire party took a short taxi ride into town and entered a large, gated villa. Luxurious by any standard, the main house had stone steps to a

marble patio entrance. Once inside, Lady Julia and four other members of elders sat in chairs on one side of a very long table. "Please join us," as she pointed with an open hand to the other side of the table. She looked upon Miranda and Aaron as children who found their way home after a longer journey. "I will accompany you with nine of our children to this event. Jefe told us we would find an enlightenment at this ceremony. What do you know of it?"

Aaron replied, "Gee and Soo told us they had returned to pass down their powers to the next generation and then would leave us forever."

"They said to witness this event and accept the truth in whatever form it takes, do you know what that means?" she asked.

Aaron replied, "They are expecting to pass their power to other people, in doing so, whomever is chosen should not be questioned, we should trust their judgement that the right people had been chosen."

"I see."

Miranda added, "We have undergone many changes since the new world, how have you adjusted?"

"My mother had four sisters and two brothers," Lady Julia said, "my father had five brothers and three sisters, Jefe did something to allow them to have children when no one else could. After only a couple years, everyone was gone except our family."

"So, all these people are your family?" Miranda asked.

"Yes, all in this village and the other two."

"The same thing happened with us."

Lady Julia was like Angel, the oldest of the original offspring. She continued, "My husband died last year, I'll surely follow him soon, but Jefe has given me reason to fight for a little more time. We did not think we would survive. For a long time, we feared we would all perish, who the disease didn't take, we

feared the forest would. The animals that survived seemed to have gone crazy and didn't return to the forest for years."

Aaron acknowledged, "Things have started to get a little weird lately up where we are from. The earth's alignment is causing animals to become excited."

Beta was trying to 'behave,' and not interrupt the adults as her mother requested, but that wasn't her nature and couldn't control her impulse to speak any longer. "The birds and squirrels were playing, and the butterflies were dancing, do they dance and play here?"

Lady Julia looked at Beta with an innocent smile and replied, "I'm not sure, I stay inside mostly, but I hear the monkeys carry on more than usual." She looked to Miranda, "Is this your daughter?"

"No, she's, my cousin. Her mother thought this might be a once in a lifetime opportunity and let her come, under my care of course."

Aaron asked, "How long will it take everyone that's coming to be ready? We have lodging arranged and we have another stop to make."

"We are ready," Maria said.

"We have a big celebration planned, plenty of food and music, we should probably go," Miranda said.

Maria didn't say much after she introduced them but listened to every word carefully, studying and learning from her newfound acquaintances. She was a direct descendant of Lady Julia and her favorite. She was chosen to go specifically by their elders because, of all the children of the village, Maria seemed to know what everyone was thinking or what was going to happen next in any given situation. She also had a gift of making people tell the truth. Miranda could tell that whatever Gee and Soo did to genetically alter them was different than what they did for her people. Maria seemed to have received more of a gift than the others.



As the team from Columbia boarded the craft, Miranda asked Maria, “You seem different than the others, do you have a gift or special powers?”

Maria replied, “It’s too obvious, isn’t it?”

“Not really, I’m just good at judging people,” Miranda said.

“Me too. I can tell you are honest, caring, and confused about relationships.”

Miranda said, “I’m not confused, I’m in denial.”

“Oh, well that’s different,” she said with a light snicker.

“I think we’ll make good friends,” Miranda concluded.

Beta clapped her hand and said, “All aboard!”

Aaron looked around, counted thirteen people, and announced, “Buckle up, its show time.” The airbus could seat one hundred people, they were traveling with thirteen, “Can half of you sit in this section and the other half in this section,” as he pointed out the areas to fill. “Technically, you can sit anywhere or even walk around, but having good weight distribution as we take off makes for a most enjoyable ride.”

“Phillippe would love to ride this plane. This is a plane?” Maria asked.

“It’s more like a spacecraft than a plane,” Aaron said. A plane requires wind passing over wings to gain lift, this can rise and maneuver without wind, but it does use it as it flies.”

“Well, Phillippe would love it.”

Miranda asked, “Who is Phillippe?”

“He is our curator and builder of planes, it’s his hobby.”

“Why didn’t he come?” Beta asked.

Maria paused, “He did, that’s him with the hat.”

Miranda picked up on something, she’d ask Maria in private when she got the chance. The craft departed with the entire village gathered at the airfield, all wishing they could be a part of it. The elders were told more of the Tricentennial than they relayed to the people, because their leadership may have come

into question if everyone knew what the full scope and meaning of the ceremony was.

As they passed over the Gulf of Mexico, they could see major cloud formations out of the windows to the east. “Look,” Phillippe said to Maria, “The storm is going the wrong way.”

“You are right. These storms always come from the Atlantic into the Gulf not originating in the Gulf and moving out to the east.”

They stood at the window looking out, Miranda realized no one else was paying them any attention so she asked Maria, “Is Phillippe your love interest?”

“Why would you ask me that?”

“I felt it when you talked of him.”

Maria conceded, “You are as sensitive of these matters as I, you cannot say anything about it, please.”

“Why?”

“It is forbidden. The elders have chosen a suitor for me. I am to marry and have many children, but I have been delaying it for as long as I can. I’m afraid that by the time we get back they will have arranged everything.”

“Seems to me like the answer is clear,” Miranda said.

By now the conversation got Beta’s attention. “Yeah, don’t go back.”

“Beta, what did your mother tell you about eavesdropping?” Miranda scolded her.

“Technically I wasn’t eavesdropping, you were talking too loud.”

Maria said, “Little one, I wish it was that easy.”

Aaron circled the city twice before landing in the middle of the town square. Music was playing throughout the city, decorations, food, and drink were available on endless rows of tables on every corner. People were out and about enjoying each other’s company and as the passengers exited the craft there was an overwhelming sense of acceptance in the air. What they saw

as respectful protocol to have Lady Julia exit first, nostalgically reminding Hope of the day she watched her father enter the bunker when the comet came. Aaron and Miranda escorted Lady Julia to Hope and Angel, both of whom, at their age, looked strikingly familiar.

Lady Julia asked, "Are you sisters?"

"We are all sisters," Hope replied.

"My name is Angel; this is my mother Hope," she said before looking back at Hope with one brow raised.

Maria joined in, "This is Lady Julia, and my name is Maria. Thank you for the warm welcome."

"Please come and have a seat," Hope extended her hand toward a reception area where a table was set up with refreshments. Hope, Angel, Lady Julia, Maria, Miranda, and Aaron sat at the main table and the others filled tables to the flank. "We know you won't be with us long, but for the time you are here, we have arranged three houses next to each other for you to use, relax and rest in until you return to your home. The owners consider it a privilege to offer their home to you."

"That is very kind," Lady Julia said. "Your kindness gives us hope that our families will be able to maintain a friendship after this ceremony."

"We sure hope so," Angel said.

Hope spoke directly to Lady Julia, "Now that we are aware of each other's existence, I don't see why we couldn't sit and discuss how we could help each other right away. Food, clothes, equipment, technology, medicine, whatever our strengths, we must have the other could use help with, wouldn't you agree?"

Maria could see a similarity between the two and realized that Hope understood their culture enough to know that Lady Julia was the only one that needed convincing or persuading. She looked at Hope intensely, feeling there was something of great value to learn from her.

“Yes,” Lady Julia agreed. “You have a wonderful city; it looks clean, safe, and laid out efficiently. Our city is more condensed and surrounded by forest. Utilities and waste are our biggest challenges right now, if you have system designs that could help us upgrade, we would be very grateful.”

Aaron and Miranda could see this meeting turn into a lengthy and boring conversation while a party was literally in swing behind them. “Excuse me Hope, Lady Julia, Aaron and I wish to show Maria and her team a little of the city and where they will be sleeping tonight while you and Lady Julia enjoy a conversation.”

“Go on then,” Angel butted in. She knew what they were doing.

The kids left in a bunch and walked throughout the city like sight seers on vacation. They didn’t get too far when Beta came running after them, “Are you forgetting something?” she asked Aaron.

He looked confused, “I don’t think so.”

“Is this the only family you have to get?”

“Oh, shoot, you’re right. Miranda, we have to go north to pick up the other colony.”

Miranda called for Gee, “We need to know where to go.”

“Start leading north, I’ll program your craft. Meanwhile, I’ll be waiting there for you.”

St. George’s Bay, Newfoundland was only about 250 miles farther away than their trip down to Columbia, so it took close to the same amount of time to get there. This time they left Beta back home on a special mission to entertain their new friends from Columbia, but Beta knew she was just being ditched.

Aaron and Miranda could tell a lot about the colony just from what they could see as they flew into the bay. A small town, a lot of fishing boats, old shops and buildings lining the street across from the piers. It resembled a throwback community from the turn of the eighteenth century.

“Wow,” Aaron said, “I don’t think this place has changed a bit in the past two hundred years.”

“I think you’re right. Where are you going to land?”

“Not sure, maybe on the other side of that hill,” he pointed to north of the village.

Right at the end of the street he saw his spot, a vacant lot where a building obviously stood, complete with a wooden pathway that went nowhere.

Upon exiting, they were met by a small group of elderly men, all wearing beards, rain suits and boots.

“Looks like they just walked off the boat,” Miranda whispered.

“They probably did,” Aaron replied before seeing Gee come up behind them.

“Gentlemen,” Gee said, “These are the friend of which I spoke.” Gee had filled them in on the ceremony and like the group from Columbia would only be taking a select group.

After introductions Aaron asked, “How many people live here.

Pierre, the more outspoken of the group said, “There is about 2600 in the village, and we suspect there might be a few more living inland but that’s just from old stories, we don’t know for sure.”

Aaron and Miranda thought to themselves that was a very small number and wondered how they managed to survive.

A second man standing next to Pierre kindly mentioned, “We can hear your thoughts you know.”

“Excuse us,” Aaron said, “we are a little confused how a society can maintain itself without going extinct with such a low population.”

“We never thought about it. We’ve only had three people die for as long as I can remember and that was during the great storm.”

“But what about children? You obviously have to have children,” Miranda asked.

“Yes, we have children but not feel the need to burden ourselves, so we just to keep it where we have enough strong workers available.”

Aaron and Miranda thought it a little odd, but if it worked for them how could she argue about their culture?

Gee suggested, “Time is short, your people should get ready.”

“How many will be coming?” Aaron asked.

“Twelve,” Pierre said and gestured them to follow him to a tavern a few building down. Inside, a small host of villagers gawked at the visitors in wonder, realizing they were not alone. They had many encounters with Gee and Soo, that they called mother and father, and looked to them as deities, but Aaron and Miranda were the first outsiders they’ve seen.

Miranda looked past Pierre to see a younger man about six five. She thought to herself how gorgeous he was. She glanced at him in a curious way, “who’s he?”

“He is Joseph,” Pierre said as he waved him closer.

“Will you be a part of the group to return with us?” she asked softly. Even Aaron could see a change in her personality but neglected to understand. Aaron didn’t think in terms of jealousy, but Miranda could feel an attraction like she hadn’t felt before, and if Aaron had picked up on it, he may have. She was determined to find the origin of the attraction; her perceptions drew to her to reflect on mythology and perhaps she was experiencing an Adonis descendance.

“Yes,” he said with a slightly French accent, “I’ll be joining you.”

“You speak a different language?” she asked.

“No,” he said.

“But you speak differently.”

“I choose how I wish to sound just as everyone does,” he said.

His explanation caught her off guard and wasn't sure how to respond. “And you sound lovely,” she quipped.

“Gather around everyone, significant times are upon us. Though we don't know what to expect, having faith in ourselves is a blessing so before we leave, may I suggest we put our faith in our new friends that our travels will be safe,” Pierre said as his farewell.

Sometimes Aaron felt like a social misfit, and toasting was uncommon for him, but occasionally he'd put himself out on a limb, “Fare Winds and Following Seas,” he announced.

“Interesting,” Miranda said. “Were you thinking of your ancestors again?”

He shook off the sarcasm and turned to Gee, “Gee, may I offer you a ride?”

“No thank you, I can be there in one second, however, I hope you enjoy your ride.”

After short goodbyes to family and friends, everyone boarded Freedom 5, “Buckle up,” Aaron said, as the craft's engine began to cycle.

Pierre was blown away by how quiet and smooth the bus operated. Pierre was more of a mountain man living in a fishing village. This was the first time these villagers have ever seen a man-made object fly, even though they knew all about aviation from books and film, they had never seen one in person.

People were starting to feel closer and closer. The pulse of the earth was becoming steady and stronger. People everywhere were feeling a bond and reason to grow together. This was the one area Aurora felt comfortable with.

Arriving back in New Providence, ten after one in the afternoon, “In about six hours the night sky will begin to glow,” Gee said. “You have plenty of time to prepare for the celebration, just keep your eyes and mind open.”

While each of the guests were provided a home away from home and given every freedom to experience the Tricentennial in their own manner, it seemed clear to Columbia and Newfoundland that they were ‘less advanced.’ New Providence seemed like a city of the future with all the modern nuances.

Beta was walking around the crowds handing out little colorful origami roses and handed one to Pierre.

“This is beautiful, thank you.”

“Your welcome,” she replied.

“Did you make these?”

“I sure did.”

“Very impressive,” he said.

“Well, Grammy says, we all have a part to play, and whatever that part is, do it to the best of your ability,” Beta said, “and my part is to make you feel welcome.”

“Your Grammy sounds very wise, and yes, you’ve made me feel welcome.” Pierre said.

“You will like her, she’s the best.”

Four hours before the galactical contact, the western tectonic plate in the Pacific shifted to the east causing one Island to drop out of site while creating a new one on the other side of the break. Tidal waves blasted southern California; ash plumes began to blow in from volcanic activity from the west as the earth shook from quakes. These would all have been great events had there been people in those areas. But for each of the areas that had people, the Mississippi Delta, Columbian Forest, Island in an icy ocean, the people would not have known without updates from Aurora.

Aurora walked through a small crowd to get close to the visitors. It was a little out of her character, but she approached Joseph with the same interest Miranda had. Captivated by his charm, Aurora would never be the same. Miranda saw that coming and reveled in its consequence. She understood the attraction whether she could control it, was the real issue.



“What do you think of our little town?” Aurora asked Joseph.

“I think, beauty is a wonderful thing to present someone with, upon traveling abroad, and you have my full attention.” Aurora had never been so smitten. Miranda laughed out loud when she thought about it. Aaron, like Miranda, was entertained.

“Can you hear the whales?” Aurora asked Joseph.

Joseph replied, “No, I’m sorry, I don’t hear anything.”

From behind her she heard Phillippe, “They are afraid. But listen close, you can hear the dolphins trying to keep them calm.”

“Oh my,” she said, surprised that someone else could hear it. She held a cordial conversation with Phillippe for a few minutes then turned back to Joseph. “My name is Aurora, I can tell you anything you want to know,” and put her hand out to him. Joseph was used to people liking him, but she made him feel a little uncomfortable. Aaron and Miranda smiled at each other and made their way to the Atrium.

Miranda walked up to Angel, “Grammy, much is happening, can you feel the spirit grow?”

Angel told her, “A spirit is what you’re feeling. It should be telling you to play your part.”

“Am I not playing my part?” Miranda inquired.

“With Aaron, child. I rue my loneliness and that is not what I see for your future. Be happy, among other things, and open your heart.”

Sol and Lisa approached a podium set to the north side of the pavilion leading to the Atrium, “Attention, attention,” he spoke into the microphone. “I have an announcement, Lisa and I are expecting another child, in honor of our founders, we shall name her Destiny.”

“It sure seems like my family is all about family,” Miranda mentioned to Aaron.

“Is that a bad thing?” he asked.

“No, but there’s a purpose out there other than family, which is what I have yet to understand.”

He said, “I know what you mean. Sometimes I feel a bit detached.”

The afternoon was waning, and the lining of the clouds began to glow with a bated sunset. People came out of their houses and gathered in the streets. They collected in the square as if to be summoned and migrated to the center with an overly abundant sense of excitement.

Gee and Soo brought Lady Julia, Hope and Angel together prior to the official start of the ascension to give their last piece of advice. Gee said, “A message from another time or another place may beckon our attention. Trust your instincts, within the hour, things will change. Sometimes things change because you make them change, sometimes things change because of fate. The people, chosen this night, will require your support.”

Then Soo had a say, “Volumes of history have led us here. As we prepare for our transition, you must rely on each other to navigate your future. Our likes will never meet again, but you won’t need us after tonight, good luck.”

## Chapter Five

Gee's words hadn't time to fully sink in by the time Hope realized her long acquaintance was over. She has had Gee and Soo on her mind since she was ten years old, and especially during the hundred and fifty years of their absence. She still thought of them fondly and would console them, knowing they weren't there. That didn't stop her from superstitiously engaging in conversation with them, but this time it was real, she could feel it in her heart.

"Look outside," Phillippe said.

"The lights in the street have come on early," Hope said, "they usually don't come on till twilight."

"I believe twilight has come early," Lady Julia said. "Maybe we should investigate."

They left the cover of the Atrium and walked out into the street. People had already begun to congregate and socialize; the mood of the city was rising.

Meanwhile, the young group had grown. They bunched together in conversation on the east side of the courthouse overlooking the square and discussed the group's differences. They were compelled to notice the differences they shared in relationships. "Why has only one female accompanied your people here?" Aaron asked Joseph.

"We have five times as many men than women," he said.

"Doesn't that make it hard to start a family?" Aaron asked.

"Not really, the women have it made with so many men to choose from, as soon as a man fails to treat her right, she gets one that will. So, you see, even the homeliest man will sooner or later find someone," Joseph replied.

"Do you hear that?" Aurora asked.

"I don't hear anything," Aaron said.

"Neither do," Joseph followed.

“Exactly, the frogs, birds and crickets have all quit making noise. It’s creepy quiet.”

They looked around, “Look, the birds in the trees they have all lit and sat docile,” Maria said. They noticed the fountain appeared to be reflecting more light from the streetlamps than usual and made it look to be glowing. People gathered closer to the fountain and instinctively began walking counterclockwise around it. Overcome with an internal force, pulling them into the circling group, the gang held hands as they joined the crowd circling the fountain.

“There is no doubt the time is here,” Joseph said.

The rest of the group agreed.

Older generations filed in order followed by the elders who simply took seats near the center. Gee and Soo appeared from the far side of the square, very slowly walking through a heavy crowd toward the fountain. People on the left and right opened a lane for them to pass as they continued their march around the fountain. With every step, Gee and Soo appeared to capture a growing reflection from the fountain. Step by step, their aura got brighter. Looking up into the twilight sky would answer that glowing question of their complexion. The reflected light wasn’t coming from the street, it was coming from the sky.

“Look Aurora, it’s an aurora,” Aaron said with a snicker.

No sooner than he finished amusing himself at her expense, Aurora appeared to glow herself. Gee and Soo were now emitting a brilliant green glow. They were silent and calm, even with their inability to form a smile, but Miranda could feel their smile. Beta stepped out of the circling crowd and sat cross-legged on the stoop of the fountain. Suddenly the fountain began to glow. One by one, people all throughout square began to glow but there were some who were brighter than others.

The music playing throughout the square faded away and the people suddenly realized there was silence. They looked to each other for clues out of confusion. The deathly silence fell

upon the good people of New Providence and for just one second, then, BOOM! An invisible bolt of lightning cracked above their heads. A hole in the sky appeared above the square and grew brighter. A light rushed in from the heavens and connected with the chosen. Gee and Soo slowly began to rise above the crowd. Their aura glowed brighter the higher they ascended. The crowd stopped walking around the fountain and stared up above to Gee and Soo. Together, they gracefully held each other's hands and looked out among the crowd. The crowd watched in awe as Gee and Soo shared one last dance.

They were in the grasp of the gravitational wave they told them of and had entered their final phase. Glowing brighter and rising higher, their powers were searching for the right home. Slowly other people became intensely personal with the light. The light in kind lifted them into the center of the crowd. Before long, a handful of people were levitating above the fountain, staring out into space. Of note, there were two who stood out in beauty, Aurora, and Joseph.

The witnesses of the ceremony saw the participants locked in a trance while glowing of a spiritual light. For the few involved, they would be referred to as angels by average folks, a title they would not accept. Hope looked up and saw peace in Miranda's smile. Angel for one, couldn't have been happier for Miranda. Expecting a hint that Miranda would ascend higher than the rest, Angel temporarily felt disappointed. Aurora's youthful and often confused face became stoic and serene, more mature, and confident, and Joseph's stature grew with a sense of strength and adoration.

At this point, Miranda, Aurora, Joseph, Aaron, and Maria were the only ones to rise above the crowd. Each in their own pose of enlightenment, none looked more striking than Maria. A beautiful woman engulfed in a beautiful orange aura, peacefully rising toward the heavens who captivated the minds for all to witness. A gift to the gods, and in return, the gods would walk

among them. The people were in awe and that was just the beginning.

Gee and Soo had gotten so bright they could no longer look upon them. With all that was happening above them, the people failed to look down. While Gee and Soo were getting brighter, Beta, sitting on the stoop was getting brighter as well. Angel saw her, "Lisa," she called out, "Beta's under the event." Hope stopped Lisa from advancing toward her.

"Let her be, remember, we all have our part to play. It appears our baby is special."

"My own words against me," Angel said.

Gee and Soo were mere balls of light at this point and began to fade as Beta became brighter. Right then, it became clear to Hope and Angel, that the auras of the ascended ones became Beta's aura. Within a flash of that revelation, Gee and Soo were gone. Poof, the light went out and they were gone. All that remained of their light began to diminish below them and the group slowly returned to the ground.

Another quiet spell swept through the crowd then the music could be heard again clear as a bell. With all, safely back on the ground, the trance-like state they were in faded to a peaceful awakening. The people present and witness to the event, experienced the cosmic winds and gravitational forces to some lesser extent, but the ones who have risen above the crowd, did so with an exaltation tasted the transfer of power.

"Angel said to Hope, "Did you see Miranda's aura? It was orange, as was Maria's. Aaron's looked blue to me."

"Yes, and Aurora and Phillippe's looked yellow."

"I wonder what the significance of that is."

"We'll have to find out what their assessment is, five people ascending is not what I expected. I assumed Gee and Soo would have a replacement each and if I had to put money on it, I would've guessed it would be Aaron and Miranda," Hope said.

“Are you sure you’re not being a little biased? You always favored Miranda,” Angel replied.

“Maybe I did, but my intuition has never failed me before.”

“Look at Beta,” Angel pointed, “She’s still glowing.”

The crowd took notice of Beta as well. They whispered to each other, ‘what is happening?’

Beta rose to her feet as the glow began to fade. She raised her arms in the air, pointing to the heavens and said, “The force has passed, and we’ve entered a new era. The wisdom acquired here today marks the beginning of a new tricentennial. There will be no Supreme Counselor, in time, everything changes. We now have spirits to guide us, spirits of the soul, from the earth and from the skies.”

“Oh wow,” Hope said, “I think Gee and Soo’s powers were divided in different areas so we would have to work together. How Beta became involved, I don’t know.”

Lisa walked up behind Angel and put her hand on her shoulder, “I think I know.” She looked at Hope, “Aurora and Beta are sisters, it could be that they were originally meant to be the ones until the other’s became known.”

“Are you forgetting that Gee and Soo knew of them the whole time?” Hope asked.

“No, but I am wondering how they wanted all of this to play out,” Lisa replied.

“I think you’re reaching,” Angel said, “something Gee, and Soo always said was, the universe will make up its mind with or without us. It was probably always meant to be this way.”

“We should go talk to them.”

Pierre was already making his way into the circle where they touched down. “How do you feel?” he asked Joseph.

“Never better, it was wonderful. I felt everything all at once. Everyone’s joy, amazement, hope, fear, love, and confusion. I feel closer to you all.”

Sol pushed past the crowd to get to the fountain and pick Beta up. “You had a wild front seat view, didn’t you?” he excitedly burst out, knowing his little girl was special.

Beta addressed the crowd, “We’ve witnessed much this day.” She paused between each statement. “I have received the light. Knowledge and understanding are powers of infinite wisdom. Of all we understand, I am the common factor. There is plenty of time to tell you all about it, but for now, there is one thing you should know; Gee and Soo left a little bit of themselves within me.”

“How could this be? You are just a baby,” Sol said.

She laughed, “Size and age are increments of measure. You can’t measure the truth. Either it is or it isn’t, that’s what my gift was. Everyone should mingle and talk with Aurora, Miranda, Maria, Phillippe, Joseph, and Aaron. Three thousand years ago, they would have been called gods and goddesses, they are different from who they were yesterday, as am I.”

Sol was bewildered, he carried Beta to Lisa, handed her over and said, “You should have a talk with your little girl.”

“About what?”

He smiled, shook his head, and walked back to the fountain.

“What’s he talking about Beta?”

“He’s expecting me to amaze you with brilliance and insightful conversation.”

“Sweetheart why are you talking like that?” she asked.

“Let’s just say I’ve matured, in a cosmic way,” Beta said as she laid her head on Lisa’s shoulder.

“I don’t like practicing mind reading but I will if someone doesn’t start making sense around here.”

“Mom, the Tricentennial is complete. Gee and Soo are gone but they left a little bit of themselves in me. I was the sole recipient of Gee and Soo’s legacy but it’s just my part. Aaron, Miranda, Aurora, Joseph, Phillippe, and Maria have received



specific powers, but it appears that I am the catalyst. You can no longer look at me as a child, the earth lives in the universe, not the other way around. Let's sit together at the big table in the Atrium and discuss these events."

"Ok sweetheart." She gathered Hope, Angel, Sol, Lisa, and the gang of angels and sat in a circle at the grand table.

"Beta stood in her chair with her hands raised above her head, "It is a most glorious time to be alive," she said with a truly heartfelt embrace. "A new chapter in the universe is being written as we speak. Gee and Soo have found refuge in my heart. My brothers, sisters and cousins have joined me in spirit to guide us into our future."

Hope looked around the table at each of them and she could see a difference in each of them. They clearly showed a golden aura when they were all together. She could tell that they each changed, evolved, became aware. "One cannot imagine your experience, but we hang on bated breath for your wisdom."

Miranda was first to remark. "We each had separate strengths and those strengths were magnified. I have a connection to people and animals. Aaron's love for science was his strength and now it's amplified. His imagination will take us into the future."

Aaron said, "Indeed, we see the future and are compelled to steer ourselves toward it. Space exploration in my lifetime is mandatory."

Aurora then spoke, "We exist on a living cosmic organism, traveling on an infinite journey. She heats up, she cools down, she gets angry, sometimes tired, and sometimes it has a spastic fit. I know where and when the next natural disaster will occur. I suppose this lifesaving knowledge is what my destiny requires. I am an oracle."

"I am overwhelmed with emotion right now," Maria said. "There is fear, joy, comfort, and anxiety all at the same time. South and North will have their own representative in this newly

formed spiritual guidance. I've heard five times since I've been here that we all have a part to play, and now I feel it. I will return home as a supernatural link between the colonies."

Angel gazed across the table at a gorgeous specimen of a man, "What will you contribute to your community when you get back home?" she asked Joseph.

He said, "Everyone is looking for answers. All the time, everywhere, people look to whatever or whomever they think an answer could come from, but that confusion is over. We look forward to great trade and great relationships going forward. All three communities are now bound in spirit to coexist and work together."

Angel then gazed at Beta, "Come to me child," she said with the love of a grandparent. "What is your part as it relates to the others?" she asked as the entire table went silent, everyone steadfast in their seat attentive to every word of the conversation.

"I am wisdom. How ironic is that?" Beta said.

"Yes, I am impressed," Angel laughed.

"The world and the people don't always understand each other. I am in the middle of these issues. Miranda, Maria, and Joseph share a spiritual link with people; Aurora and Phillippe communicate with the earth, plants, rivers, mountains, and seas; Aaron will create new tools, new concepts, new equipment and technology and they will all come to me for advice. By the way," Beta continued, "I no longer require lessons," she said with a grin on her face, but not everyone understood.

Hope asked about Gee and Soo. "What was it like?"

"It was peaceful, absolutely no reservations or stress, like a light fading as the battery dies until there is no more energy. You may feel their loss, but I won't."

"Yes, I will miss them," Hope said. "They were my parents, one third of them anyway."

"So, what is next?" Angel asked Beta.

“We should all walk amongst our people, enjoy, and celebrate the rest of the evening, dance and sing and express the joy in your hearts. Tomorrow work begins.”

With that request everyone at the table rose and clapped their hands, an international expression of approval.

Maria was particularly striking. Her perfectly cleaned and toned skin glowed even more now, and like Joseph, it was hard for people to resist their beauty. As she walked through the crowds around the pavilion, with her head held high, she approached the fountain near the center of the square. She passed through the crowds of people, majestically reaching out to touch them. Her hands brushed across their arms and heads as energy passed between them creating a spiritual connection.

For the next two hours groups of people gathered around one of the icons and received a communication of hope, not in words directly, but an instantaneous understanding of all that is relevant. Maria met with Phillippe at the center of the square, while Aaron and Miranda also met there. Aurora and Joseph found themselves together, that’s when Angel saw the big picture. “It wasn’t so much like Gee and Soo having a replacement, rather they were having replacements. Three civilizations joining together as a family takes three times as much guidance.”

Lisa saw it too. “Honey, I’ve never seen that look on her face,” referring to Aurora. “That’s the look of love, I’ve seen it before, in the mirror, while I thought of you,” she told Sol.

Sol looked into Lisa’s eyes and realized the positive energy being created was intoxicating. They felt younger, stronger, smarter, and better looking. “This was as close to euphoria we’ll ever encounter,” Sol said. “It would be a shame to let it go to waste,” he nodded and winked.

Lisa easily picked up on his inuendo and took his hand.

Aurora and Joseph would join in spirit, even though they would be located separately. They could feel each other’s presence wherever they were and would occasionally physically

meet. Aurora having an earthly spirit, and Joseph having the human spirit, would be a good match. Phillippe and Maria being of earth and people would also be a good match, but Miranda and Aaron were different, the human spirit and the universe, which was a much larger picture.

“With all that has transpired over the course of this evening, it is hard to imagine that we could get any rest, but I shall try, good night, all.” Hope walked away and Angel followed. The rest slowly retreated to their homes as the evening fell to sleep.

The first day of this tricentennial started with sunshine and songs from birds. Spring was Hope’s favorite season. Her age gives her notice that fewer springs are coming. With a sense of fulfillment, she felt she could now follow Gee and Soo, and didn’t think about it again.

“When is Aaron taking everyone back?” Lisa asked Miranda.

“He’s giving Freedom 5 the once over now. He’ll probably leave in about twenty minutes,” she said.

As Aaron was walking around to the front of the craft, he realized a better way to distribute the magnetic field around the craft. He was in the middle of a breakthrough that would haunt him while he waited to return from his trip. He would begin working on his new design the minute he returned.

“We’re going south in about five minutes,” Aaron said.

Newfoundlanders took occasional trips to Columbia and some from Columbia travelled up north. Miranda and Maria became very close on their journeys, each so much alike.

Out of the blue, Miranda confessed to Maria, “I’ve decided to commit to Aaron.”

“And I have decided to stay with Phillippe, my elders no longer speak for me, I speak for New Providence now. We are the teachers now, let’s go and teach.”

Beta telepathically gave advice from the comfort of her bed, “Spread the knowledge, tell your people back home that the future begins today. Tell them of your experiences.”

“The power of the mind continues,” Miranda pointed out, “The communication block Gee and Soo had on the colonies is gone, all of your people should have been able to witness the event.”

“They did. I feel the chatter among them, they are very excited,” Maria replied.

“Did anyone find out why they blocked our communication in the first place? What was their concern?” This was a question only Beta could know, but her reply was simple, “Because we are different, and we weren’t ready for different.”

“I guess we have to be ready for different now,” Miranda said.

Maria agreed, “So far, so good, yes?”

The entire village was awake and waiting for their heroes to return. The people would revere them as demigods despite Maria and Phillippe’s objections. Suddenly Miranda could see what Gee and Soo meant. “We are different,” she said, “your people look at you as gods, Joseph’s people will look at them as gods as well, ours will just look at us as more genetically advanced. I can see how and why past civilizations accepted ‘different’ as godly, if only one person in a group understands something, that person would be special or gifted, certainly not normal.”

Maria and Phillippe were overwhelmed by the adulation received from the crowd upon their return. The transport didn’t stay long before plotting their next trip to the north. Because he could fly straight to Newfoundland from Columbia, Aaron was able to open the craft to maximum speed. He solved one of his greatest obstacles for hypersonic transportation by riding the gravitational lay lines along the way. He couldn’t wait to get

home to document it and reprogram Freedom 5's navigation system.

"The bay is quite choppy today," Joseph said.

Aurora added, "The water has begun to recede. The tricentennial altered the current but it will return to normal by the end of the day."

"Will you stay with us a while?" Joseph asked Aurora.

"I would love to." Miranda and Aaron have become close, and Aurora felt ecstatic not to be the lonely, odd ball, a theme in her life she had hoped to avoid and having a relationship with such a fine specimen of a man was icing on the cake.

Meanwhile back home, Hope was getting ready for bed. Angel could hear a voice around her but couldn't place it. A whisper maybe, in either case, Hope walked away slowly toward her room. Angel followed her to her bedside, "Are you ok?" she asked while putting her hand on her shoulder.

"Darling, I don't feel quite right, like I'm not all here; I feel like I'm floating away and dragging my body behind me," she said sadly.

"You'll feel better after you lay down for a while," Angel suggested, but Hope knew the cycle had begun, she could sense it.

"You were my one and only, my pride and joy. Your father didn't have a chance to say goodbye, but I do. My time is near." Hope plead. "Just as Beta safeguards Gee and Soo's memory, I want you to keep me. I take nothing with me, I leave it all with you." By now, Hope's voice has softened with shallow breaths and weakness overcame her limbs.

"Mama," What are you talking about, you're just tired, get some rest." Even though Angel was 167 years old, Hope could make her feel like a 10-year-old.

"I hung around as long as I possibly could to find out what the Tricentennial meant, and now I know and can join Gee, Soo, my mom and dad."

“And where would that be?” Angel asked.

“In my mind sweetheart, and infinitely in your heart.”

“I think you just need some rest.”

Hope looked up at Angel while she laid her head on the pillow, “Would you care for my soul when I leave? As Beta is custodian for Gee and Soo, would you be mine?”

“For a hundred years we had no death, now in the past thirty, we’ve had four. You shouldn’t have to go,” Angel argued.

“That’s just the way it is, sweetheart. You’re no spring chicken either. The cycle must continue, I feel it, and before you know it, you’ll feel it. Prepare a place in your heart for me and have Lisa prepare a spot for you.” Hope’s voice was now too low to hear, her thoughts had become echoes in Angel’s mind and soon waned to a whisper. It was then, Angel felt her pulse disappear Hope’s life force leave her body and enter her heart. Angel saw a lot of herself in her mother. She had a very special bond with her and could feel her deepest desire for peace and love. She looked up at Angel and wiped a tear from her face. “When you feel your heart being squeezed, relax and let me in.” At Hope’s moment of passing, Angel could do no more than hold her hand and sing a song. With teary eyes and broken voice, Angel softly sang while smiling down at her, and realized the power of love and value of life. Hope’s eyes closed but a smile remained, allowing Angel one last memory of a mother’s love.

As soon as Angel had time to process her statement, she felt a tightness in her chest. “No, I’m not ready, don’t go,” she said. Angel dropped to her knees as the pain in her chest vanished. Hope laid perfectly still, everything was quiet and peaceful, and she knew Hope was gone. She felt Hope’s presence within her and like Beta, Gee and Soo, they joined together in perpetuity.

Within seconds, the entire community was in the know. Angel’s strong emotions overwhelmed the telepathic airwaves. Her thoughts and feelings transmitted for all to receive and from every household, Hope’s passing was felt with great sorrow.

Things happened so quickly; Angel didn't have time to fully understand what had happened. One minute they're walking and talking, the next she is gone. With all the condolences she was receiving, she hadn't had time to properly reflect on her relationship. Hope was the most respected and revered person of New Providence, the mother of mankind. Angel proclaimed to the masses, "We shall keep the decorations in town up for another week in her honor. Encourage all to visit and mingle, pass tea, and cake, and tell stories in her memory. We shall celebrate her life and sacrifices as we do for Gee and Soo."

Angel was very sad to have lost her mother but left it to Beta to try and warm her heart. "We did not lose Grams, she's in our hearts, she did not leave us, for I talk to her still. I am blessed to be a part of her, and she would want us to celebrate what a glorious life we have ahead of us."

She appreciated Beta's attempt at consultation but until she could sit alone and have that final conversation with her, she wouldn't be able to find peace within herself. She would have to ride that train alone.

Family members started arriving at Angel's house as soon as they heard.

"It happened so fast," Angel said. "She took my hand, laid on her pillow and said goodbye."

Sol went back to her room and sat next to Hope at the side of her bed. He held her hand and closed his eyes, "Thank you for all your love and support, we will miss you dearly," he whispered. Even though death was a new concept for everyone, they seemed to understand the end is another beginning. From one existence to another.

"She looked so peaceful and happy right before she closed her eyes; I felt her love as she fell deep in sleep, now I feel lost," Angel told Lisa. "She asked me to care for her soul."

"How will you do that?" Lisa asked.



“It’s just a reference to keep her memory alive,” she said, “which is what I hope you can do for me when it’s my time to go.”

“Shouldn’t your daughter be the one to do that?” Lisa asked.

“You know she doesn’t feel like she fits in. I trust you, you are so very special, please consider being the caretaker of my soul, and by default, also become Hope’s caretaker.”

“Of course, I will, I’ll always be here for you.”

Back in Newfoundland, being a people spirit, Miranda felt Hope departure as soon as it happened. Miranda worried for Angel, knowing how close they were. She informed Aaron and Aurora to which Aurora turned to Joseph and said, “We have to change our plans, I cannot stay, Hope has passed away and we must leave. I’ll return in a couple weeks.”

They returned home without delay, all the while grieving in a manner unfamiliar to them. They’ve had very few people die in their short history. Hope and Angel’s husbands perished in a storm, but no one was physically with them so the personal connection to loss of life was absent, just an awareness that they were no longer there.

The house was filled with family and friends when arrived, talking, and crying, holding hands and reminiscing. For so many of them, there was very little to compare, these were new emotions for the most part and many were afraid.

Angel’s long-lost daughter, Lisa’s grandmother, and Hope’s granddaughter was also named Lisa and referred to as Lisa II. She was a member of the lost generation who wanted to leave New Providence to discover the world for themselves. The younger Lisa welcomed her grandmother home, “We missed you Nana,” she said with sadness. Lisa II and the others that left didn’t exactly leave on a happy note. The older generations wanted them to stay but the rebellious youth would do what they wanted. They had a problem with authority and didn’t understand formal

societal structure. They longed for freedom without responsibility.

“I felt Grams say goodbye,” Lisa II said. “She came to me to say goodbye. I’m sorry I stayed away so long.”

Angel gave her a hug, “I knew that she missed you, we all missed you and are happy you’ve come home.”

“How long will you stay?” Lisa asked.

“Just until our welcome wears out I suppose.” She replied.

“You are and will always be welcome here, this is your home.” Angel insisted. “It’s time to stop fighting. The heavens have opened and passed down great powers. There is no right and wrong, only acceptance. Please stay and experience this truth with us.”

By now, everyone was feeling Hope’s loss, and a wide variety of emotions were sharing space between them, but there were few that realized the full scope of Gee, Soo, Hope, Justice, and Valliant’s passing. Angel being the next in line for eldest living person realized it.

## Chapter Six

Miranda, Aaron, and Aurora returned to the city before dust and by midnight, they were unequivocally aware that they were the future and had to take the lead.

As they walked from room to room greeting people, they appeared normal until they got close to Beta. The closer they came, the brighter they glowed. The change was so dramatic everyone froze in awe of their presence. They assumed the Tricentennial was over, yet evidence among them spoke otherwise. They resembled angels in a glowing spiritual sense, displaying their powerful aura, of golden hue which lit the room. “Everyone here,” Aaron said in a calm and calculated voice, “We, as a people have experienced much sadness and grief of late, but we shall overcome. A great light came to us, gave us many powers, and took back its champions. Now it is our time to steer this ship. Great powers come with great responsibilities.”

Beta asked for help to get to the table through the crowd. “A most wonderful event has just occurred,” she started, “we have literally inherited the world, as was predicted. It is true that Gee and Soo were of a different species. It is also true that we are all the same now. Hope’s legacy will always be the creator of modern people. No one has given more for their people than Hope, so we shall honor this day every year in her honor.”

Everyone was leaning forward to hear more of what she had to say. It wasn’t so much the words she chose, but the meaning they implied, that drew people to her wisdom. She spoke so softly to herself while scanning the crowd, ‘The love of our ancestors is ours to share. We must take notice of Angel’s prestige and grace, the keeper of souls.’ The desire for the people to know what wisdom she may speak forced them to concentrate on her voice. They listened to her voice sing into their ears like words from an angel. It was surreal for these odd statements from a six-year-old to carry such a commanding presence. Beta continued,

“Aaron processes the power of the cosmos, Miranda speaks with the spirits of life, and Aurora knows all things earthly. I am just in the center. As we begin a new plan, we honor our ancestors by moving forward. The spirits of the earth have separated. Aaron communicates with one, Miranda another, and Aurora yet another. Together is how we must proceed.”

She stopped talking and the room was quiet for a second or two while everyone waited for the next word.

Angel asked Beta, “Ok, what’s next, where do we go?”

Beta looked to Aaron, and he replied, “To the heavens.”

Sol asked, “Why would we leave earth when we finally have everything we need?”

Aaron replied, “We’re not leaving, we’re exploring. It’s a natural process in expansion. The more we understand the universe, the more we can live and control our environment within it. It is time for us to develop a space command.”

Lisa asked, “Who will you get to go?”

“This is for the people who crave more and many of our children crave more. We have a permanent home here, and some day it will be a vacation spot for galactic visitors. The gravity wave has shown me the future and gave me the powers to steer technology,” Aaron said.

Aurora added, “There’s a lot of future here on earth too. Changes will happen out there and down here at the same time; I will focus on earth, and with all confidence I can say, the earth will be here, habitable, for the next 300,000 years. Even if some of those years were miserable, at least we’ll be here.”

“The point is, we have a purpose, one that we can all rally around. It is our time to change the world,” Beta said, as her last words of the evening.

Given the hour and the next busy day to come, people slowly retreated home.

Bright and early the following day, Aaron and Miranda got an early start by asking for students. All the citizens, young

and old, had an aptitude for one of the three spirits. The brightest of minds swayed toward Aaron and technology, while the majority stayed with people and earthly spirits.

Aurora asked Miranda, “I wonder if this feeling is what the Greek Gods might have had in their story?”

For the first time, Miranda looked at Aurora and didn’t see an obsessed misguided person. She was different. The arrogance replaced with poise, and her naivete replaced with knowledge and wisdom. “I’m starting to see things more like you would and believe Hope would have approved.”

Columbia, Newfoundland, and New Providence became connected through their representatives. As people spirits, Joseph and Maria coordinated all the connections between animal and beast, while Phillippe and Aurora shared the spirit of the earth.

Aaron spent countless nights studying his algorithms and insights and now with a couple hundred young minds began research on the infrastructure worthy for the future. “We will build our city, our fortress and spaceship out in orbit. We will need at least 80,000 builders, technicians, and scientists. Once complete, the SS Infinity would set sail to another solar system and beyond.”

“How long should this take,” Miranda asked.

“About thirty years.”

“Can’t we speed the process using robots to build it?” She asked.

“That is with robots. We’re talking about a city not a village,” he said, “This ship must be 100% self-sufficient and able to protect itself from everything. There will be no backup plan once it exits the solar system.”

“I’m still trying to imagine saying goodbye to the crew forever when they leave, there will be family left behind that would have to accept their loved ones taking a terminal journey. I wouldn’t want to be one of them,” Miranda said.

People from one end of town to the other began showing up to secure their place in training for upcoming projects. Communications and mental control are Miranda, Maria and Joseph's hallmarks. The metaphysical connection between them is strong and together the entire populous can be in immediate contact, if Beta were to join them, their collective power would triple.

"Miranda," Aaron whispered. "Talk to me while you evaluate things, there's nothing stopping us now, what do you think?"

She conceded, having let some stress go, she was ready to fulfill her own commitment to society with her own family. She wanted it more now but for a different reason. "I want to dedicate a piece of my legacy so the name Hope can once again be spoken with reverence, this time for my daughter."

A response Aaron was not ready for. He tried talking about family, but she would change the subject, now all of a sudden, she's ready to talk about it.

"Are you still interested in a family?"

"Of course," he said.

Miranda admitted, "I'm sure this will give Grammy a boost, she's been playing match maker for years."

With Aurora smitten with Joseph, and Maria taking a stand to be with Phillippe, Miranda may have been the only one at the time to catch the significance of the Tricentennial. Originally thought to transfer power from one pair of supreme counselors to another, there were three civilizations to manage, and it would take three pairs of counselors and one supreme to do it. That was Gee and Soo's last act of intervention, to empower a single source of wisdom for the future of earth to follow.

Though no one would qualify, even Beta had candidates swoon over her for favor. One of the cutest was a little girl named Vera Luna. Vera was twelve, six years older than Beta. She was still a child but almost mature. She was in total awe of Beta. To

Vera, Beta was divine and worthy of worship, but Beta was not so easy to woo. Her philosophy was simple, she was a messenger, she received divine information and merely passed it along.

“Vera Luna, I love saying your name, have you something to share?”

Excited but in control, she reached out to touch Beta’s arm, “I am here for you.”

“Oh my,” Beta laughed, unknowing what she meant. With everyone else, I knew what they mean, but I question myself in your regard.”

“I’m Sorry,” Vera said, “I just wanted to make a good impression. I wish deeply, to serve you.”

Vera was lovely but could disappear in a crown. She was also quite sophisticated for a twelve-year-old debutant when she wanted to be. That’s how Beta knew she needed more exposure. She would need a philosopher, a wizard, and wisdom. Vera had an uphill climb to get close to Beta.

“Vera Luna darling,” Beta said, impersonating a flamboyant movie star, “I want to introduce you to Miranda. Her powers can help you become who you are meant to be.” She dismissed Vera’s devotion while propping her up and afforded Miranda some seniority. By giving Vera new purpose she wittingly gave Miranda a new task. Beta had a powerful wisdom worthy of Gee’s trust, but she hadn’t been able to figure Vera out yet. One thing was for sure, her age would no longer be an issue.

By noon, there were more volunteers than positions. Each of the new counselors had their teams assembled and planning began for an electromagnetic pulse compositor which was a key element for space travel. The technology driven youth would have much to get excited about. The ability for everyone to communicate with just thought was half of the winning combination, the ability to retain knowledge was the other. This was where the other colonies made a difference, twice as many equal twice as much.

The people of New Providence didn't rise from the ashes. There was a great deal of equipment and technology available after the event and they had 150 years to improve it. The other colonists were the best students. Upon learning things, they also became great teachers. 'Everyone has a part to play' became the most quoted saying for decades.

Aurora gave notice to Beta that the electromagnetic field of the earth was slightly altered by the Tricentennial's gravitational wave. Where one force pushed toward earth and another pulled away from it, the natural magnetic pattern stretched, causing wind and current anomalies. Between all three points, Columbia, New Providence, and Newfoundland a direct triangular relationship formed, splitting the Bermuda Triangle in half. Had any shipping or flights been in the area at the time, they would have been devastatingly affected.

"When do you plan to return to the north?" Aaron asked Aurora.

"I plan to stay here for at least a week, then I will fly back north in a shuttle."

That week went by very quickly and Aurora was back with Joseph in Newfoundland. Springtime was beautifully landscaped with flowers. Aurora was thirty-two with no more worries of purpose, she was in her prime with an Adonis figure at her side, she was loving life. Her powers and destiny now being confirmed, was liberating and made her feel like a goddess. The thought of Joseph and her joining was almost too much to bear.

When Aurora walked through their seaport village, she walked with head held high. The golden aura she emitted captivated the people in her presence. She couldn't have been more pleased with herself.

Talking to a small crowd in a café, Miranda announced, "A statue of Hope will be erected in the Plaza in a couple days," Aurora confirmed. "Please stop by and pay respects."



With those words, came an understanding, the people loved their new idols, and the idols loved the attention.

Down in Columbia, things were a little different but still followed a familiar theme. Maria and Phillippe grew strong as one voice and thought, “We should gather some family and picnic at the river today,” Maria mentioned to Phillippe.

“Yes, absolutely,” and between them they walked through the village asking people to come along and bring food.

“Picnic at the river,” she called out, “we’re celebrating Hope’s day!”

People from everywhere began to show up, bringing food and drink, music, and a benevolent spirit to the party.

Back in New Providence, Miranda and Aaron were making plans to wed. In a society where everyone can communicate with each other just with thought, there wouldn’t be any secrets, everyone seemed to know everything. However, for a highly advanced being like one of the six demigods, they could easily mask their thoughts or persuade ordinary folks to see something different. Angel tried to tie Miranda to Aaron for quite some time, the fact that even Angel didn’t see the pathology, made Miranda’s situation more difficult. Aaron had obsessive tendencies when it came to matters of physics and now that his knowledge had expanded, he began to feel a familiar feeling of power rushing through his veins. He became a master at hiding his personal feelings by keeping his mind busy with work.

Aaron worried that if they joined, she may not approve of how he saw things. He had to make a choice before it was too late and decided to confide in her. “Miranda, do you remember dropping the stones in the fountain?”

“Why yes I do,” she fondly recalled.

“What were you thinking about as you dropped those pebbles?” Aaron asked.

“I recall looking into the ripples of the water and wishing for companionship.”

“I was dreaming about the heavens and traveling through the galaxy.”

“That’s not very flattering for the story of how we met. What are you talking about?” she asked.

“What I’m trying to say is, we are going to be wed, and I can no longer keep a secret from you, I have a confession,” he sighed as he reached for her hand. “As you know, I have always been fascinated with physics, mechanics, and space but when we rose into the sky filled with the spirit, I didn’t feel that I belonged here. I knew my place was out there,” he said while staring out to the sky.

“It is perfectly ok to dream,” she replied with a smile.

“You have the power of love; I will need that to keep my desperation for exploring in check.”

“Hell, you scared me for a moment,” Miranda said, “I thought you were going to confess a crime. It’s ok to dream and now that you have this ability and power, you have a chance to do something good with it?”

“We have so much to do to get the ship built and the core ready to go active, I think we should postpone the wedding for a while.”

A lump formed in her throat. “You pressured me to be closer and now you’re holding back. I’m a little confused.”

“I know, and I’m sorry, all I can focus on right now is the ship and the neutron core.

She wouldn’t let him see her pain and replied, “If that’s what you think is best for now, I’ll support it.” Miranda disguised her feelings until he left to go back to the ship, then buried her face in her pillow in teary confusion. At first, she wasn’t ready, and he was, now she is ready and he’s not. She felt lost.

For the next five years, he labored tirelessly to place all the parts needed to create a space lab and colony out in orbit. Engineering, residence, medical, research, science, laboratory, shops, leisure, tunnels, railways, and elevators, all with a

beautiful view of the stars. The primary mission would be to act as a marina and shipyard for the building of their ultimate spacecraft, a star ship that would become home to future generations of travelers. “We will work to build the heart of the Infinity,” was his first words upon announcing the plan to colonize the universe. Five years later they have put eight of these small city platforms in orbit. His next step would be history, to construct a living sphere, two miles in diameter with eight square miles of surface, held together by its very own gravitational core. His plan involved creating a man-made miniature neutron star contained by its own energy and gravity, the closest thing to cold fusion as they would ever get.

In his training students and engineers, Aaron proposed, “The artificial gravity and power by which we all will depend, will be coming from the core of our man-made planet and star ship. The future of space travel is in your hands,” he concluded without being specific.

Meanwhile Miranda, Maria and Joseph began adapting environments and processes for which life on a star ship could not only be maintained but given the ability to prosper. From living quarters to parks and recreation, the quality of life was important.

Daily conversations between the three kept the world’s focus on this mission positive and productive. People of earth began preparation for long term interstellar space travel. Children were taught and raised as if they were already isolated on the ship. The program was completely voluntary, not everyone was meant to go and many of them thought that they were not meant to stay.

Training was a joint venture for Aaron and Miranda. Working together empowered them, Miranda of the spiritual growth and Aaron of a darker direction, especially when defense of the spaceship was discussed. Aaron’s work on the space command was an impossible dream come true. His work on the neutron core delved deeper into the mind of madness. How could such power be harnessed and at what risks? Aaron seemed to

believe he had mastered both the quantum and relative sciences and could literally create a world. Not only a world, but a world that could travel across the cosmos.

“How about giving yourself a break?” Miranda asked.

Aaron of course, didn’t want to take a break, he was getting close to completion. He looked at her, eyes wide open and said. “What?! Really?!” We are so close; I think the reactor will be ready to fire up any day. Everything has been planned and executed, why would I stop and take a break right now?”

“You, poor dummy,” she said. “How potentially hazardous is that core?”

“It would dwarf a Yellowstone super volcano eruption.”

“Then, maybe you should relax, spend a little time with your family before potentially blowing all of us to smithereens.”

He temporarily became emotionally crippled, “family?” He froze for a moment as he thought of his place in the grand plan and realized he had been absent. “You are right as usual. I accept your invitation.” he said.

“Good, you can start by coming over here and giving me a hug and for this weekend, I am in charge. You shall worship me like the goddess I am,” she declared with humor. Aaron took advantage of her emotional state. He had been captivated by her since the fountain incident and every now and then those old feelings resurfaced.

“Ok, for the three days without interruption, I belong to you. Do with me as you will,” he said.

Phillippe and Aurora spent so much time communicating with each other that Joseph and Maria took notice. Given everybody’s ability to read minds and share thoughts, secrets were nearly impossible to keep. It wasn’t so much they feared losing their partner, it was their partners where spending more mental time away than they were at home.

Beta was called into service, “We’re taking a couple days to enjoy each other’s company before activating the reactor,” Miranda told Beta.

“I know. Your next big decision will be whether to go with him or stay.”

“I didn’t want to think about that. Do you think he’ll go?” Miranda asked.

“Oh yes, I know he’ll go. It’s what makes him who he is. It’s his nature to go, the question is, what are you going to do?” Beta asked.

“I’m still thinking about it and it’s not an easy decision.”

Aurora and Phillippe collaborated to make audio and video recordings of all life’s natural mysteries. From birds to volcanoes and life under water, everything had an audio and video file. They were committed to preserving history so future generations could enjoy the very best life had to offer, even if they’ve never seen it in real life.

Aaron’s journey through the cosmos was predicated by his ordainment. By virtue of his gift of knowledge, his commitment to explore the heavens was stronger than a desire, it was a necessity. Miranda’s spirits gave her a different sense of rules, laws, and commitments. She needed people to care for, and people needed her. In her heart, she knew her place was on earth, someone else would have to take that journey into the infinite sky.

The SS Infinity would have eight sides placed together as panels to a sphere a little more than two miles in diameter. Once the core became active and generated its own gravity, they would have to move it farther out from earth. The two gravitational forces would attract each other, so to keep the Infinity from crashing into earth, it would have to orbit out near the moon. After five years, the eight panels to make up the starship’s outer platforms were complete. They would run off solar power until the work on the core was complete.

Daily shuttles to the space station brought supplies and workers to aggressively assemble and construct the new city in orbit. As the children graduate and complete their initial space training, they are reassigned to the ship for advanced space training to include work on the neutron core for the most gifted cadets.

“I think you’re driving these children too hard,” Miranda confided with Aaron.

“I have to. There can be no mistakes in the building or preparation of the ship. Thousands of lives will directly depend on our ability to contain and protect every aspect of the ship’s functions and capabilities. There will be no second chances and no one to come to the rescue.”

“Ok, but can you at least present your commands in a more pleasant tone?” she asked.

“I’ll try,” he said.

“I will have to take leave from the space station while I work on the weapon systems. We are coming along nicely and on schedule for the city’s modules, but we’ll have to have the weapon systems installed and operational before we engage the reactor and move out of this orbit.”

“What kind of weapon systems are you talking about?” Miranda asked.

“We’ll have to be able to defend against individuals, possibly other spacecraft, asteroids, comets, moons, planets and stars.”

“Moons, planets and stars?” she asked in confusion. “Why would you have to fight a moon?”

He said, “Because we don’t know what to expect out there and if we’re not prepared, we could be destroyed by something else that is prepared.”

“It sounds a bit overkill and scary.”

Beta interrupted as she walked in on their conversation. “I’m in agreement with Aaron, if they encounter another force

that threatens them it may become necessary to defend themselves by eliminating the threat even if it means destroying a moon, a planet, or a star. At the heart of the Infinity is a nuclear reactor that if damaged could collapse on itself and vaporize everything within a one-thousand-mile radius.”

“This is too much doom and gloom for me. I’m glad I’m staying home,” Miranda said.

Aaron looked at her, knowing for a while that she didn’t want to join him on the mission, but hearing her say it made him feel sad. He wanted to be with her ever since they met, but since ascending during the Tricentennial, he knew he would be leaving for the stars and didn’t think about what he would have to give up in order to do it.

“Ok, I understand you have to make some weapons. What kind of weapons are you talking about?”

“For smaller, handheld personal protection, laser and micro gamma burst devices will work and for the different levels of larger threats, I have some chain reactive subatomic ideas that could split a planet or star in half. I have some critical testing and lab work to do, so I’ll be back in New Providence for a while working on it.”

Beta took Miranda’s hand, “The people here at home, would never know if anything were to happen requiring them to use any of those weapons. Once the ship leaves our solar system they will be gone forever, I may not even know what would become of them.”

“What of the science and technology powers Aaron has? If he leaves, will he be taking those powers with him.” Miranda stated.

“Yes, he will, and he will need them, but we will have some of his trainees to carry on in his absence. After all, we went 150 years without a science and technology god to guide us toward the future.”

“I suppose you are right. I’m still not happy about my life’s partner leaving me. It’s not at all like I envisioned.”

Aaron stepped closer and held her. “I am sorry, but I no longer control my future, my future controls me.”

“Oddly enough I understand, I still don’t like it, but I understand.”



## Chapter Seven

With a little persuasive suggestion from Beta, the people of Newfoundland and Columbia spend more and more time in New Providence learning and enjoying the amenities of a more advanced society. Not to diminish their culture, but to join in the benefits of technology. More and more unions between the groups also meant a closer relationship. It was well established that all the people of New Providence were related, and all the people of Newfoundland were related, and too, the people of Columbia were all related. Now the three families can expand their gene pools by interbreeding. The big difference between them was, New Providence was established from the offspring of two people, each with alien DNA, where Newfoundland and Columbia only had the mother with alien DNA. Therefore, New Providence had dual alien traits, but Newfoundland and Columbia only had mono alien traits, which could have been a key factor in the evolution of their progress since the rebirth.

Beta turned into a beautiful young woman but hid it well under a golden laced robe. Simply walking among the people gave them hope. Her mere presence was enough to give them a sense of purpose and faith that they would not have had otherwise. Unlike her group of spirited prophets, Beta had no other half. Not having a family of her own was her sacrifice and a testament to the importance of her mission. It was also a reminder she had no equal. She called the group together, “Let us focus for a moment. Each of you has begun to question your relationships. You question the love and to that I say, if you want love in your lives, go love someone. If you are waiting for love to come your way, you are not understanding your position. You have powers for a reason, and it comes with sacrifice.”

“Are you suggesting we must live unhappily because we have powers?” Miranda asked.

“No,” Beta said, “I’m stating that with divinity comes great responsibility.” Beta went on to say, “Phillippe and Maria are together, but not really, because Phillippe spends so much time with Aurora. Joseph spends too much time reflecting upon himself. Maria is a true angel and can comfort anyone’s soul, but watches Phillippe’s eye shift away. Do any of you understand what I am saying? Resign to the fact that you will be alone and concentrate on making life better for others or, get together and reevaluate your relationships, perhaps you’re not with the right person.”

“Is it really all that simple?” Miranda asked.

“Yes, it truly is,” Beta assured her, “maybe you should talk with Phillippe.”

Giving everyone the time to process her remarks, she continued talking with Aaron, “Don’t feel guilty about doing the only thing your life tells you to do. If alone is ok with you, no one else matters,” Beta said in a quizzical manner. A sarcastic quip that left him baffled.

“It’s unlike you to roast someone, let alone all of us, what’s going on here?” Aurora said.

Angel joined their circle, “It seems as if we have about 180-year lifespan. I can see my end nearer now and so can my 1976 brothers and sisters. We have decided that if any of us live long enough to witness the Infinity’s launch, we would ride it out into space and be jettisoned out into space upon our passing.”

“What of their souls being accepted and cared for, like you are keeping Gee and Soo’s souls safe?” Miranda asked.

“As I fade to nothing,” Angel said peacefully and wanting, “I want my last thoughts and feelings to be with you. That is what keeping faith or keeping souls means. Sharing that last ounce of love with you is my desire.”

“Of course, Grammy, you are and have always been my angel, name notwithstanding. I will always be here for you.”

Beta stepped back in, “Allow me to suggest, all of you get together alone, blindfold yourselves, and feel around until you find the one you feel comfortable with in the dark. Let your senses and your powers decide for you.”

“Ooh,” Aurora said, “I can’t believe that came out of your mouth, did my little sister suggest partner swapping?”

“Grow up, find the right person or not, it makes no difference to me. I have no more advice for you today,” and she checked out of the conversation leaving everyone to wonder. Should they be looking at each other differently now? They would have no other recourse. The seed had been planted and Beta knew they would have to bite. Not only was curiosity driving that train, but their hormones had never been stronger. Beta laughed, “Godly hormones, I hope they’ll be able to control themselves.”

Miranda was starting to get the answers she was looking for. She was learning a lesson from a preteen, even though she was considered a goddess of the very subject she was getting a lesson in. Connecting out to the others, she said “I think Beta is right, we’re not with the person that’s best suited for, does anyone have an objection to trading partners?”

Joseph heard it but didn’t understand it, what was she suggesting? He thought she meant in an orgy fashion and was curious to find out more. “No, Joseph,” Miranda said, “We’re talking about reorganizing the relationships.

“I am a little concerned about all this. If I stay, Aaron will be alone. Phillippe and Aurora obviously belong together, having the same spiritual powers. Maria, would you consider joining Aaron in the heavens?”

“It sounds like you’re trying to sell me something,” Maria said.

“Kind of. I cannot leave, I know my place is here, and I know Aaron must leave. I don’t want him to be lonely, nor do I

wish to remain lonely, if Phillippe and Aurora are together, I wouldn't want you lonely either," Miranda responded.

"Honesty, being what it is," looking over at Aaron, "I could share a life with Aaron." Maria was an angel in every good sense of the term. Phillippe had been the apple of her eye since before the ascension but letting him go to be with Aurora seemed the right thing to do. Aaron was so intensely focused on the science and never gave Miranda the attention she deserved but looking at Maria made his heart skip beats. Maria was very keen on emotions and his interest in her increased hers in him. The more Miranda thought of Joseph, the more excited she felt about the possibilities. Now her question would be, can Aurora say goodbye to Joseph and allow her at chance?

Angel, hearing all she had to hear, and Beta already gone, said goodnight and took her leave of absence. The rest of the group disbanded for the evening shortly thereafter. The next morning's sun would rise with excitement and promise. Everyone seemed to have a new purpose, a drive to properly come together and make this mission a success. Maria and Miranda suddenly found themselves in a unique position. Phillippe was with Maria but now he would officially court Aurora; Maria took her station at Aaron's leaving Miranda with Joseph. Changing partners was difficult but a logical and necessary choice. The powers they shared brought them closer together, though Maria's sacrifice was greatest. Neither were Aaron and her powers the same, she resigned to bid earth farewell and care for the crew and settlers of the Infinity.

Now when Miranda thinks of Aaron, she can know how lucky he is to have it all. His work and a love intact. It made her feel good as a deity to know she made it possible for him.

Miranda also had a connection with her cousin, Aurora, she hadn't had before.

“I must apologize, Aurora,” Miranda started, “When we were younger, I made fun of you, I thought you were weird, but I now understand you were right all along. Can you forgive me?”

“Don’t think anything of it. I never doubted myself, so any negativity elsewhere didn’t bother me. However, if it makes you feel better, I feel closer to you now too.”

Miranda gave her a hug out of reconciliation and family ties but gained a little more. She had in fact felt closer than she ever had before. She wasn’t sure what it all meant but it triggered an emotional response to an otherwise congenial relationship.

Aurora felt it too, caught between guilt and relief, she may have been more likely to engage Miranda than the other way around had Joseph not been involved.

“None of you are the same, everyone and everything changes,” Beta returned to say.

From the corner of Phillippe’s eye, he noticed Aurora’s response to a stare from Miranda and was cut off from connecting with Aurora for a moment. He turned to ready a response when he was shut down again by Miranda’s powers. He suddenly realized she had much more power over him than he did her, which left him feeling a little vulnerable. He realized Miranda and Aurora were bonding, so he left peacefully.

Weeks went by, then months and years. Before they knew it all the people from the north and the south merged in the middle as families drew closer to saying goodbye to each other forever. “22 years of working on the ship and we’re almost ready to build its core. 22 years of teaching our children to work and live in space and we’re almost ready to put it to the test.” Aaron said.

“As you go through your checklist of all you need, don’t forget there are those of us praying one day you shall return and share your travels,” Beta mentioned to Aaron. “Grammy always liked you, she was right about why, just wrong about who she thought you should be with. Had she known about the other

colonies earlier, she might have come up with a different solution.”

Angel was right regarding time. She would not be around to see the launch, nor would half of her siblings. Many requested to be frozen so they could be taken to space. Angel would spend her last day with Miranda as she had wanted, unafraid and accepting of fate. All her life’s experiences brought together for one last farewell. Miranda was not looking forward to this. Her memory of Hope’s departure was emotionally trying enough, now her beloved Grammy was checking out. The fanfare celebrating Angel would not rival Hope’s, but there was no competition in death. Hope may have been the City’s founder and the oldest, Angel was known and respected by everyone as well.

Holding her hand never seemed so intimate or important before. Suddenly it was the only thing that seemed important. “I shall hollow my heart for you to dwell, your love and wisdom will guide me, and your spirit will keep me safe.” Miranda said as she realized she wasn’t just saying goodbye, she was saying a prayer to her dying great, great, great grandmother, a person she felt closer to than even her own mother. With each of Angel’s final breaths weaker than the one before, Miranda felt the tear drops roll off her cheek. Whispering how she loved her; she kissed her hand as she felt her slip away. She would spend the next two days in complete solitude, mourning her loss and celebrating Angel’s life by organizing a photo album from thousands of digital photos she kept on her digicube. Digicube was the latest digital storage technology that replaced all hard drives, removable storage devices and anything that stored data.

Though Hope was considered the matriarch of New Providence, Angel was the darling to Miranda’s generation. Angel made it to 189 years old. An average life span between 180 and 190 was now established which gave Miranda’s generation, the generation of deities, another 140 years to accomplish all they could. The group preparing for space travel worried about the

civilization they would leave behind, and the inhabitants of earth worried about their brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters leaving earth for space.

For the next five years, work goes on running and maintaining a space station with no gravity. People are shuttled back and forth to keep from spending too much time in the challenging environment. All systems were online and operational, all eight city panels placed in position, a three-foot thick protective coating was applied to the entire exterior of the ship. The coating was an engineering marvel, able to prevent penetration of space debris travelling at hypervelocity, and the only thing left to finish was the reactor. The temporary power supply for the ship was provided by solar panels that would be shuttled back to earth for recycling once the reactor goes online.

Aaron told his first mate, Jupiter, "From the minute we fire up the reactor we must begin our migration outward of current orbit. We are going to be generating a gravitational field that can easily force us back into earth's atmosphere if we are not careful. This will be the most crucial element to date."

"No doubt," Jupiter said, "I'll conduct sequence training and drills every week till we launch, but I think someone else should be assigned to the release of the temporary power stations. I'll be too busy with the power transfer."

"Go ahead, assign someone."

"Aye, aye."

For months prior to launch, supplies were transported to the ship around the clock by shuttle. Farms, laboratories, and manufacturing slowly began reporting that they were operational. Coming up to the final week, the personnel started to arrive for permanent assignment. By launch day, 1976 crew members reported for duty. The crew size was initially supposed to only be 1950, but in commemoration of the original 1976 settlers of New Providence, they decided to symbolically increase the crew's size.

The all-volunteer fleet of space travelers and pioneers would stay in outer orbit for one year after light-off to work out any remaining bugs, then set a course toward the inner galaxy. At 5 a.m. January 23, 2225, Aaron announced over the intercom, “Release permanent solar system connections,” fifteen minutes later, “shift to core battery backup.” Upon shifting to battery power, only essential systems had power so the crew living spaces and nonessential services were without power. Excitement and fear rose in anticipation of light-off. If they couldn’t light-off, they could always switch back to solar power, but as soon as the reactor ignites there would be no going back.

“Reactor room, transfer propulsion control to the bridge; solar system, stand by to disengage; reactor room, you have control,” Aaron commanded with authority, like he’s done this hundreds of times before, everyone else on board was ready to wet their pants.

Jupiter began the countdown making commands at periodic intervals and finally, “five, four, three, two, one, ignition.” He pressed two buttons on his control panel while the chief engineer pressed two others and the reactor fired off. A high pitch microburst was heard and almost instantly, a gravitational force pulled people down to the floor. The lights came back on, and everyone breathed a huge sigh of relief. Within an hour it was clear their power was stable and could engage propulsion.

“Engage photon drive, all ahead one third, elevate 5.21 degrees altitude, set orbital speed and course. Now, let’s go see if this ship will sail.” Aaron said, as the ship pulled away, passing the moon on its port side. The crew on the bridge felt a satisfying feeling of relief as their journey began recounting the thousands of hours of training to get to this point. Eight years of dedicated study for the bridge crew seemed to have paid off as the excitement was hard for them to contain. Aaron seemed cool as a cucumber, having the knowledge and power of the universe had gained Aaron the respect and admiration of every crew member.



If any of the crew had doubts about their choice to venture out into space, those doubts were replaced with dedicated wonder.

One question the chosen few had concerned their ability to communicate away from earth was answered upon extending past the moon's orbit. Aaron tried to communicate with Miranda, but she could barely make out his transmission. Being outside the earth's magnetic field and perhaps the ship now having its own electromagnetic field hindered transitions. They knew then, the ship would have to communicate in the old-fashioned way, electronically and those transmissions would take considerable time.

"I could barely make out what Aaron was saying," she told Phillippe. "I can't feel them anymore either, can you?"

"No," he said, "It looks like they are on their own now. I've known Maria my whole life, do you think she'll adjust, do you think she's happy?"

"I don't know, maybe." She didn't want to think about It, and she didn't want Phillippe to think about it either. He was with Aurora now and if he were still thinking of Maria, he'd have a harder time accepting Aurora. "I don't think she'd be there if she didn't want to be," she concluded before changing the subject. "Is the Infinity going to cause problems down here?"

"In two months, unless they speed up their orbit, the moon will pass behind them and the additional gravity between the two will cause some dangerous tidal surges in the North Atlantic, mostly in northern Europe but our friends up north will be affected. Aurora is aware but I think they should consider coming here during the peak times."

"There's one good thing going for us now, we have many more shuttles available to move people around. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if we didn't have enough pilots to fly them all."

The anxiety of the family and friends back on earth had never been higher. Everyone had family and friends on the Infinity and were lost without being to communicate with them.

They had been able to telepathically communicate with them their entire lives, in fact they didn't even have telephones because they didn't need them, now the only way to communicate was with devices they were unfamiliar with that they had to make out of necessity.

Beta was still able to communicate with them, perhaps because her powers were accentuated from Gee and Soo's transference or that she had a true higher source of power, but she too knew it was limited. "The Infinity crew is doing well," she explained to all telepathically. "For the next year, they will work a month on the ship and take a week's leave until it is time for them to leave. I suggest you use that time to lay out your future plans and farewells. Once the Infinity sets sail, we will no longer have the technological advantage of a divine science presence, so I hope you students of science have paid close attention to Aaron's inspirations." Beta could feel the questions rolling in the minds of the people but chose to walk away from the conversation.

Vera Luna resurfaced as an assistant to Beta now that the group had two less powers. As far as any knew, she had no special powers of her own, but she did have Beta's ear and sense of establishment. With Aurora taking Phillippe, she left Joseph alone fed information and updates back to New Providence. Beta utilized Vera to filter their input as well as the people down in Columbia that opted not to resettle in New Providence. The benefits to being in New Providence and forming a Mecca for their societies were substantial. Even Beta, the queen of wisdom, was having a hard time understanding why Newfoundlanders were so reluctant to relocate.

"I suppose people are comfortable with what they are used to, even though logic would detail benefits to the contrary," she admitted to Vera, who could always be counted on to listen.

Unlike the people on earth, the SS Infinity was a star ship, a colony, and a world unto itself, the people would have nowhere

to go. The ship provided as many comforts in life as they could dream to provide, but the people knew there was no comparison. They were, however, willing to make that sacrifice for the freedom to explore, an aspect of humanity Beta thought was common, until she met the Newfoundlanders.

Back on the Infinity, Jupiter was one of six children of the same family to join the crew. He was Aaron's first mate and Chief Engineer but didn't care too much for titles. He simply preferred to be called number one. His sister, Nova, was chief medical officer and addressed him in front of the crew as Jupiter and he pulled her aside, "Please refrain from using my name around the crew. I am number one to them and that is how I should be addressed."

"That's a little pretentious, don't you think," she replied.

"Not at all. I'm not their buddy. My decisions may affect their lives and they must have the upmost respect and confidence that those decisions are made professionally. Just as your patients must believe your actions are professional.

"I knew you weren't a people person," referring to the powers of the demigods, "but it seems a bid apathetic to be so detached from the people you live with," she said.

"I'm sorry, it's natural to me, we all have a part to play, and I take mine seriously."

That wasn't the first time he played that card.

"Tell me then, what shall I call you if we're alone?"

He paused and looked at her, "Anything you want, but please, in front of the crew, call me number one."

"Ok," she conceded.

Nova wanted to believe he was a little warmer inside prior to the Tricentennial and his appointment to the Infinity but the more she reflected on their childhood the more she realized that he had always been a serious person, not necessarily void of compassion just serious.

On the second day in the outer orbit, Aaron realized the cameras had all been coated over with the hardened protective shell. He called his maintenance engineer to his cabin, “Mr. Wahl, is there something you failed to tell me about the exterior visual sensors?”

“Is there something wrong?”

He turned toward the screen on the wall and touched it, it came on, he touched the camera icon on the lower left then the multichannel icon and there was nothing on the screen. “What do you see?”

“Nothing.”

“Exactly.”

“May I,” as he motioned to take control of the screen. He tapped this and that, went to the system setting control panel and touched a few more icons. “I don’t know what’s wrong, I’ll get a technician up here.” All the while, Aaron looked at him with humorous contempt.

“Don’t bother. Nothing is wrong with the system. When your crew sprayed the carbon crystallite over the exterior of the ship, did they cover or remove the cameras?”

“Oh, no, don’t tell me we left them in place.”

“Ok. I won’t tell you, but it looks like about three weeks of work to get them all replaced.”

Jupiter left Aaron’s cabin feeling small. This was a huge mistake; one he was afraid that Aaron would remember for a long time. He was correct, Aaron would sarcastically bring it up in jest under circumstances where a good laugh would not be disrespectful. More than his maintenance engineer overlooking a critical issue, he held himself responsible which brought an even bigger issue to his attention. “Number one,” he called, “Make ready a transport to the surface.” Aaron needed a face to face with Beta.

An hour later he was back on earth and sitting with Beta. “We had an issue on the ship that gave me great cause for concern.”

“What was that?” she asked.

“Our crew covered the exterior cameras.”

“Why is that such a great concern?”

“The incident isn’t really the problem; the problem is me. I didn’t realize what happened and as a result I feel responsible.”

“I understand.”

Aaron went on to explain, “If I am going to feel responsible for every little thing that happens, what are the chances that I won’t be able to control myself in the future if things continue to happen or something big happens?”

“So, you don’t trust yourself?”

“I guess putting it that way doesn’t make it look like I can handle this mission.”

Beta preferred to let people come up with their own answers as she worked with them, so she continued to ask questions, “Have you talked with Maria?”

“No, as a matter of fact I tried to avoid thinking about it till I got off the ship so she wouldn’t know about how I felt and thought any less of me.”

“What is Maria’s job?”

“Admin officer.”

“She’s the admin officer, and she possesses innate powers of personal insight and persuasion, and you didn’t want her to know you had doubts about your ability to keep your sense of failure in check,” she inquisitively offered.

“Yes, but mostly the crew.”

“Was it your failure?”

“Technically, no, but everything on the ship is my responsibility.”

Beta looked down at the floor then lifted her head to look into his eyes, “so, by the same logic, my possession of the light

of wisdom makes every error within my purview my fault as well, and as such, your mistakes become mine.”

“Not at all, how can you be responsible for my errors?”

“Exactly.”

He thought about it for a moment, “but this is different.”

“How is it different?”

“The Infinity is my responsibility; the earth is yours.”

“How many times have we heard we all have a part to play? You must allow others to play their part; you are not the only responsible person on that ship. I suggest you become closer to Maria; she can help protect you from yourself. The burden of the father does not include the decisions of the child, the burden lies with preparation and training. If you’ve given them the tools, what more can you do?”

For the rest of the day, Aaron walked around the square. He stopped to enjoy a cup of coffee at the plaza café and thought of Beta’s advice. From behind him, he felt Miranda’s presence and turned to see for himself.

“I heard you came back,” she said.

“Yeah, I had to talk with Beta.”

“Are you ok?” She asked, knowing he was in some emotional distress.

“I’m ok, I just needed a little reassurance.”

Miranda had the closest connection to the human spirit as any of the group, she knew what he was dealing with. “Beta’s right you know, you have to let Maria in. If we were still together, would you have kept this from me?”

“I don’t think I could.”

“She’ll see right through you, you know.”

“I suppose so. I guess I better get it together before I get back within her proximity.”

“Don’t let the powers of the light make you feel infallible, there’s still some human in you and mistakes will happen. Your gift will be the ability to fix or correct those issues and continue

with your purpose, things are going to happen, not all of them good.”

Aaron had a special connection with Miranda ever since their first meeting and suddenly he felt at ease. “Am I making a mistake?”

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“We were good together, but I can’t stay, and you can’t go. Were we meant to be together?”

“No darling, it’s true we have a special bond, but your heart is in the heavens and mine is here. If it’s any consolation, I will think of you often, but you must open your heart to Maria. She is beautiful and smart and is sacrificing so much for you; she will serve your heart well if you let her.”

Once again, Aaron felt a little immature.

Miranda put her hands on his face and softly spoke, “Go home, Maria is probably concerned.” She gave him a hug and a smile then walked away with a tear in her eye knowing it would be the last time she’d see him.

He thought of what he would talk with Maria about all the way back to the ship. He also thought about Beta and Miranda’s words. Deep down he felt Beta had Miranda go to him to help him realize he had a new source of support. When the ship sails, there would be no Beta to run to, it would be Maria and him, the only powers left in their world. By the time he returned to the ship, he was ready to commit to the mission and Maria.

## Chapter Eight

As the end of winter approached, the decision not to speed up the Infinity's orbit was made because it would cut off all communication with the planet. Without a communication satellite network, the only communication from the ship back to earth was a direct line of sight, microwave signals that were only reliable when space debris was minimized. Aaron considered the factors and hazards and decided the gravitational effects were marginal and being able to communicate was important. What he didn't count on was the weather.

Aurora and Phillippe received signals from the earth when things were about to happen. A vibration of sorts in different frequencies depending on the nature of events. Earthquakes, tidal waves, and volcano eruptions had a lower rumbling frequency while hurricanes and tornados had a higher pitch. Just days before the ship was to eclipse the moon, they were alarmed about a nor'easter forming off the coast of Maine. "Everyone be aware, there's a very nasty storm forming off the coast of Maine," Aurora said. "I believe the tidal surge will cause major problems up north, we should consider evacuation."

Phillippe added, "How much effect will Infinity's orbit have?" he asked.

"Oh no, we need to get word to Aaron. We have high tides from the storm, a full moon, and the added gravitational influence from the Infinity, we're screwed." While Miranda tried to get in touch with Aaron for his input, it was already determined that the people in St. George Bay had to evacuate. Their problem would be where to go. They had plenty of shuttles to bring everyone back to New Providence but most of the people didn't want to leave. They thought they could ride it out.

"Aurora asked Beta, "Why don't they heed our warning and take our advice?"



“Their environmental factors were starkly different and as much as we may believe we’re superior, their leadership is still their greatest influence. Unfortunately, they must make their own decisions.”

Aaron got Miranda’s message and returned to the surface. “Without the storm, everything would have been alright but if you were to add all these factors, the tidal surge will be over 30 feet in St. George Bay.”

“That will flood the entire town,” she said.

“Yeah, everyone will have to evacuate.”

Half the town had already relocated to New Providence since the two colonies met and half of everyone left didn’t want to leave under any circumstance. “We’ve been here our entire lives, been through some rough storms, we will stay and ride it out,” was their final decision.

Though they had plenty of shuttles, most of the capable pilots volunteered for the Infinity crew and had to be brought back to run the shuttles and Aaron had to fire up ole Freedom Five one more time. Aurora and Philippe travelled north to assist Joseph with the evacuation. In all, they would transport 1016 people back to New Providence leaving 892 people to weather the storm at great risk of peril. Aurora telepathically asked Beta to help with the last plea to the leaders of Newfoundland. Aurora told Pierre, “The water is expected to rise about thirty feet. The storm is expected to last 36 to 40 hours. All the homes in the harbor will be under water, winds will reach seventy miles an hour. There is no safe shelter up in the mountains, how do you expect to survive?”

“We’ve never seen seas over 16 feet,” Pierre said, “we think your 30-foot assessment is exaggerated. Besides, our docks are floating piers, as the water rises so will they. If the water rises too much we can stay on the boats.”

Beta asked, “If we are correct and the seas rise thirty feet and your pylons are only twenty feet, being on the boats would

just put you out to sea in a terrible storm. Do you think that is survivable as well?"

"Some would say we shouldn't have lived as long as we did. We don't know why we were spared from the apocalypse, but faith kept us then and it will keep us now," Pierre said with conviction. "This is our home, where we were meant to be. Of course, if anyone wants to go, they can, but for the ones that stay, it is our choice."

"Well then, I suppose we must honor your wishes," Beta relied, "though we leave you with heavy hearts as we don't believe this will end well and fear this may be our final farewell."

With those words she told Aurora it was time to leave.

"We just can't leave them?"

"You heard him; it is their choice. Sometimes the price for freedom is worth the wager, sometimes it's a sacrifice for principle. They've made the decision."

As Aurora and Phillippe were embarking on the final shuttle to return to New Providence, Beta met Miranda back at her house. "Something became clear as we worked to evacuate our friends up north, nearly the entire crew of the Infinity is from your generation and the next. Our following generation will be underrepresented like the fifth generation was."

"I can see that," she said.

"Between you and Joseph, you will need to convince your generation and the next to increase their procreation rate by one per family each to replace the missing people."

"Do you think that's necessary?"

"The future is with the young and we just gave up about 2000 futures, so yeah, it's necessary."

"Ok then, we'll organize an orgy," Miranda quipped.

"That's not what I meant," Beta replied.

It was particularly hard for Miranda to take advice from Beta without a little banter, but she knew she was right and much more mature than her age would suggest.

“We will get the word out.”

“Thank you. Besides, mom and dad are expecting again and you’re going to have a niece 40 years your junior, I doubt if you want that trend to continue.”

Miranda laughed, “You’re right about that,” and left for home.

“Blink twice and turn around and the next thing you know, it’s a new day,” Lisa told Sol as she got out of bed. “That storm is supposed to hit Newfoundland today; I’m going to spend the day with Aurora and Phillippe. If anyone could tell what’s happening there, it’d have to be them.”

Beta showed up with Miranda just before Lisa got there. “You didn’t have to come over, we could have kept in contact,” Miranda said. A bystander may look at it as if Miranda didn’t want Lisa there, but she had respect for her aunt, after all, she was the mother of two prophets, one of which Gee and Soo chose and trusted with their souls.

“I just wanted to be together with you. Those poor souls stood blindly to reason, if we had done that during the comet, we wouldn’t be here right now,” Beta said as she put her hand out to Miranda.

Miranda took her hand, and as soon as she did, “I have an idea,” she said. “We still have Freedom Five, it’ll hold a hundred people. I know some of Aaron’s students could fly it through a hurricane, and if things really go bad up there, we can still have a rescue mission.”

“Sound pretty dangerous but I recall Aaron flying though worse, can you set that up?”

“Sure.”

Aaron returned to the ship the night before and Beta tried to reach him with telepathy, but the distance and disturbance wasn’t going to allow a connection. She’d have to use a radio, and she hated gadgets. Aaron had a perfect view of the storm from

space. Through various infrared and ultraviolet sensors could see right through clouds.

The first waves began small but grew steadily before noon. A lightly lit white moon shown twelve o'clock high through the light blue sky. Within ten minutes the moon was gone, and the day turned dark as dusk. Waves increased and the wind picked up.

On shore in St. George Bay, a boy looked out of his second story bedroom window as a loud snap and bang scared him making him jump back. A lightning strike caused large branch from a tree across the street to break off. Another bolt struck the antenna at the harbor down the street and the boy ran from the window and to his parents, "Its bad out there. The trees are breaking and there's lightning everywhere."

"Stay away from the windows," his mother said, "and get ready in case we have to run to the boat."

The power went out throughout town around two in the afternoon. Battery operated lanterns lit their way as they shuffled from room to room. They tried to imagine what was happening outside to account for the rumbles, roars, booms, and bangs without staring out the windows. It was frightening in the dimly lit lantern light, but for the ones without lanterns it must have been terrifying. Seventy mile an hour wind carrying debris crashing and breaking windows all up and down main street.

"Water's blowing in from under the door," the boy yelled out.

His mother came running, then the father. By now the water has risen eight feet. "It looks like the water is rising about six inches per minute," he said, "the piers have already started to rise by now and we'll have water to our door in less than ten minutes. I think we have to decide now; I say we go." She agreed and grabbed a go bag she had prepared with survival essentials. Dad used a rope as a tending line to keep everyone connected. They approached the quay wall, knee deep in water. The floating

piers had already risen three feet and they could no longer see where the dock ended, and the harbor began. The noise of the wind made it hard to hear anything so he pulled his family closer and shouted, “Walk straight to the fence, then straight to the pier, don’t get off course or you can end up in the harbor.” With his wife leading the way, they made it to their boat and secured themselves down in the cabin.

From the space station above, Aaron could see the solid white, massive circular cloud about three hundred miles across. By his calculations, it was moving as slow as the tides and St. Georges Bay would be subject to about eleven hours of relentless pounding.

The people of Newfoundland didn’t have a clue how bad things would get but they steadily began to regret the decision to stay. Pierre and his family took the same approach and boarded one of their fishing charters. At 86 feet long, he felt it plenty strong enough to handle the storm, but then again, this was a little more than a storm. By two thirty, twelve-foot waves were pounding the roof tops of the shops and pubs down at the harbor with steady winds around 65 miles an hour.

Suddenly, on the bridge of the Infinity, Aaron yelled, “Damn it!” and slapped himself in the head. “Reactor room, disengage from main grid and maintain minimal activity reaction.” Aaron was totally frustrated with himself right now, he just realized that he had the power to decrease the power of the storm and he was fit to be tied. The reactor core’s gravity made a difference, but the power it was generating increased the gravity tenfold. By decreasing the gravitational output, they could have prevented the storm from being so big and dangerous. He felt that his failure to calculate this put their entire town at risk.

Giving Beta an update was hard for him because he knew she would realize his mistake. “I’m sorry, it just came to me now, I assumed we needed the power up here and didn’t think about it.”

“I disagree with your sense of failure. You are the captain of a ship, the master of your own civilization. Your concern was for your ship and crew. That is exactly what is required of you. The minute you put something before your crew, that’s the moment you fail. Do not judge yourself harshly, trust your powers and yourself.”

“Thank you, Beta, but it’s easier said than done.”

The seas are now capping the pylons. Only twenty-one families managed to make it to their boats for refuge. As the seas rose, the pier and boats rose with it until it finally rose high enough the pier came off the pylons and headed out to sea. Pierre decided to stay fast alongside the floating pier because the pontoons the pier were on were stout and strong and could help keep his boat stable in the high seas. He just wouldn’t have as much maneuverability. “Laddy, Pierre called to his youngest son, if we have to break away from the pier, we’ll need to be leeward, once in position, you take forward, I take aft, and we’ll cut the mooring at the same time, but wait for my order.”

“Ok, I’m ready.”

Even though Aaron shut down the main power, the Infinity was on basic life support, their effort may have been wasted. The gravitational pull on the earth may have subsided but not before it created massive swells in the middle of the storm.

The pilot of the airbus could fly in the storm easily due to the weight, shape, power, and agility of the craft; they just had a hard time seeing with the spray of the ocean blasting the window and cameras. A family of four were found floating on a section of roof and brought into the bus from the belly door while the airbus nearly sat on top of them. “Our little Anna and Gabby are gone, we lost them when the roof came off,” the man cried.

The small crew of the airbus could feel their pain and no words could offer comfort, they just put their hands on their shoulders and continued to scour the seas for more survivors. With the additional gravity from the Infinity shut down, the seas

no longer had an opposing force. That opposing force had increased the seas and now the waves began falling back in systematic rhythm, possibly making the waves even more destructive in the interim. The people in town wouldn't have been able to tell the difference; the entire town was washed away. Had anybody been left in town, they were part of the sea now.

Aurora sat back on the sofa sipping on a cup of tea. "I have a hard time believing the universe gave me powers to communicate with the planet and I didn't have the power to save those people. I should have had the power to demand they followed orders."

"So, dictating someone's behavior should have been part of your powers?" Beta asked.

"It's for their own good."

"You received earth powers, not people powers. If you had received people powers instead, you would realize the importance of their right to make their own decisions. We are advisors, not rulers."

"I know, it's just something I don't understand, how can they not see the danger and make a rational call to protect themselves?"

By the time the storm subsided, and the seas lowered to normal, there was nothing left of their town. Of the families that escaped only sixteen of the twenty-one survived. Abandoned in the icy waters of the arctic was not a comfortable place to be. Their low-tech radio transmissions were more useful than their telepathy. Family and friends, all gone, who would they be trying to connect with. The airbus had been flying for nearly ten hours. It was now on its fifth pass over the area looking for survivors when they heard more calls. The airbus pilot was able to spot some of them now that the storm had cleared, pinned between floating sheets of ice. The airbus arrived just in time to rescue four families crammed in two boats.

Pierre and his family were one of them, “You’re probably waiting for me to admit I was wrong,” he said, “Ok, I was wrong. Thank you for not giving up on us, what a ride,” he said, clutching his wife and little one.

“It’s not about being right. My ascension was not a sideshow, I was given powers for a reason,” Joseph said. “I know I’ve always been full of myself, but these powers are real, not just for show. We need to be taken seriously, Ok?”

Pierre acknowledged and nodded his head. There didn’t need to be any further discussion, they finally met in the middle.

All the channels funneled toward Beta, who turned around and made sure everyone was updated. 826 people would die that day, families ripped apart, an entire town destroyed, and some hard lessons learned about the powers and limitations of their combined societies.

“Preparing the Infinity for departure was supposed to be the next big event’ Beta said, “but now we must focus all our efforts to make arrangements for our friends from the north. Two thousand people have left to live on the ship, so we should have plenty of room. Miranda, can you oversee the welcoming and coordinate with volunteers to house our guests while they wait for housing to open?”

“Sure. It would be my honor,” she said.

“How can I help?” Aurora asked.

In all her years, Miranda never witnessed as much compassion from Aurora, “Thanks, how about you take left and I’ll take right, and register any available rooms or houses. We can meet back here when they arrive.”

Weeks passed before their new neighbors were all settled into homes of their own. The launch of the Infinity was nearing and the revelation that a spiritual loss was approaching concerned them. Beta felt the push and the pull of the spirits clashing. “Before you know it, Aaron, Maria and two thousand people will leave our presence never to be seen again, or perhaps their



ancestors will return some day. We will be losing Aaron's power. When our world splits and the Infinity sets sail, the driving spirit of technology and the cosmos will be lost. The spirit of earth and animal will be our dominant traits."

Aurora said, "If we had to eliminate a spirit, I think it's a better choice than losing earth or people."

Losing Aaron to the mission was a sensitive issue for Miranda, and she wondered how the people leaving were affected by their loss.

Beta could feel the difference between Miranda and Aurora's spirits, the compassion of the human spirit was in Miranda but not so much for Aurora.

"They are giving away their home," Beta said, "saying goodbye to earth is an impossible concept for those of earthly spirits, but for those who crave knowledge, their wisdom will rely on logic. We have allowed ourselves to be split into evolutionarily deferent species. Should we meet in a hundred thousand years I doubt we would recognize each other. We will wish them success for the next week, as we say our goodbyes. We should have a party."

Once again, the middle of town was decorated in a hero's welcome, music playing in the streets, the smell of food filled the air, hundreds of people meeting and greeting as the topic of the day was space travel. The seventh generation were between thirty and sixty years old, while the eighth generation was mostly under thirty. Many of the young staff were eager to go while the older ones had more time and opportunity to develop attachments and leaving was a little harder.

"Parting is such sweet sorrow, can only be understood by those who have parted." Beta told Miranda.

"Feeling a bit poetic today?" Miranda joked.

"I am, and it's ok, thank you very much."

Aaron split his crew into two shifts so they could spend some time with family and friends before setting sail. The ship

was in impeccable operational order and the crew was ready to launch. They joined their fellow enlightened families, and by now they'd finally realized they were merely filled with a spirit. When they leave the spirit of earth, it would not be going with them. They would have to generate their own.

"This is the hardest part about leaving Maria told Beta, "I feel the love in all my people. I feel the love of, and in their pets. For the spirit of the earth to be absent from our lives can change our perspective."

"What do you mean?" Beta asked.

"When there are no more roses to smell, will an artificial life provide the same faith?"

"You sound like me, Maria. Perhaps you have more light in you than you thought. You and Aaron will be the Adam and Eve of your own new world, you know. Keep that in mind as you travel the universe. Who will succeed you, will they be ready, will they be able?"

Phillippe came with Aurora on his arm to the center of the square. For the first time she felt close to him. Though she looked at him with a curious want she had never really felt the connection before. She assumed because he had once been Maria's Romeo, it didn't quite feel real, it would take her some time. Perhaps that time has come. Beta joined them in the square with a tag along of her own. It was no secret that Vera idolized Beta, but she was starting to grow on her. Since she was six and now in her early twenties, Beta knew she was destined to be single but recently began to think that didn't mean she had to be alone.

Phillippe, Aaron, Maria, and Miranda seemed to meet like magnets at the fountain. "Do you remember meeting here?" Miranda asked Aaron.

"That was an interesting day." He said.

Maria and Phillippe looked into each other's eyes while feeling a little uncomfortable with the conversation. Not to interrupt Miranda and Aaron's conversation, Maria and Phillippe

telepathically recognized each other's circumstance. "I'm sorry I was mentally gone while we were together," he said.

"I didn't like the idea of the counsel determining my partner," Maria implied.

"I couldn't help but be attracted to Aurora because of our spirit, and I now think I have found peace. Don't you think it's odd how things turned out?" Phillippe said.

"I think it turned out for the best," Maria said. "I think I wanted you before I knew what I wanted."

They intended to have little private talks, but they all knew the same things and could tell what each other were thinking anyway, which made their reunion awkward. Saying goodbye to Aaron and Maria was difficult. Not as difficult as saying goodbye to Angel though, Miranda thought.

"Do not forget us," Miranda said. "Send us messages and updates."

"We will," Aaron replied, "We have about two hundred generations of fuel in that reactor before it begins to break down, unless we develop a new source of power or build a new core, we may return in a couple thousand years."

"Maybe you should plan to return anyway," she said as she could emotionally feel them drift further away.

Sol and Lisa would not be losing any children or grandchildren. Aaron was a distant eighth cousin on Sol's side of the family; Maria was from another colony. Their lineage was with Miranda, Beta and Aurora, all from Lisa's side of the family. Not as much could be said about many of the residents. Sons and daughters, aunts and uncles saying goodbye forever. As much as they tried for a party mood, they battled to keep it from ending sadly. As the eve of the launch came, so came the tears and the tension.

Beta stepped into the middle of the room, "If you close your eyes and concentrate with me, we will feel them leave."

On the ship, things weren't that calm. "Prepare for departure," Aaron said loud and clear over the intercom. "Secure all spaces and man your station." On the bridge he commanded the navigator and helm to set course for Sagittarius A and standby to engage hyperdrive."

The humming of the crystal core generators used to engage the hyperdrive served as a reminder they were playing with a lot of power. The image of an electrical explosion was hard to ignore, and enough to keep everyone paying very close attention to the orders and directions they received.

"On my mark, prepare to engage, five, four, three, two, one, engage."

Upon the command, the ship began to propel forward, though no one could tell. Like being sucked through a vacuum, the ship accelerated to thousands of miles an hour as it slowly pulled out away from orbit. The more power used to accelerate, the heavier the gravity and stronger the electromagnetic field around the ship became. It wouldn't make a huge difference in gravity but just enough to notice the few extra pounds. The further from earth they got, the faster through space they traveled. Small and incremental increases in force, over time, would get the ship travelling hundreds of thousands of miles per hour. Their course provided them with a gravitational wave toward the A Star as the neutron core seemed to sub atomically bind itself to the wave. Just like earth, the ship would also have a gravitational force field surrounding it, protecting them from interstellar gamma ray radiation from solar winds and smaller objects in their path.

The ship was now underway on a course for the center of the galaxy. Most of the people, inclined toward science and knowledge, were now aboard the Infinity heading deep out into space while the world they left behind would rest peacefully in concert with the harmony of the earth. They assumed Aaron would be taking his powers and the secrets of the universe with

him, but Beta could feel a fluctuation of the powers as the ship left any gravitational connection to earth.

“They’re out of orbit and on their way,” Beta said. “They’re flying solo.”

“What do you mean?” Miranda asked.

“Their powers did not leave with them.”

“What happened to their powers?” Phillippe asked.

Beta was just starting to sort it out herself, “It appears the powers are all connected, like family. As the ship pulled away if left their powers behind, they may not even know yet.”

“Oh no, can you warn them?” Miranda asked.

On board the ship Aaron and Maria felt it right away. It wasn’t as dramatic for them as it seemed to be for family back home. “Did you feel that?” Aaron asked Maria.

“I did. It’s gone, isn’t it?”

“I think so. The burning thirst for the next calculation, the next equation is gone. I actually feel a little less stressed.”

“Me too. My concerns for the crew’s mental and emotional health are not driving me to adjust my own biorhythms. I’m more relaxed as well. How is this going to affect us and the mission?”

“I’m not sure,” he said, “but I don’t think it’s a big issue. Sure, we had an advantage with the power, but we’re still the same able-bodied people we’ve always been. We know the ship and systems; we know what and how to do this job.”

“I agree, I’m not worried, However, we should consider keeping this between us. If the crew knew we no longer had the power, there’s no telling how much confidence in us they may lose,” she said.

“It’s agreed then, as far as anyone know, we are still the gods they look to us to be.”

Maria reminded Aaron, “Please don’t use that reference, even with the powers we would not have been worthy. Also, our crew could easily see through this if we’re not careful. How are

we to act, and presumed to be in possession of powers we no longer have?”

Aaron put his hand to his chin, a gesture of habit he did while unsure of the parameters, “confidence,” he said. “While feeling the power I was confident, I had no doubt of the outcome, it was natural confidence. If we are to continue with the charade, we must always be confident.”

Maria thought for another moment, “It is not going to work. Sooner or later, it’s bound to come out, they can read our minds and sooner or later we’ll drop our guard. If we deceive them, we’ll lose their trust. I think we should wait a day or so, long enough to get into a steady routine, then pull in all the commanders and let them know.”

“Even though I know you’re right, I worry about their confidence in us if we don’t have the powers anymore,” he said.

“Are you worried about their confidence in you, or your confidence in yourself? If they see you still have confidence in yourself, I believe they will have confidence in you too,” she said.

He stepped forward and put his arms around her, “Thanks, I suppose that’s why you’ll always be my better half.” She told him what he needed to hear and gave him the support he would depend on for years to come.

Back on earth, Beta was compiling her summation of the experience. She opened her eyes, cleared her throat, and announced, “Their powers did not leave with them, their powers are still among us. The final impression of Aaron and Maria’s disposition is positive, they are aware they no longer have powers and are ok with it. They are gone, I no longer feel their presence; may the universe be kind to them and bring them home safely someday.”

## Chapter Nine

“What a shock it had to have been,” Miranda said to Beta. “Aaron spent hours in thought with his powers, analyzing and calculating everything, and as his mission starts, he finds himself alone, I just can’t imagine.”

“He is more knowledgeable about the universe than any other even without powers. All we can do regardless of powers, is to have faith.”

“What of his powers? If he didn’t take it with him, where is it?”

“It is here with us,” Beta said, “we just don’t have control of it. It’s all around us and available, but we will have to invoke it. I suppose we can refer to it as a free spirit. Maria’s power is a little different, her spirit has two other people sharing the spirit here, it is only Aaron’s we will lose.”

“I’ll be looking for it, if it shows, I’ll let you know,” Miranda mumbled as she drifted off in thought. Her ex-beau was flying blind in space, and another kindred spirit was on the loose, she wondered if someone could connect to it, or would it roam free till the next Tricentennial?

Beta told her, “When you refocus on the here and now, can you connect with our guests and new citizens to assure them this will not be the last time the earth reminds us of its superiority but together we can overcome anything. Let them know this is their home now and help them ease their pain of loss.”

“Of course, I’ll get with Joseph, I’m sure he would want to take the lead on this.”

Miranda met Joseph after helping Pierre move into a house. “Joseph, can we talk for a moment?”

He took a moment to think, wondering, “is this a trap?”

“What does my soul tell you?”

He was thinking trap, “That you want me to want you?”

“Yeah, what’s wrong with that?” she inquired with a twist of sass.

“We already have a relationship.” He said.

“Yes, we do. We are all spiritually connected. I was with Aaron before our powers, Phillippe and Maria were together. After we received powers, Aurora latched onto you, and everything seemed to be upside down. Now Phillippe and Aurora have reconciled, Maria and Aaron left for space and you, and I are left together.”

Joseph was finding it hard not to follow her logic. “What are you getting at?”

“My heart has been through much; it is time for it to heal and I was hoping you had room in your heart for me, so yes, I want you to want me.” She stated, feeling vulnerable.

Joseph looked at her and it all became clear. He felt bad not seeing it earlier. He enjoyed other people’s company but never felt the love bug for himself, so his complacency was of his own making. For someone to have his powers and overlook other people’s emotions, especially someone so close to him was unforgivable and it was just enough to put him on the right track.

“I am so sorry, I haven’t been attentive,” he said and opened his arms to her. “We may have started out unconventionally, but I promise to do better.”

She graciously accepted his apology and held him tight. Years of a distant relationship left a deep hole that she was anxious to fill and to fill it with Joseph almost made it worth waiting for.

Aurora addressed Beta, “Why didn’t you advise us on our relationships in advance? How long have you known we were with the wrong person?”

“I could tell right away, but your affairs and learning how to live amused me.” Beta replied.

“Did our heartbreak really amuse you? Aurora asked.



“No, I was being facetious. I didn’t see it until you started spending so much time talking with Phillippe.

Suddenly, while enjoying what her eyes were looking at, Miranda said, “My soul feels better.”

Beta backed out of their business. She may have been the youngest person in the room, but Beta was a very old soul. She was comfortable being herself and comfortable having her powers.

Joseph was the only one that showed any apprehension, probably because the ultimate desire was his forte and he was beginning to fall into Miranda’s spell. “I’ve felt the opposite side of this situation my entire life and now that I’m on the smitten side, I don’t know how to act. Miranda opened my eyes, now I just have eyes for her, this is all new to me.”

“Ok everybody, if you’re through discussing sleeping arrangements, there is something that we all have to do.” Beta didn’t have to mention why; they could feel her guide them in the direction of the newly replaced citizens.

“We need donations of clothing, towels, food and pantry.” Miranda said.

Joseph volunteered, “I’ll gather food and supplies, you hand out wardrobe and supplies.”

“I was thinking the same thing,” she said.

Meanwhile, aboard the Infinity, in certain areas of the perimeter angles, solar winds deflected off the edges and glistened off the shield. From observation balconies, the view was amazing, and an occasional scare of debris hitting the dome added excitement to the event. “They look like sparks out the corner of your eye,” Maria told Aaron. “This is an absolutely beautiful night.”

“I hope it stays that way. It’s going to be many years before we reach our nearest star.”

“Years of darkness doesn’t seem so bad if you got someone to dance with.” Maria said.

Over the ship's intercom a message from the bridge announced, "To the port side, we'll be flying within twenty thousand miles from the moon and the view is amazing. Last gaze at the moon, to the port."

"Number one," Aaron called, "take plenty of video and get a feed back to earth. I'll be up on the bridge in five to record our official farewell." Turning to Maria, "Meet you in the stateroom in a half hour?"

"Bring your dancing shoes," she said.

Aaron cued his mic, "With the grace of the light, we have overcome much. From apocalypse to the heavens, our lives have been full of surprises. As we endeavor to evolve, we take to the skies and ask the world we leave behind, to remember us as pioneers. May the stars be beacons to light our way and to our loved ones back home, we bid you farewell. We'll send a post card from Proxima Centauri."

The gravitational wave sensor locked on to a signal from Alpha Centauri and the ship began a gradual acceleration, within the next couple hours the speed will increase to about 100,000 miles an hour and steadily continue to increase.

"We have quite a few years until we get there, we'll be securing most of the crew in cryo-sleep, but I'm going to take the first watch," Aaron told Maria.

"I'll keep you company."

"Number one," Aaron announced, "set the watch and secure the cryochambers."

"Aye, aye," he replied.

Of the total 1976 people aboard, only 1200 were crew, the rest were settlers, about one hundred each for the eight living panels. The settlers would not be cryogenically frozen during their travels, but the crew would split into four teams to maintain the ship and systems. The initial plan was that each crew would stand one year of duty and three years in cryo-sleep but knew the schedules would ultimately be flexible.

“My biggest concern is the thaw time required to come out of cryo-sleep. Even under an accelerated rate, twenty-four hours is a long time to be incapacitated if we had to be wakened in an emergency,” Aaron admitted.

“The main computer is programmed to wake us under certain threats, isn’t it?”

“Yes, and the Officer of the Deck can override and wake us anytime, but that doesn’t ease my concerns.”

“Well, you can’t stay awake, you’ll die of old age before you have a chance to explore anything,” Maria said.

“I know,”

Over the crew channels of the ship’s intercom, Jupiter announced, “Now set the extended watch, duty section one, Blue crew, report to stations and make ready reports to the con. All duty section leaders not on duty, report to hanger bay three for stand down briefing.” This was where Aaron would disclose his secret prior to assuming the watch on the bridge.

“Good morning,” he started, “we have come a long way. Twenty odd years ago, when this mission was announced, many of you had questions and doubts. Now that we are underway, those concerns are irrelevant. Maria and I have recently had a revelation you need to be made aware of,” he paused to make sure everyone was paying attention. “As we left earth’s influence, we left the heavenly powers we possessed behind. Those powers apparently belong to earth. That does not change our mission or capabilities. We still have our knowledge, our abilities, and our duty to explore the heavens. Before we travel too far from earth, this is your last chance to voice an objection.”

Remarkably, no one objected. Aaron was sure some would fear not having the protection of the powers and object. Maria added to his statement, “We all possess powers and abilities, we didn’t need the intervention of the spiritual forces to learn and know what we know, they just helped to get us where we needed to be faster.”

One of the section heads commented, “We have been studying, training, practicing, and learning on our own for twenty years, though the special powers were comforting, we have faith in ourselves and in you. Powers or not, you are our captain and I, for one, am proud to serve under you.”

Another registered similar comments, then another, and another.

“Ok then,” Aaron said, “This issue will be considered closed, and I encourage you all to get some rest, enjoy your time off, and don’t wait too long to report to the cryochambers.”

After this admission, he still had the bridge and current duty section to brief.

“Captains on the Bridge,” was called out as he stepped on the bridge.

“Can I have everyone’s attention?” Aaron inquired. “Before I take the watch from Number One, I have a confession to make. As we left earth, Maria’s and my powers were pulled away from us. They were left on earth, where they apparently belong, but that doesn’t change our commitment to this mission. We, as a people, have been tasked with exploring the stars. Knowing now that your captain is a mortal, offers you one last chance to return to earth.”

The bridge was silent for moment, then Jupiter spoke, “We signed up for this mission many years ago,” looking around at the rest of the crew, “not because you were gifted by the gods with a power that would keep us safe. We signed up because we believed in the mission, and we believe in you.” He looked around and addressed his crew, “Are you with me? Are we doing what we are meant to do?”

“Aye,” a young electronics technician announced. “This is who we are,” another said. Without objection again, the crew stood behind him which filled his heart with pride and a sense of dedication to his crew he hadn’t realized before.

He looked around at his crew, then back to Maria and finally turned to Jupiter, “Number One, you stand relieved, I have the con.”

“Captain has the con,” Jupiter said as he gave him a salute.

After all the duty stations were set, the maintenance and janitorial robots were deployed, the remaining off duty crew were free to relax and enjoy some of the many amenities the ship offered while few took the opportunity to enter the cryochambers early.

The settlers would rarely know anything the crew was dealing with, they would conduct their business as normal with the exception to scenic tours from observation decks to star gazing platforms around the perimeter of the ship. Shuttles and elevators for the settlers were separated from those for the crew. Crew spaces were biometrically coded so only authorized personnel could access designated spaces. The conscious decision not to tell the settlers about Aaron and Maria’s power was agreed upon by the department heads. They were told from the very start that travelling from earth to the stars was hazardous and the chances of never seeing the likes of earth again was extremely probable.

Although Maria was not officially part of the bridge team, she had a chair designated on the bridge out of respect to her divine appointment. The fact that she no longer had that divinity didn’t register or affect the crew, they loved her just the same and gave her their utmost respect.

Later in their stateroom, they would reflect on these conversations and acknowledge their duty, responsibility, and blessings. “So much stress,” Maria eluded to, “sometimes we just worry too much.”

“Yes, we do.”

Meanwhile, drama was beginning to develop back home with the families in Columbia. Marsal and Raul had been at odds with each other over families being split up, whether they joined

the space program or just relocated to New Providence. Marsal believed families should stay together, Raul believed people needed to find themselves and pursue those things that make them happy. At first the disagreement appeared more of a disappointment until the realization that the nine volunteers for the Infinity are gone and will not be returning sank in.

“How could you let them leave?” Marsal chastised Raul.

“That was not my choice,” he defended himself.

“Yes, but you said nothing, you just let them go.”

“Again, it was not my choice. They are grown and have minds of their own. It’s what they want to do, what they felt they needed to do,” Raul argued.

“We were happy. Now outsiders came and busted up our families. Jefe told us many years ago if we stuck together everything would turn out ok, now look at us.”

Pita joined in the conversation and made it worse by recommending the entire village move to New Providence. “The climate is better up there and there are more resources.”

“No, I know what you’re really thinking, you’re thinking of the men,” Marsal said.

Pita had been widowed for more than forty years and didn’t try to hide her lonely pain but also didn’t wear it like a badge. She was strong but some wounds are hard to heal. “So, what if I am, am I not human? I don’t deserve happiness?”

“You can go if you wish, I’m not your mother,” Marsal replied.

“No, but you act like you’re everyone else’s mother, disapproving of their decisions. I think you are just being selfish,” Pita claimed.

“Come now,” Raul intervened, “a little wisdom can go a long way. Perhaps Beta could help.

“Once again, you are ready to disregard our own sovereignty and enlist the opinion of outsiders.”

“I don’t know how you can refer to Beta as an outsider, she has been given Jefe’s powers,” Raul reminded her.

And finally, she took a moment to let that sink in. “Ok, I concede, maybe Beta could provide some guidance.”

They called Beta and invoked her advice, “Beta, please speak to our concerns, Marsal feels our families are being ripped apart while Pita and I feel change is good. Can you ease our conflict?” Raul pleaded.

“Marsal is just in her concerns for that is a mother’s nature to protect and love her children. Raul and Pita are also within normal parameters of human behavior. We as people have and always will look to improve our situations. To come to an agreement with two opposing views has only one effective solution.”

She left them hanging, waiting for an answer, “Compromise.”

“I fail to see how we can compromise when I don’t believe in separating and they do,” Marsal said.

“We have the ability to talk with each other anytime we want, we have the ability to travel and see each other any time we want, and maybe we have a moral responsibility to each other to honor such agreements. Taking a moment to think of the other person can typically help resolve conflicts.”

With that bit of advice, Beta backed out of their dispute and left them to complete the process of reconciliation.

Marsal admitted, “I know I’ve been selfish,” looking at Pita in agreement, “my heart is heavy with loss, and I now know what you must have been feeling. I’m sorry for not seeing your situation earlier.”

Pita walked over and gave her a hug. “It’s not too late, please think about all of us relocating. We could all still be together; we’d just be together somewhere else.”

Raul said, “I love my home here, but if moving to New Providence would make everyone happy, I will gladly join you.”

“We are a simple people, and they have different concerns. I worry about us getting along,” Marsal added.

“The colony up north had the same concerns. They didn’t want to leave their home, now they had no choice, their home got destroyed. I would think that might be a sign, or at least a blessing that they had somewhere they could go after such devastation,” Pita said.

“Their situation may have been a result of their desire to stay but I don’t believe that storm came because they didn’t want to leave,” Marsal replied.

Pita’s response gave Marsal one more thing to think about and drew acknowledgement from Raul, “I didn’t mean to suggest it did, I was just drawing a comparison to them being outsiders, us being outsiders, and the people of New Providence doing everything they can to help. Maybe, just maybe, they are better prepared for this world, and we could benefit from them.”

“Ok, let’s think about it tonight and present it to the village tomorrow. I think everyone should have a voice in this,” Marsal said.

“I agree,” Raul nodded.

“Me too,” Pita agreed.

Beta gave Miranda and Joseph a heads up. “If the families in Columbia were to relocate, there would be a lot of accommodations to be made. More housing, additional services and supplies, additional classrooms, not to mention your personal sacrifices. We should probably prepare.”

That evening was long for Marsal and Raul. Though not as old as Angel, they were up there in years. Back when Gee and Soo left New Providence, everyone was under the impression they went back to their dimension and that they wouldn’t return. They didn’t leave earth, Columbia and Newfoundland is where they went. They spent many years cleaning their villages of the virus and seeding them with their DNA so they may survive. As advanced as Gee and Soo were, they still had doubts whether



humans could survive the event and capitalized of the chance that one of the civilizations would prevail.

Marsal prayed to Jefe, as she has on so many occasions. Not being alive didn't matter to her, she just felt comfortable consulting with her higher power even if only symbolically. "What should we do, Jefe? We belong here, no? Our home is all we know, we will be lost if we leave, and we've lost too much already. I don't want to leave." She paused between each statement hoping for an answer she knew would not come. "Some of the children like it up here, they say they feel comfortable and safe. They say they don't have to worry what may come out of the jungle or if the crops were infested. Oh, why did you leave us?" She laid her head in her hands.

Not realizing the full extent of Beta's powers in that she could hear her prayers, Marsal almost jumped out of her skin when she heard, "Jefe has some advice for you."

"Who speaks?"

"It's Beta, the keeper of the light. Your concerns are causing you undue stress, if Jefe were here, he would tell you to follow your heart, or maybe in this case, follow your children. The children are the future, and it will ultimately be they who will make the decisions for your people. Can you put your trust in the hands of your loved ones? Is their love for you and life strong enough to support you?"

"So, you talk with Jefe?" She asked.

"No, Jefe is gone. Their souls' rests in peace within me, as they rest in peace within you. Doing what is right for all is always harder than doing what you think is right for yourself. Many people rely on your wisdom, if you think of them as you make decisions, you can never go wrong."

"Thank you, Beta, I don't feel so torn apart anymore. I still have to be able to accept my own decisions, so I will think of all you've said." She slept on it and woke up the following day ready to discuss moving the village to New Providence.

Back in New Providence, Vera took a chance to get closer to Beta. Beta was now twenty-eight and Vera was thirty-four. Back during the Tricentennial they were just children, now what Vera told Beta took her completely off guard.

“Beta,” Vera softly spoke, “I have a twin.”

“A twin? I didn’t pick up on it.” Beta admitted. “Explain.”

“We’re not like you. My brother’s name is Viceroy, and he is currently aboard the Infinity.”

“Please continue,” Beta implored.

“On the day of ascension, we were sitting behind you at the fountain. While anyone would have noticed your brilliant white glow, they would never have noticed the yellow hue beside you. That was Viceroy. He was granted powers no one seems to know exists.”

“What kind of powers and why the ruse to be close to me?”

“It’s not a ploy, I genuinely want you, I always have.” Vera said. “From the day you were filled with the light, and my brother was filled with the darkness, I became consumed with desire and have dreamt of you since.

“How could I not have seen this?” Beta asked.

“You have a good heart; I’m sure the darkness in Viceroy’s heart had something to do with it.”

Beta became frustratedly uncomfortable. She had always had a clear and confident assessment of things, and now, she has no control. “How could you and your brother sit next to me while I received the light, and your brother supposedly received the darkness, and not be aware. I highly doubt that.” Beta proclaimed.

“My darling Beta, your powers are powerful, but his mere presence can make people forget, forget they had ever seen or knew of us. As my twin, I feel his power and it scares me. Go ahead, ask someone who Vera Luna or Viceroy are?”

“I don’t need to, I can see.” Beta said.

“It’s scary, it scares me. He walks among people unnoticed,” Vera admitted.

“What is his purpose?”

Vera stepped forward and reached out to her, but Beta backed away. “I’m sorry Beta, we were left at the fountain by our parents just moments before the ascension. They abandoned us there and we’ve been alone ever since. I just want to fit in and be a part of what is right and just. I’ve tried to rid myself of Viceroy and the darkness, which is why I’m drawn to you so strongly. I know if anyone could save me, it would be you. As long as Viceroy is away, we are safe and can be happy, but if he gets close, his dark side can be devastating.”

“Is the Infinity in danger?” Beta asked.

“It was in danger the day it left. They will soon find out the universe cannot be tamed. The forces out there are stronger than they can imagine, and their vulnerabilities are many and great. Even Viceroy knows the odds are too great and will ultimately try to force the ship to return,” Vera said.

“I cannot tell if you speak from head or heart. How are you blocking me and why didn’t you say something sooner?” Beta asked.

“I honestly didn’t know I was blocking you, but if we concentrate together, maybe you’ll be able to feel it and the truth. As far as not saying something sooner, the world is better off without him and there’s a lot more people here. He would have known it was me who told, in the end, he would make people forget then take it out on me.” She extended her hand once again and this time Beta took it.”

“I see, and I feel, you poor thing,” she said. Vera showed her what Beta assumed were her deepest secrets, her love for Beta and fear of her brother. Beta now saw things a little clearer and it was quite a shock for Beta to realize another power, possibly greater than her, existed among them all this time.

“This is unacceptable. Did we let our loved ones fly away on a deadly mission? I don’t think so; we must have hope and faith that they will overcome and succeed.” Beta insisted.

“As far as I know, Viceroy is the only one with this power, and the spirits we invoke have a role to play in the evolutionary process as well. His powers are the ability to make people forget and plant thoughts of doubt in their mind. That gives him an advance to try things on people over and over till he gets it right. I have tried to invoke his methods to get you into a physically precarious position many times, but I don’t that power.”

“Are you saying you hit on me?”

“No, I wanted to, but I didn’t have his powers”

“What processed you to try the dark powers?” Beta asked.

“I looked at you and saw, strength, beauty, poise and intelligence, I fell in love,” Vera said. “I saw how Viceroy could manipulate people and thought, being his twin, I might have powers too, but alas, I’m just fool in love.”

“We can discuss that later, right now I’m concerned about your brother. It is so odd; I have no memory of either of you at the fountain,” Beta mentioned.

“His powers are great and even greater if he ever figures how to use it properly,” Vera said. “Can we meet again, later tonight maybe, after you’ve had a chance to digest everything?”

Beta looked in Vera’s eyes and for the first time saw the real Vera. “You have a beauty about you I haven’t realized before, it makes it hard to concentrate. Is that part of the dark powers?” Beta asked.

“No, that’s the look of lust,” Vera admitted. “I cannot help it; I feel chemically and biologically attracted and my hormones are screaming.”

“Oh my,” Beta realized that she was experiencing her first bout with seduction, “I’ll see you at seven?” she asked while holding her breath. Beta was in uncharted territory; she’d never had to deal with someone that she couldn’t read their mind.

However, she felt a trust in Vera that made her feel weirdly comfortable.

## Chapter Ten

In the service isles of sector 17-A, a lab technician stubbled across a couple of security guards, laying across from each other in the middle of the passageway. He called the bridge from the intercom on the wall of the passageway, “There are two guards down in the passageway in 17-A, they’re unresponsive. Please send help.”

Before he knew it, a call came over the intercom, “Security – code 66, sector 17-A, code 66, sector 17-A.”

In less than a minute, four other security details arrive on scene, with weapons at the ready. After a brief examination, “It looks like they shot each other,” one said to the other.

Shortly after, Aaron showed up at the scene and was briefed by the lead investigator, “Why, what would have caused them to do this? I want answers!” He looked up and at the end of the passageway he saw Viceroy just standing there, looking on. Out of curiosity, he walked down to speak to him. “Excuse me, who are you and did you see what happened?”

“I’m your brother, I’m everyone’s brother,” he said cryptically. “I think you know who I am, we should talk.”

Aaron thought his manner was creepy and it caused him to be fearfully cautious. He called for Jupiter, “Number One, come join me.” When Jupiter got there, he asked Viceroy once again, “What’s going on here? Who are you?”

“I am announcing my presence,” Viceroy said with an air of arrogance.

“What do you know of this, are you responsible?” Aaron asked.

Viceroy didn’t hesitate, “I suppose I am. I suggested they square off and fire at each other, and low and behold, they followed my suggestion. That, my friends, is power. A power you are unfamiliar with and a power you cannot control.”

This was a lot for Aaron to take in. He's familiar with having power, even though he's not familiar with this type of power. If he had a power, why hadn't he seen or felt it before? If his powers dissipated why didn't Viceroy's? He had more questions than answers.

"Number One, keep a guard on this one," Aaron commanded as he frisked him. He then asked, "where's your weapon?"

"I have no weapon," he informed him.

"So, you want me to believe you told them to shoot themselves and they, did it?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying."

"To what extent were their lives worth sacrificing?" Aaron asked.

"They were inconsequential, a means to an end. The big picture is this ship is cursed. If you continue out into the heavens, the universe will crush you," Viceroy proclaimed. "These two souls were merely a statement that the ship is in danger if we do not turn around and go home you want have a crew to continue the mission."

Viceroy had to go home. He knew his powers were going and would soon have no real control. He had to make a bold and decisive statement if he was going to be taken seriously.

"Number One, place this man in custody," Aaron commanded.

Jupiter just stood there like he didn't hear a word he said.

"Number One, take him into custody," he repeated.

"He can't hear you," Viceroy said, "I've commanded him to forget. I can command the entire crew if I have to, and perhaps, command them to kill each other or damage the Neutron core."

Aaron wasn't sure why, but he believed him, and it scared him. "What do you want from us?"

"We need to go back to earth while we still can," he ordered.

“Tapping Jupiter on the shoulder, he told him, “my vacation was too short,” a code phrase to be used in the case of duress, signaling Jupiter to assume command of the ship. Using the word short instead of long indicated the ship needed to be locked down. Aaron continued to engage Viceroy, Jupiter slipped away and made his way back to the bridge and gave the order.

Over the crew’s intercom, “This is the First Mate, I have assumed command of the ship under article two of section four, set condition Alpha Delta One. The ship’s computer shut down and locked all essential spaces and passageways. The ship was now in a modified battle station’s posture for a potential security breach.

“It’s out of my hands now,” Aaron said.

To which Viceroy replied, “It’s just a matter of time before I have every single person I have contact with, doing my bidding. The more difficult you make it, the harder my reaction will be. Die out in space or go home to the safety of the earth. Make a choice. I am prepared to crack this neutron star if I must.”

Aaron didn’t know Viceroy was at the very end of his abilities. Soon he would have no more power than the average person. Viceroy’s power was equal to Beta’s but even theirs has limitations. There was no way for Aaron to prepare for something like this, he called out to Maria, “What are your thoughts, what can we do?”

She tuned in with what remained of her powers and asked Viceroy, “From what spirit have you come?”

He said, “Your lives are a lie. You choose to see things the way you want them to be seen. I see the entire picture for what it is. Good or bad, right, or wrong, there’s always two sides to every coin. You failed to account for me while I studied and manipulated you for years.”

As Maria continued with her conversation, she began to understand his role a little better. “How do you want this situation to end?” she asked.



“You take me back to earth where I need to be. You then, can take off to meet your fate in the icy expanse of space.”

“Just that simple?” Maria asked.

“Just that simple,” he replied.

Now Aaron had to really think. Viceroy has proven to be the biggest threat he’s ever come across and doesn’t know how to fight him. The dark power he commands scares him. The more he thought about it the more he knew he could never give in. Viceroy must never be able to harm earth. Even at the cost of the crew and settlers. The hardest decision any commander could have to make.

Viceroy could see his indecision and said, “Let me help you with this decision.” At which point he concentrated hard and convinced masses of people to believe that the ship was damaged and must return home for repairs or everyone will perish.

With that thought in their head, how could Aaron stop him? He couldn’t, but Jupiter could. Number One was Aaron’s number one for a reason. He accessed the Neutron core control panel and set the override power to emergency services only, locking every navigational and operational systems in place. This ship was coasting through space now under no one’s command.

Even Viceroy’s mental powers couldn’t penetrate the thick nuclear protective walls of the main reactor room. Aaron knew that would only provide them limited time before Jupiter would have to egress, sooner or later the bridge crew would have to leave the bridge to eat. He figured they had about five to seven days. Aaron didn’t think like a psychopath, there was no way for him to prepare for this situation. Viceroy asked him, “As I walk around this ship and people start killing each other or killing themselves, how many will have to be sacrificed before you concede and return me to earth? I am of the same light as you, I belong on earth.”

“If you belonged on earth, your powers would have ceased like ours are. You obviously do not belong on earth.” Aaron declared.

“Allow me to educate you, your powers are of the earth, mine are of the universe, my powers will get stronger if anything.” Of course, he was lying through his teeth. Viceroy’s only advantage was Aaron didn’t know his powers were beginning to fade. “You’ve been warned,” with that threat, Viceroy walked away leaving Aaron to fear the worst.

But he didn’t set out to harm anyone, he set out to confuse everyone. The ship was on cruise control, at the mercy of the universe. Aaron knew it couldn’t continue this way. All he could think of was which world would bear the burden of this dark power. He couldn’t subject the world to this danger. As soldiers of space, the responsibility was theirs.

Aaron called out to him, he stopped and turned around, “Had you not presented yourself in such a villainous way, you could have been able to manipulate this situation better,” Aaron said.

“But it’s fear that does my bidding. Fear has always been stronger, and it belongs back on earth. I did not enjoy letting the guards kill themselves, it was a necessary evil to coerce a necessary outcome. I belong back on earth and eliminating the entire crew is worth getting back there. My dark powers are the balance to the light and are the only thing that can protect the people of earth from the dangerous mysteries of the universe,” Viceroy stated.

“I fail to see how creating fear is a good thing.”

“If people have no fear, they have no concern to be aware of dangers. It is my power that allows people to be cautious, balancing cause and effect. Otherwise, the people of earth would not survive the many hazards and catastrophic events.

Aaron didn’t fully understand but was forced to see it his way. Would the instinct to be aware of danger exist without him?

Did he truly serve a purpose on earth by making them aware of the darkness? And what of his crime? Aaron didn't feel qualified to accept this responsibility. Maria stepped in to offer her advice.

"Aaron, we have to return. Viceroy is just being himself. He is part of the equation; he is just playing his part, as we are. Beta has the loving strength to deal with him. We have almost two thousand people to think of, and as you once proved, the crew is your soul responsibility. If the gods of light produced him, let the gods of light deal with him. His was on earth for as long as we were, during that time do you recall anything that would indicate the world was in grave danger?"

Once invoking the under-duress clause, Jupiter was forbidden to take orders from Aaron. Maria on the other hand could effectively communicate duress was no longer an issue. Just before they made it to Mars, Aaron used Maria to get a message to Jupiter to reverse command of the ship back to Aaron.

"The captain is no longer under any threat of duress. He has full control of his faculties and believes taking Viceroy back to earth is necessary to save the crew and settlers. In addition, he doesn't believe him to be as big of a threat to earth as our fears would have us to believe, noting Viceroy had been on earth for as long as we have without major incident and finally, we have five people with powers back home that can help keep him in check. I recommend returning authority under article three of section four, back to the captain."

Jupiter contemplated the situation for about ten minutes then opened the bridge and unlocked the ship. Jupiter met with the captain outside the reactor room, "How was your vacation?" he said with humility. Over the ship's secured intercom, he announced, "Attention all hand, as acting commanding officer I stand relieved, the Captain has command."

"This is the captain; I have command. Reactor officer, return us to full operational power, Navigator report to the bridge."

Maria told Aaron she would stay with Viceroy and gather additional information. “Be careful, we know what he’s capable of.”

“What was your initial plan?” she asked him.

“To control the ship and passage of course,” Viceroy replied.

“What changed?”

“The ship won’t make it to Proxima Centauri. It will be pelted by pulsars and gamma bursts long before we would have arrived.”

“And how do you know that?”

“It’s a gift, I’ve seen it like it’s already happened. The problem was I didn’t see it till we left earth’s influence.” He said.

Maria replied, “So why did you kill the guards?”

“That was an accident. My powers are that of pessimism, doubt, and fear. The negative side of things balances the irresponsible optimism of false hope. The guards couldn’t control their fear and had a breakdown right in front of me. I just capitalized on the situation to have the ship turn back. But we witnessed your coercion. You admitted to it, did you not?”

“I did.”

“So, did you tell those guards to shoot themselves?”

“Even if I did, it would have been their fear pulling the trigger. I just have a darker view on things and people pick up on that. By the way, the dark powers are greater than the light because fear trumps trust, it always has, and it always will.”

“Why haven’t we seen your likes before?”

“You were blind. We sat next to the light and the light was the only thing people saw.”

“We?”

“My sister and I.”

Viceroy was extremely cooperative almost to the point of suspicion. Maria wanted to believe him, truth and faith were hallmarks of her powers, powers she no longer had. If he was

being deceptive, she doubted her ability to recognize it but so far, his story hasn't fallen apart.

"I don't know how much truth is in your statements, but assuming you are not a monster, how do you intend to defend yourself when we return to earth?"

"First, you should reconsider leaving our solar system. We are here for a reason, otherwise we would be somewhere else out there. Don't misunderstand, by nature, I encourage your mistakes, but you've taken nearly two thousand souls away from my domain. Traveling the galaxy may take you away from my influence but it would be meaningless if you couldn't survive, so you see, I'm an ironic hero in all this, I'm saving your lives."

On the bridge there was a different feeling of the situation and Jupiter's conversation with Aaron had the bridge crew taking notice. "Are we letting a mad man go free?" Jupiter asked Aaron.

"Maria tells me that he claims to know the ship would be doomed if it continued on its present course and took advantage of a bad situation. She said he claims his mere presence caused the ill fate of the guards and he did not actively create the event."

"I've returned your command because I trust and believe in you. We are behind you, 100 percent," Jupiter said, "and if he had the power to make me forget, he probably has the power to make anyone forget about the crime."

"Perhaps, but the entire crew is not worth the risk. Having faith in Beta and the light is the wisest thing I can come up with."

Back home there was an ancient saying that 'no man was an island,' but Viceroy knew that not to be true. He was the only one with the power of negative thought and control, and he knew he was alone in that regard.

Vera's influence with Beta would soon be tested and so would the benevolence of the powers of the light. It would take the Infinity a couple weeks to slingshot around mars and return home. Radio communications have already dispatched an update

of events, so Beta and Vera were to have intense fellowship for the next few days.

Beta met with Miranda and Joseph, “Your powers of the human spirit are needed. We received word that the Infinity was returning home with trouble aboard. It appears that Vera’s brother is involved in a plot. His absence helps keep us safe but jeopardizes the crew, we need to assess the possibility of remanding him back to earth.”

“What do you need us to do?” Joseph asked.

“When they arrive on station, we will link up and interview him prior to allowing his return while they maintain orbit. We’ll determine what threat he possesses and how to contain it. We also have a fact-finding issue to conclude. We’ve never had a crime like this in modern history, how can this secret exist?” Beta was concerned about Vera as well. Her fear of Viceroy seemed authentic and who better to understand someone than their sibling. Beta’s powers were being tested and she felt ill prepared. She could see the truth in everything, suddenly a situation develops where she feels she has no power. She would not have a restful sleep till this issue could be solved, she was sure of it.

That evening Vera stepped into Beta’s room. Vera was not intimidating at all, she was a little shorter and thinner than most, she was childishly beautiful despite being older than Beta, yet Beta felt weaker at times when she was around. “Can we talk?” Vera asked.

“Sure, have a seat,” Beta suggested.

“No,” she whispered, “I’d rather stand in your presence, look deep in your eyes and kiss you.”

“Pardon me?” Beta asked.

“I can fix this problem,” she said. “No one knows the evil he is capable of more than I. I never wanted this and have fought to keep clear of it. He was my blood, but he also has my soul. The

soul he stole from me while stealing my virginity. I told you our parents left us; the truth is, Viceroy chased them away.”

“How does wanting to kiss me fit into this scenario?”

Vera confessed with a tear in her eye, her heart beating more rapidly, “He cannot be allowed back, and he cannot be allowed to take two thousand hostages. He is coming back for me; I will rid the world from him, but it will cost me my life, but before I go, I just wanted to know and feel your gentle touch and love upon my lips.”

“I’m sorry Vera, it won’t come to that.”

“Yes, it will, and you know it to be true. Look, I can do it. Just give me an antimatter fuse capsule and I’ll ride out in a shuttle and on the way back, I’ll blow us up before entering earth’s atmosphere.”

“Now why would you want to blow yourself up with him?”

“I’m telling you, if he returns to earth, every living soul on earth will ultimately become his to manipulate. That’s what he does, eats souls. Let me prove it,” as she slowly approached Beta. She finally got the accepting invitation she’d been waiting for. Vera put her soft frail hand on Beta cheek and leaned in face to face. I may have been associated with the powers of darkness; but it is your light that shines my way. My tormented life is an extremely small price to pay for the welfare of tens of thousands of people.”

Beta fell still in her presence, “That’s a sacrifice I hope to prevent, can we try to save you?”

“Your love, right here, right now, is all that can save me. Allow me to go to heaven before I go to hell,” and she kissed her. The moment was so tense Beta froze in place till the warmth of her lips drew sweat upon her brow.

“Is this the love you need?” Beta asked.

“No, this is the love we need.” Vera continued with her advances and Beta ultimately succumbed to her desires.

Beta recognized her weakness after the fact, “You managed to control me and made me do something I would never have thought of, before you.”

“Yes, but it was still good, wasn’t it?”

“It is more than being good. How can I abandon you now that I’ve tasted you? You are very clever,” Beta said.

“Not clever, in love.”

“That makes it that much harder. Are you seriously entertaining the plan to blow yourself up? What if we can get him on the shuttle by himself with the devise?” Beta asked. Suddenly she realized, ‘Oh my, I’m plotting to have someone assassinated.’

Vera saw the light go on in her mind and knew an existential experience when she saw one. “You can’t look at it as a civilian would. This is not like getting to know the neighbors. Viceroy is the vessel to a spirit that thrives on fear and hate. When Viceroy is gone, the spirit will be banished to roam the earth unbound to the physical world and relegated to be the voice of the little devil on your shoulder and nothing more till the next Tricentennial.”

“I want you to give me a chance to save you and get rid of him at the same time. Is that ok?” Beta asked.

Vera pulled closer, “I can only pray,” she said.

Before they knew it, the ship was back near earth and causing problems with the moon’s orbit. “Beta contacted Aaron, “Vera Luna and I are on the way there in a shuttle. Before we allow Viceroy to return to earth, we must be briefed.”

The command didn’t seem any less responsible, so Viceroy didn’t think too much of it. They arrived at the docking bay but stayed near their shuttle. While Aaron was escorting Viceroy to the hanger, the bridge crew was on standby to blast out of orbit if needed.

Vera and Beta discussed the plan, “We’ll use his narcissism against him,” Vera said, “No matter the elaborate story that comes from his mouth, he will think he’s smarter than you



and that, is our element of surprise. He will talk, you will listen, then you agree to go back to earth. Except, after you're in the shuttle, before the door closes, you get up and excuse yourself, assuring you'll be right back. I'll remain in the pilot's seat while he's paying attention to you stepping back off, I press the self programmed flight plan button giving me ten seconds to evacuate while leaving him strapped in the shuttle with the bomb."

Beta met in the front of the shuttle and told Aaron, "our stay will be extremely short if he cannot convince me to trust him."

As expected, Viceroy had a story prepared and spoke it very convincingly, "I was simply walking past one of the guards when he bumped into another guard, they quickly turned and locked eyes, they then drew and shot each other. It's not my fault, my presence may have influenced their natural fear, but I did not intentionally mean to cause harm."

Keeping to the script as close as possible, Beta said, "Ok, we will take you with us, but you will have to be escorted everywhere until we can complete our investigation. Agreed?" she asked.

And he did. Aaron was shocked that they were so easy to accept an obvious story. "That's it, that's all you need to know?"

Beta said to Aaron, "I don't feel in danger. But feel free to hang around a few days, give your crew a break, a vacation will do all of you some good."

"Ok, let's go home," Beta said, as she stepped into the shuttle and took her place in coach. Viceroy followed and sat across from her. Right after they sat down Vera reengaged the shuttle and the hum of the craft's generator signaled all systems go.

After everyone was secured, Beta unbuckled, "Oh my, wait a minute I forgot to give Aaron a hug," and scurried off the shuttle. Viceroy didn't think too much of it knowing people were soft and emotional. Vera flipped the toggle and counted to herself,

‘ten, nine, eight,’ she got up and walked calmly to and then out of the door, ‘three, two, one,’ the door closed, and the shuttle taxied out of the hanger bay leaving him with a stupid look on his face.

“Aaron,” Vera called out, “we’re going to need a ride.”

Aaron stood frozen, unsuspecting, and confused. “What just happened?” he questioned. The shuttle was now flying away rapidly ‘five, four, three, two, one, BOOM!’ The shuttle exploded, rocking the other shuttles in the bay.

“What in the world just happened?!” Aaron yelled.

Beta looked at him and said, “The only thing that could have been done. Either evil takes over your ship or the earth. That’s not an acceptable choice.”

“Never would I have imagined you doing this,” he said in a surprised way.

“Learn from it. While you’re out there, a billion miles from earth, there be another spirit like Viceroy among you?”

Aaron understood, but subconsciously questioned whether he could have done what Vera and Beta did to Viceroy.

After a little time for Aaron to fully grasp what had been done, he asked, “As a matter of historical value, what exactly happened here?”

Vera, looking into Beta’s eyes, then turned back to Aaron and declared, “The prisoner took advantage of the situation, threw Vera off the shuttle, and attempted to escape. Unfortunately, his biometrics didn’t match the registered user’s authority which triggered the self-destruction sequence.”

“You thought this out thoroughly, didn’t you?” Aaron asked.

“You’re welcome,” Beta said.

Aaron felt immensely relieved he hadn’t had to make that decision and decided a couple days R and R for the crew, and himself, to get their heads back in the game would be a good thing. “Number One,” he beckoned, “You deserve a medal and a

few days off. Stand down, enjoy some liberty, I'll take the first watch."

Normally you couldn't have pried Jupiter away from the ship, but he had just invoked a command take over procedure, held a terrorist from access to a nuclear weapon and potentially saved the lives of a couple thousand people, he was ready for a break and maybe some wine and a woman.

Vera and Beta bonded stronger on the flight home. Having something so personal in common now allowed Beta the chance to become unified with another, a concept she long regarded as a sacrifice. Vera may not have been able to give her a family but was sure she could still make her happy. With Viceroy out of the picture, Vera would be free from a dark spirit of doubt. But she had a balance in life that her brother didn't.

They flew all the way home in each other's arms. "I feel I have to hide my emotions," Beta said.

"That must be residual effects of the dark spirit putting doubt in your mind, it is natural, but it is also an answer from something greater than ourselves, that we are merely playing our part. The earth and universe are guiding us, and until now, you have had an exclusive path without the fear of failure. I am a reminder that when darkness comes you can create your own light or succumb to it and face your fears."

Staring into Beta's eyes, made everything in Vera's world right. She barely gave her brother another thought.

## Chapter Eleven

Two years in space marked the day the Infinity's crew completed its registration of Neptune. Every square inch scanned and recorded in their meta scale cubes. The ship's mainframe computer systems had been uploading and storing data for two years and each year the ship's power grew in kind.

Music was playing on the bridge, in the galleys, in the cabins and all throughout the ship. Celebrating their second anniversary in space was a special event and creating an atmosphere of jubilant success was a psychological gold star. The next aspect of the mission would involve analyzing the Kuiper Belt for possible future mining operations.

Aaron told Jupiter, "We head to the Kuiper Belt, I'm a little excited to find out the possible benefits of mining it. Imagine, elements as old as the solar system itself will be examined for the first time."

"Ok, how are we going get close enough without getting torn apart?" Jupiter asked.

"We gain speed beside it and slip right into the stream. Going with the traffic we can suck up debris, grind it up, spit it back out and go." Aaron said.

Jupiter asked, "What are we looking for?"

"Name it, gold, copper, magnesium, lithium, anything there may be a market for and in the process, take and use anything we can. Who knows, we may stumble upon a process or system that allows us to resupply vital elements or minerals indefinitely."

"Are these little junkets to the nether regions really that beneficial?" Jupiter asked.

"Absolutely, do you recall our tour around the asteroid belt?"

"Yes."

"Waste of time?"

“I’m not sure I know where you’re heading with this.”

Aaron nodded, “Exactly, it didn’t seem like much, it certainly didn’t appear to be groundbreaking research, but what it did do is completely map it, determine its mineral value, combined mass, speed, identify potential hazards. Our research will give our people back home options. Perhaps they can develop drones to travel with the asteroids to bust them up and make gravel out of rock which could reduce the risk of a strike on earth.”

“Our main goal is to find other places that could support life, right?” Jupiter said,

“Of course, but if we set out with blinders to only our main mission, the crew will kill themselves out of boredom. We must stay busy, hell, we may never find another place like home or other intelligent life. We should keep all our scientific prowess in the here and now and get as much out of our travels as we can. Number One, you seem distracted, uncommonly unsure. Are you alright? I haven’t said anything new here.”

“I am, I mean I know. After going back to earth, I broke down and visited a tavern, found a woman, now my head is not right. I’m having a hard time concentrating.”

“Do you want me to ask Maria to talk with you, she’s good with emotional and psychological things.”

“Hell no,” he said with humility, “it was just a just a fling, it’ll pass.”

Aaron was no expert but even he could tell the signs of love and loneliness. Later, when he and Maria were alone, he said, “Number One wouldn’t appreciate us talking about him, but I have him busy with reactor drills, so he shouldn’t be able to tell we’re conspiring against him.”

“Why would we? She asked.

“I think he fell in love with a girl back on earth and it’s distracting him.”

“If that’s true, he only has a few options. He can convince himself he just used her, and she is insignificant, or he can rededicate himself to his work and maybe he could forget, but we know him. He had always been able to deeply dedicate himself to his work because he had never had a relationship, but now that he has, I think he needs it. I think he should find a partner. He’s going to need one sooner or later anyway. We’re not meant to live our lives alone.”

“I’m glad I didn’t try to fix this on my own,” Aaron said.

“I’ll tell you what, how about we bump into each other in the officer’s mess during lunch tomorrow. You have lunch with Jupiter, I’ll have lunch with a ‘friend,’ and we could end up sitting together.”

“You’re sneaky.”

“Yes I am.” Maria replied.

Aaron trusted Jupiter, he looked at him as a little brother, which was his first thoughts on why he called him Number One, as in number one friend or buddy, but was able to disguise it to the crew as a reference to 1<sup>st</sup> Mate.

Back in New Providence, an issue has arisen they’ve not had to deal with before. In their history they’ve never had an instance of greed or corruption to an extent the high counsel had to intervene. With the expansion of the city came increased services and needs, areas of management had to be increased then divided to account for all the people’s and city’s needs. One such manager has caught himself in a precarious position, now the council has been called to advise.

“What is the summary of your complaints?” Miranda asked a small group waiting outside the courthouse.

A spokesperson stepped forward, “My name is Jackson, we didn’t want to create any problems, but we are all building businesses and homes in the new expansion. All the permits and registrations have been completed, but the material manager said material won’t be ready for 6 months.”

“How much material and how long have the request for material been in?”

“It’s mostly rock from Riverrun quarry that we can’t get, it’s been on requisitioned since September.”

Joseph was looking over the mining and shipping invoices and things weren’t adding up. “Excuse me,” he pardoned himself, “can I see you for a moment?” He asked Miranda. “It looks like there’s plenty of stone coming from the quarry, but I don’t see it going anywhere.”

Miranda has seen something similar in a much smaller and less significant way and said, “I hope I’m wrong, but we need to audit and question the material managers.”

She stepped back over to Jackson, “Friends, please go home and we’ll get to the bottom of this and let you know as soon as we can that the problem’s been resolved.”

They had faith in Miranda and trusted her, they left without argument, confident their grievance would receive justice.

She said to Joseph, “I don’t even have to talk with them to know they are using the material for something else. I’m just afraid we may find much more than just some stone.

They left city hall and could feel the managers at the city planning office leaving. “Where are they going,” she asked.

“I think they know we are coming and are trying to evade us,” Joseph replied.

“Beta,” Miranda called, “can you send assistance, we have runners from our investigation.”

The managers knew better. They’ve been on the other side of the council for smaller issues before and found themselves in humbled judgement. A squad intercepted them near the bank. “Going somewhere fellows?” Joseph asked.

“Yes, we have business in the bank.” Mr. Poole said.

“Your Business can wait,” Miranda said.

“I’m sorry, this is very important, we can meet with you after.”

“As of immediately, your charter as city manager is temporarily revoked. Now you have plenty of time to return to city hall so we can discuss why you are avoiding us.”

They knew they’d been caught and attempted a defensive posture until the squad Beta sent pulled out a sonar blaster. The fear of 180 decibels pacified their demeanor and they agreed to return to city hall without incident.

Sitting across the table from them, Miranda and Joseph stared into their eyes, read their minds, and had all the facts they needed for a summary trial in front of the full council.

Trials of counsel were extremely rare. They were also very quick. All the information necessary for a decision was right in front of them, no debate, no argument, no cross examination, no disputes. Regardless of the circumstance, the truth always came out. Miranda, Joseph, Aurora, Phillippe, and Beta were the council. Each having exceptional abilities to read minds was the city’s largest crime deterrent, the consensus was, it was impossible to hide a crime, so people just didn’t commit crimes.

Beta began “Our entire system of governance and social development depends on just a few factors, and trust being one of them is paramount. You have been entrusted with public domain and have failed to uphold the integrity of your position. I will lay out the charges before you, you will be allowed a plea resolution, then we will determine the consequence. Before I begin, have you any other information you wish us to consider?”

Mr. Poole was the main principle in the case, but his three supervisors were on the hook for their participation.

“I have nothing to add in my behalf, however, I hope the council can find lenience in my affiliate’s participation.”

“Noted,” she said. “You were entrusted the management of all public materials, to issue and dispersed in a manner consistent with charter protocol. You requisitioned material to be



used in the expansion of the city and instead you transferred the material to the requisitioning builders you provided to friends, for unauthorized personal construction projects. It was one thing to introduce our very generous system to corruption and greed, it is beyond mercy to allow the innocent to suffer directly as a result. Though it is admirable you wish to save your partners from retribution, this council will make its decisions with the goal of preventing further incidents of this nature.” Beta turned to her council, reading each of their thoughts. “The council has made our determination. One, you are banned from assuming any position of public trust and you will relocate outside the city limits of New Providence. Two; all materials acquired and subsequently issued unlawfully, must be returned to the office of management by week’s end at the labor and cost of the recipients of said gains. Three, your partners will be removed from their posts and reassigned to one of the crews working on the plaintiff’s construction. I suggest you work hard, and when your assignment is over the council will reevaluate your clearance. Case dismissed.

The three supervisors left the courtroom with Mr. Poole right behind them, then Mr. Poole turned to address Beta one last time. He wasn’t shocked to lose his job but to make him move seemed vindictive, so he asked, “Excuse me high council, is it really necessary for me to move?”

“Sir,” Beta said, “You have dishonored yourself and your family. You will need to enroll for the very services you once had responsibility to the public over. Your name and photo will be a part of our history. I would think that moving would be a blessing for you, a chance to make a new start. You can rebuild your life outside the city, the city that gave you so much, the city you let down, and if that is all, good day.”

He left with his head down, ashamed, confused and a little afraid. He understood what he did was wrong but didn’t think it was that bad. “No one was harmed,” he thought, ‘I could have made some sort of restitution, what am I going to tell my family.’

Beta could see that he didn't understand the big picture and wondered if the populous would.

"Folks we have an issue," Beta addressed her team. "It is inevitable that flawed people will do flawed things, and we are all flawed to some extent. However, I hadn't expected this level of corruption in our young history so soon. Historically, these social tests arise when groups reach critical mass and demand exceeds supply. We must all be vigilant and begin assessing all of our service organizations, supply resources and outlets, and identify weaknesses in our system."

"We will need help," Miranda said.

"How about appointing unidentified auditing teams to keep track of the managers?" Phillippe asked.

"That won't work, everyone would be able to tell who's doing what, whose thinking what," Miranda said.

Beta said, "They would know, which is what makes this entire case puzzling. Anyone near this case would have had to know what was going on, yet it went on anyway. The people became complacent and blind to the powers our managers had been given. The best thing we can do right now is get people involved, make examples of unacceptable behavior, and reinforce our checks and balances."

"I'll take farming and textiles," Aurora said.

Joseph volunteered for utilities, Miranda offered to follow up with the office of management and planning, leaving Phillippe to oversee housing. Miranda started by contacting Jackson and the other plaintiffs to update them on the case. She appointed a new manager and supervisors from the pool of people in the office of management. "By accepting these positions, you understand your authority is a privilege, granted to you by the people you serve." Knowing what happened to Mr. Poole for breaking that trust was more effective than any words Miranda could have said so she left, confident that people understood their duty.

Later that evening, Joseph asked Miranda, “Did you catch what Phillippe was thinking when Beta banished Mr. Poole?”

“No, I was concentrating on the look on his face as Beta told him what a piece of work he was. What was Phillippe thinking?”

“He wanted to relocate him to the jungles in Columbia all by himself.”

“Why?” she laughed.

“El Gato.” Joseph looked at her, she looked confused. “El Gato, that’s what they called the leopard that menaced their village. Without all the people around anymore, he’s sure to take over the village.”

“Yeah, that is funny. I’ll vote for El Gato too. Maybe you can banish your barber along with him.” Miranda mumbled.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

Nothing was wrong with his hair, but she knew Joseph would now obsess about it till he could find a mirror. “Oo, you’re mean,” he said.

Miranda had occasional spells where she embraced her inner sarcasm, that which made Angel adore her so. When she was comfortable and happy, she was a wit to be around, a trait Aurora never understood, and Joseph would now be forced to deal with. She laughed.

Before Aurora left, Beta pulled her aside. “I know this is something Miranda may be better suited for, but I would like you to head a mission to assess civil participation, what are the people doing. As our society grows the demand increases yet the supply doesn’t appear to be able to catch up. We have the people, so we need to find out why, before making changes to our system.”

“What kind of changes?” she asked.

Beta replied, “It’s too early to get into that, first things first.”

“Ok, I’ll recruit some help and get right on it.”

“Thanks, I want to call a meeting in one week, can you complete your assessment by then?”

Beta returned home expecting to find Vera, but the house was empty. She called out to her, “Where are you?”

“I’m at the market, I was going to bake a cake, but we didn’t have the ingredients, apparently, neither did the market. I’m coming home.”

When she returned, Vera could tell something was bothering Beta, “What’s wrong?”

“It looks like we’ve outgrown our enterprise. More people in need and less provisions to provide.”

“How can we need more? Two thousand people have left, we should be needing less.”

“Yes, but that’s also two thousand people no longer providing.”

Vera said, “It’s just a cake.”

“A cake today, tomorrow could be water, electricity or food.” Beta continued, “I’ve asked Aurora to investigate, but I have a feeling we’re going to have to incorporate a value-based credit system. If my hunch is correct, we have some old-world human issues coming back to haunt us.”

“Is there anything I can do?”

“Yes, you can smile. You look a little stressed, are you ok?” Beta asked.

Vera felt conflicted about her brother, she also knew Beta could see inside of her, “I am relieved Viceroy’s gone, I feel safer, but in a strange way I feel lonelier.”

“What if we tried to find your parents?”

“I’ve been scouring the land for years. Because of Viceroy, I think my parents were able to hypnotize themselves that they never had children. I can’t find any trace.”

Beta felt her pain and knew one thing that could help. She took Vera’s hand, “Do you love me?”

“You know I do.”

“And you know I love you?”

She watched her lips move as she spoke, admired the clear silky complexion of her skin, then looked in Beta’s eyes for confirmation of her attraction. “I do,” she said, “I am so very lucky.”

“Then you know you will never be alone. Whether we find your parents or not, I will always be here for you.” The dark and the light, the yin and yang, the balance so loosely referred to was evident in their relationship. Beta felt it in a mystically spiritual way, Vera felt it more in a lustful selfish way. In either case, their chemistry was undeniable.

Back on the Infinity, many of the crew had paired themselves. Some had already wed and conceived prompting innovations and services to the crew’s work and private accommodations. Additional help from the settlers would come with great value. Nannies and teachers grew out of need and the crew and settlers now had a viable working relationship.

Since Aaron was filled with the power of his Tricentennial spirit, he had little interest in relationships, but now that he’s a normal person, he’s finally able to commit to a relationship. Much to Maria’s dismay, he may have been able to show affection but didn’t have a very good concept of romance. Maria on the other hand, had hot passion flowing through her veins that would go unsatisfied if she couldn’t make him see.

“When will we start a family?” She asked. “You said you’d like children someday,”

“I do. I just wanted to wait till the stress of getting the mission underway subsided.”

She said, “It’s been two years.”

“I know, I’m sorry, I’ve just been so busy I failed you here at home. How can I make it up to you?”

“We have a couple thousand people aboard who need a captain, I understand that we also have dozens and dozens of competent people to keep things running. You may be the best,

but the ship can get by with just being good every now and then. I'm a woman with needs and you're more than a captain. I'm betting you'll figure it out," she said, patting him on his chest as she turned and walked away.

Aaron got the message loud and clear. He stopped at a greenhouse in sector 8-A on his way back to his cabin and picked up some roses. He did understand the emotional significance firsthand but remembered some advice Beta gave him back when Miranda and he were together, that women find flowers romantic.

His alone time with Maria was special to him because it made him feel successful in relationships, but she knew that spark wasn't there, not the way it was with Phillippe. She realized the passion she desired would have to be supplemented with her own drive and imagination, so after he returned home with flowers, she snuck back to her bedroom and put on some of the skimpiest lingerie Aaron had ever seen.

"The flowers are beautiful, thank you," she said.

"Wow," he replied, referring to her attire and sexual exposure, "Maybe I should have brought you flowers more often."

"Maybe you should have."

There intimacy was a little awkward, but Maria was convinced that if she worked harder at it with him, she could make a lover out of him.

Miranda, Joseph, Phillippe, and Aurora were no strangers to temptations of the flesh either. As Beta and Vera's emotions grew, the rest of the group felt an increase in the forces surrounding their lives. Increased desires, more frequent thoughts of their partners, a thirst for life dominated the situations they found themselves in. They were unaware of a connection and unless they were all together as these emotions were present, they may have never drawn that conclusion. Beta knew the connection; she felt the spirit move through the city and marveled at its influence. But the gang was due to meet in a week and if

Vera were present, Beta knew those emotions would be high enough to see the difference in her peers.

The benefits would battle the disadvantages of emotional connections and mind reading abilities when they got together, and Beta knew it would be time for her to address it.

## Chapter Twelve

Aurora brought her team to the courthouse for the briefing. They had worked diligently to scan the entire city's population and though average people were usually not invited to these council meetings; their testimony brought a human factor to the council's oversight. Miranda and Joseph were next to show. Entering the courthouse, Joseph asked Aurora, "I understand we face issues with living conditions and wonder why Beta didn't ask our help in the assessment also?"

"I don't know," Aurora replied, "she did say this was more up Miranda's alley than mine but tasked me anyway, I guess you'll have to ask Beta."

Phillippe said, "I could have provided an assessment to the farming if that was needed."

The first thing they noticed when Beta walked in was that she walked in with Vera in hand.

"Let me start by saying," Beta announced, "I make no apologies for my emotions. I'm in love, get over it. Second, and the reason we're here, you all have some idea of the unrest within the community. Before Aurora gives us her assessment, go ahead, and get out any burning questions you have. Miranda, you're first."

They all took their seats. "I'm a little reluctant to openly discuss personal things in the company of people I'm unfamiliar with."

Aurora interrupted, "My team is very professional, the best of the best, and I trust their dedication to our positions totally."

Miranda looked over at them to get a vibe and felt enough reverence to continue. "Ok, apologizing to the guests, why were Joseph and I excluded from the assessment? We are obviously the most qualified."



Beta replied, “Exactly. We needed the people to be unsuspecting. If you showed up invading people’s minds, word would spread, and they might have avoided you.”

“Thanks, that makes sense, but why weren’t we briefed?” Miranda asked.

“Short version, I figured to clarify if asked but didn’t see the need to protect everyone’s feelings.”

Miranda caught the underlying implication referring to maturity and quickly dropped the issue.

“Joseph, your next,” Beta said.

“Does this have anything to do with our Newfoundland and Columbia citizens?”

“I’ll let Aurora cover that in her brief. I can tell you that we, as a society, are not producing enough of various things to equitably provide to everyone.”

“Phillippe, your turn.”

“Nothing.”

“Ok then,” Beta said, “Aurora, the floor is yours.”

“We split the city into four quarters and found the same results in are four. Our new citizens from north and south are having trouble adjusting to our honor system and contribution incentives. Mostly, we believe, because no one wants to suggest they participate in anything due to them being ‘guests.’ As a result, our guests still feel like outsiders and many of our local citizens have become lazy, not wanting to work for other people that could work for themselves. Seeing the benefits, and not having to provide any effort, has begun to influence the masses.”

Beta asked Aurora’s team if they had anything to add.

One spoke up, “Yes, we noticed this phenomenon primarily in the younger generation. People with families and children seemed to try a little harder to make up any differences but the younger ones didn’t feel responsible for our guests or themselves, if anything, they resented outsiders taking their provisions and accommodations.”

“Thank you. You have done well. I am afraid my concerns have been confirmed. We have some work to do,” Beta said.

Miranda asked, “What’s the plan now?”

Vera asked, looking at Beta, “May I add to the conversation?”

“Of course.”

“We have always assumed people would act the way we desired them to act out of respect and desire to please the spirits of the light. As demigods go, you are too nice. You bend over backwards to please your people and require very little from them. I think we should be more aggressive and demanding.”

Aurora didn’t quite see it so bluntly even though she had a rooted concept of the strong prevailing over the weak, “As a society shouldn’t we be able to work together rather than for some one?”

Beta supported Vera by saying, “Yes, we should work together, and if someone can’t work, we’ll have to carry them. What I think she means is that we shouldn’t have to carry people that can work.”

“Well, that makes sense,” Aurora said, “should we assign them tasks?”

Beta said, “No, they are going to have to want to participate if this is going to work. If we try to force a behavior, rebellion is certain, but if we establish a rewards system that encourages participation people will find it harder to complain about not getting something that they didn’t earn but should have. I want everyone to think about a value-based system where contributions equate to rewards and provide me with suggestions. We’ll meet again after everyone can provide some input. That includes you,” addressing Aurora’s team.

After they left, Joseph mentioned to Miranda, “I know what the guests from north and south are feeling. I feel a little out of place here myself.”

“You are definitely where you’re supposed to be,” Miranda said.

“But it doesn’t feel that way.”

“I think it’s a matter of time. We’ve been here our whole lives, you haven’t. The longer you’re here the more comfortable you’ll become.”

“I know, but that doesn’t change today’s feelings.

“I see what you mean. What if they, or you, had a little more involvement within the system?” she asked.

“That might work,” he said.

“Good, then I say you should be in charge of the welcoming committee and get our new members involved.”

“There you go being sneaky again. You flipped my own inhibitions on me to force me to correct those same inhibitions. Sometimes you scare me.”

She stood up on her toes and gave him a kiss on his cheek. That’s why we make a good team. Hard or easy, we work together for the right things. You belong here, I need you, and I have no doubt you’ll prevail.”

“Thanks, but I still know when I’m being played.”

She simulated playing a violin, as a sarcastic reference ‘cry me a river,’ with a gleam in her eye. He implicated a favor forthcoming by pointing to her and then to himself. “I love you,” he said.

“I know, and you know I love you too.”

“Yes.”

Aurora suddenly felt the attraction of various partnerships. Beta and Vera were feeling each other’s presence, Miranda and Joseph had their personal connection adding to the atmosphere, all of which drove her emotions inward toward Phillippe’s concerns. He stood at the end of the table looking at her as she realized there was a spirit in the room influencing everyone’s behavior. She looked back at Beta, and Beta acknowledged, with a nod, that she had figured it out.

Normally, one of the last to comprehend such complex human experiences, Aurora seems pleased with herself that she had noticed and thought to celebrate by taking advantage of the atmosphere and hurry home with Phillippe to experiment with her desire.

Phillippe was a tool and was ok with the arrangement. He didn't mind letting Aurora be the aggressor, in fact, it was easier for him to react than it was to act.

Beta told Vera, "It has begun. Our passion has fueled the group. Surprisingly, Aurora figured it out, she is aware our close relationship amplifies theirs. Miranda is in rare form as well and Joseph and Phillippe are servants to their goddesses. Just thinking about it excites me."

Vera responded by taking Beta's hand and placing it on her heart, "Can you tell how it affects me?"

They left the way they came, holding hands.

With materials now being acquired and delivered for the construction of the expansion project, there was a shortage of people to build and do the work. This was an opportunity for Beta as she planned her compensatory economic system to replace their existing social system. Rather than being based solely on the people's needs, it would be based on their value to the community with a base line for necessity. Sickness was extremely rare, everyone was literate and capable, there were no major obstacles to impede progress except for work availability, and that was being provided with the expansion.

"I'll be ready to lay out the plan in a couple days," Beta told Vera. "The next phase will be how to apply the credits and the final phase will be the value assigned to each category."

"Why did you save that for last?"

"There is just too much involved with assessing values. Everyone sees things different, so, we'll have to get together again and negotiate these values."

"What are you going to do about the corruption issue?"

“We’ll have to monitor our managers. You would think that knowing people can read your mind, would deter someone from such conduct. That just shows you how powerful greed is and makes me wonder if we’d ever be able to overcome it.”

“I don’t think so,” Vera said.

“Why do you say that?”

“It makes me sad to say, but it’s all part of the balance. The hand of darkness held me close to Viceroy, I’ve experienced those feelings and they are powerful. If we hadn’t eliminated Viceroy, I’d hate to think what would have become of me.”

Beta said, “Yes, but you’re not consumed with it anymore, if there’s hope for you, there’s hope for everyone.”

“I may not be controlled by it like my brother, but I still felt it. It bothered me then and bothers me still, when I have those thoughts, I cling to you tighter.” Reverently looking up at her and said, “You’re the only thing that makes my life worth living.”

“Awe,” she touched her cheek, “it’s not me, it’s the goodness in yourself you choose to share with me that makes you feel that way. The more goodness you share, the better you feel.” Beta, having the ultimate power among the group, surprised herself when she realized or figured something out that she thought should have already been known, and a revelation just came to her as she heard herself talk with Vera. Vera clung to her tighter when she experienced the darkness and Beta clung to Vera more because of the darkness. It was the hidden darkness within Vera that accentuated the brilliance of Beta’s light. “We are meant to be together,” she told her, “that’s why we ended up on the fountain together.”

“But Viceroy ended up on the fountain too?” Vera said.

“Yes, but it was the same dark powers he obsessed with that determined his fate for humanity’s sake. We wouldn’t have been able to do what was needed had it not been for you. It was you who liberated us, you’re the hero.” From a life of worry, fear

and negativity, Vera found herself living a new life of faith, love, and optimism, ironically thanks to a dark spirit.

“You’re too kind, but for the record, it was your love that gave me strength.”

Beta went back to thinking and planning for the governmental changes while Vera brought her a cup of tea.

“Beta said she’s almost done with her proposal and wants us to start thinking about putting a value score to various jobs and services the people do. It looks like people are going to have to earn their keep now,” Miranda told Joseph.

“It’s about time,” he said, “If we couldn’t catch and provide any fish, people wouldn’t serve us in the pub or make any clothes for us, and such. It just makes sense, it’s what we referred to as a fair and just relationship.”

“We’ve never had to before. People were eager to help each other, no one wanted more than their share, doing good was always the right thing to do. I’m not sure what changed but Mr. Poole sure woke us up.”

“I wouldn’t have thought my people to be an influence but maybe not being able to fish or help out had a hand in it.”

“No, I don’t think so. This is deeper, more mysterious, and powerful, I think the dark side of Viceroy might be involved.”

Joseph said, “But he’s gone.”

“Maybe his influence sewed the seed before he left on the mission, maybe Vera still has an unaware and residual influence?”

“I don’t know. I can’t imagine Vera having a negative effect, you see how attracted Beta is to her.”

“I know,” Miranda said, “it’s confusing. In either case, it’s obvious something must be done though. We need structure and what we had doesn’t seem to be working any more. Try not to think about a possible link between Vera and the corruption around Beta. She’ll be able to pick up on it right away. In fact,

she may already know what we're talking about depending on how busy she is."

"In that case, let's talk about this value system."

They sat on the sofa sipping on wine and took notes. Different responsibilities required different values, some greater than others. Services people provided had various values as well. "You know," Miranda said, "with different values to jobs, people are now going to want to choose the job."

"What did they do before?"

"There are three basic categories of spirits that people associate themselves with, earthly spirits, human and animal spirits, and science and technology spirits. Depending on their orientation, it was suggested that they work in certain fields depending on the community's needs."

"How does a science spirit work?" Joseph asked.

"I don't know. I'm filled with the spirit of the soul, apparently knowledge has its own kind of soul."

"What if we had different categories of credit. One for services, one for public responsibility, and one for basic welfare?" Joseph asked. They would brainstorm together for the next few hours till the wine altered their interest, and Joseph's magnetism got the best of Miranda.

Aurora and Phillippe were also brainstorming a credit system. "Back in Columbia our elders had first choice at anything that would have been divided or issued, the providers would be next, then everyone else. I think we should consider this."

"I agree with honoring all the ones that came before us, but everyone has to play a part providing. Maybe the work and provisions no one wants to do can be given additional credit? As an incentive." Aurora suggested.

"That's good, I like that," Phillippe responded. Aurora and Phillippe worked on their proposals all night as well.

The city may have lost 5% of their population to the space program but the eighth generation was encouraged to make up for

it by increasing their family's birth rate. Additional consideration to expecting families was also factored into the value base system, starting with the chosen ones. Aurora and Miranda announced their pregnancies one day apart.

"Can you feel your powers grow?" Beta asked Aurora.

"I can, is that because of the baby?" Aurora asked.

"It is. I feel it too. Even my powers feel stronger, and I can sense it funneling to him," Beta said.

"What about Miranda?"

"Her too, but she's going to have a girl."

All the fuss they made of their maternal blessing vanished when they sat at the table in the courthouse to discuss their proposals. Sixteen hours of concerns and lobbying brought them to a consensus. The high council would appoint a governor to preside over the city for a period of five years, each would choose their own supervisors and managers. The high council would retain the authority to replace them through committee or extend their appointment. Occupations would fall into three different categories with three levels of compensation. Credit would be issued that would be used as currency for the payment of services and goods, and a minimum service requirement established as a supplement to those in need. Enforcement of policy and public trust would be the one agency under the governorship to monitor and control the program and the council will oversee their performance.

By the time the meeting adjourned, everyone was worn out yet left the meeting enthusiastic that the system had potential. Each pair returned to their homes confident they were on the right track.

Back on the Infinity, the crew was dealing with a similar situation. The crew had slowly settled into a professional and personal relationship where conflicts of interest became an issue. When their duties conflicted with their personal commitments, a choice had to be made and for the most part, professionalism



trumped the personal. However, in doing so, the personal issues went unresolved causing even greater issues that affected their jobs.

A security guard rushed into a space on fire thinking his wife was inside and succumb to toxic fumes. Another crew member attacked a shipmate he thought was making an advance on his wife. Three or four cases of infidelity threatened the ship's safety as some crew members were neglecting their duties to find time to sneak away.

“Number One,” Aaron asked, “can you get with the Personnel Officer and develop some policy governing crew behavior and job assignments, regarding relationships, and include training.”

Jupiter thought it odd that he always referred to Maria by name, but lately he's been referring to her by title. 'He's probably trying to follow his own advice.'

As the ship entered interstellar space out past the Kuiper Belt on the way to the Oord cloud, the crew began a cryo-sleep crew shift. Some of the crew had been frozen in suspended animation and was now their turn to take the watch. The cryochambers were thought essential to preserve and extend the lives of critical crew personnel. Taking many years to go from one solar system to the next, much less one sector to the next, being able to extend the crew's life would greatly help to extend the mission's capabilities. The ability to reproduce, teach and train their children as replacements was a concept fine on paper but unproven and not worth the risk. Besides, many of the crew thought it worth wild to have a chance to see the secrets of the universe before they die of boredom on such long transits.

“Maria,” Aaron asked, “are you ready for some cryo-sleep?”

“Honey, I'm going to have to wait.”

“Why?” he asked.

She took his hand and put it on her belly. “Are you kidding?” He said excitedly.

She thought he might be upset but his excitement gave her hope that their relationship was more than professional circumstance and a matter of checks and balances.

Though Aaron wasn’t the romantic type per say, his love was real non the less. It was more like the love of a parent, which would ultimately give Maria confidence in their relationship. She would sacrifice the young lover’s dreams for the responsible partnership she received.

“Now we’ll have to wait and decide when, or even if, we want the child to undergo cryo-sleep.”

Just then, “Captain to the Bridge,” was heard over the intercom.

“This is the Captain,” he said as he made his way to the tram. “I’m in route, what’s is it?”

“Captain, we’re passing through a field of unknown matter that’s having an effect to our shields.”

By the time he made it to the bridge, it was clear that half of the forward shield was worn away. “This is the Captain, I have the con,” he proclaimed. “Reduce speed, all engines stop, engage bow thruster,” over the intercom he warned the crew, “all hand brace for stabilization.” He then commanded the Lee Helm, “In five, all engines reverse one third, five, four, three, two, one, engage.”

“What is it, Captain?” the Officer of the Deck asked.

“I’m not positive, but if you look in camera 12, you could see an amber glow and just below that what looked like black sparks.”

“I see it.”

He then asked, “Mr. Swift, what was our top speed before we shut it down?”

“We just reached .05 light speed Captain.”

“Tell me when we get to .04.” Turning back to the officer of the deck, “OOD, look in camera 12 and see if you still see that anomaly?”

“No sir, the shield appears to be stable again.”

“Folk’s, I think we found our top speed, at .05 light speed even the space dust can shave off the shield.”

“Captain, we’re down to .04 light speed.”

“Very well, maintain speed .04 light speed, all ahead two thirds.” Aaron called Jupiter, “Number One, get your best shield tech and report to the bridge.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” he replied, and arrived at the bridge with Lieutenant Willis within ten minutes.

“Yes Captain,” he said as he approached.

“If you look in camera 12, tell me what you see.”

They looked and Jupiter said, “It looks jagged.”

Lieutenant Willis added, “It looks like it’s been sand blasted.”

“That doesn’t make sense,” Jupiter said.

The Lieutenant agreed, “The shield is harder than diamond.”

“When we reach .05 light speed and you could see it being eaten away,” Aaron said.

“So now what?” Jupiter asked.

“Can we build it back up and strengthen it?”

“Yes sir, but we’ll have to use a shielded robotic applicator. If at this speed the shield can be damaged, you can only imagine what would happen to something less protected.”

Jupiter and the lieutenant left the bridge and discussed their plans to strengthen the shield all the way back to engineering.

The industrial sector of the ship was now overwhelmed with refinery and machine production. Lack of technicians was holding up the repairs and replacement of the generator and associated equipment. The metallurgist also reported shortages of

material. “I thought we were prepared contingencies,” Lieutenant Willis said.

Jupiter said, “Being flexible was part of our plan and I suspect leaving the solar system without mining for the metals needed to sustain our unforeseen needs is a lesson well learned. Add this to your debriefing report. My guess is, when we get to the Oort cloud, we’ll be doing a little more mining than originally planned.”

Through the few years of travel, the ship had a couple fires, a water main rupture in the crew laundry room #2, an air quality and oxygen scare in main medical, and about a dozen altercations within the crew. Surprisingly, the settlers had no major issues. They did have one issue that no one had thought of. There were eight separate settlements having little over one hundred people in each, but they didn’t like being separated into little groups and began their own migration. Four of the settlements were abandoned and turned into agricultural centers. As Aaron wrote in his daily journal, “The settlers in East and West Camelot took it upon themselves to relocate to Pacific City completing the reconstruction or settlements. Camelot has now been reclassified as an agriculture area.”

They had no sunrises, sunsets, or monthly lunar cycles, no days, months, or years in the earthly sense. Their calendar consisted of a perpetual clock, digitally clicking away as it was calibrated to the earth’s cycle prior to departure. Every five hundred days a census of the ship and settlement was taken and recorded in the ship’s log. His entries continued, “The 19<sup>th</sup> census rose by 37 with the births of 12 boys and 9 girls for the crew and 6 boys and 10 girls in the settlement.”

Aaron spent a lot of time recording audio files into his journal knowing the historical value if they were to survive and establish a new civilization in the universe, but the emptiness of interstellar space began to give him doubt. He talked with Maria who was now about 50 days away from birth. “I remember

looking out into the night sky and dreaming about going to space. Even doing the math, knowing how far apart these stars really are didn't really sink in until we're here. I'm afraid we'll need about 80 years in cryo-sleep if we expect to see Centauri while we're still young enough to appreciate the accomplishment."

"Once Gali, a reference to Galileo, enters adolescence we should enter the chambers," Maria said.

"I think we should enter when she's out of the toddler stage. That way we can spend nearly the entire transit to the Oort cloud asleep."

"Whatever you decide, I'm ok with, I just don't want Gali to go into cryo-sleep too early, we have never tested it on young children, and I'll be damned if our child becomes that guinea pig."

Aaron rubbed her belly, "Yes dear, I agree."

The following day Aaron met with Jupiter to lay out his plan for taking shifts in cryo-sleep. "Twelve years in the chambers and four years out," he said, "I think that will give us enough down time to ensure we all survive the first major milestone of our journey. After just a few cycles, we'll have additional crew members and can readjust our schedules as needed."

"May I suggest, doubling the guards and technicians on the cryo-deck?" Jupiter said.

"Do you think that's necessary?" Aaron asked.

"One thing I learned from Viceroy is you have to think evil if you want to prevent evil, and if I wanted to sabotage the ship or take it over, I'd prevent the leadership from being able to lead. No one is more vulnerable than when they're in cryo-sleep."

"Good thing we had this talk, I hadn't thought about it. I should have, especially since the Viceroy incident."

"I don't believe we're wired to be skeptical," Jupiter said, "it's not part of our makeup, but after witnessing the little things people have begun having issue with, I've spent a lot of time thinking about the spirits we no longer feel. I don't feel any sense

of earth anymore, even when I listen to the recordings in my relaxation pod. However, Viceroy's negative force still haunts me."

"Ok then," Aaron said, "we'll double the guards and technicians whenever there's an executive officer in chambers. I'd like you and I to be on split alternating shifts as well, where half of each other's time is spent awake together so we can have a proper turnover. Commander Harris, Cort, and Carter should be incorporated with the similar schedules. Have Commander Cort stand first watch."

"Yes sir, I'll draft the schedule and put it in place right away."

Aaron told him, "Thank you, Number One, have a good sleep. By the way, I'm proud to be your shipmate."

Yes sir, it's my honor."

## Chapter Thirteen

The Infinity has been gone for 26 years now; family members separated by the mission have long got over the emotional loss but an interest in their adventures sparked a new movement. Young people flocked two to one toward an interest in science. The movement came to the council unexpectedly and even more so, confusingly. The one spirit no longer actively represented had grown in influence. Earth's influence followed tech and the human spirit trailed.

"I wonder if this is leading somewhere," Miranda asked.

"It is," Beta replied. "Without Aaron being here, the spirit has no representation to focus on and is more fluent."

"But why has my spirit been weakened?"

"I'll bet if you look a little closer, you'll probably find that your powers have increased because less is being shared elsewhere," Beta suggested.

Aurora entered just in time to catch the last half of their conversation, "My powers have increased some. In fact, I'm getting very strong signals of a hurricane forming in the Atlantic."

"How big?"

"Huge, and powerful," she said.

"We're in the path, aren't we?" Beta rhetorically asked.

"Yes, I'm afraid so. It'll make landfall just west of the delta and cut east right over us. I don't think the winds will be more than one hundred miles per hour but once it hits land it's going to slow and drop massive amounts of rain. The people on the western side of the city may have to evacuate to higher ground."

Miranda asked, "When will it get here?"

"Six days. That's not all," Aurora continued.

Beta turned alertly concerned. She could sense Aurora had her Hurricane prediction but didn't see her next prediction coming.

“For about two weeks after the storm, the flooding will cause a breeding nightmare for a new strain of influenza. Mosquitos will devastate livestock and people. We have six days to come up with a vaccine. If Aaron were here, I’d be much less worried,” Aurora admitted.

“Well, we’ll have to get those science craved young ones involved,” Beta mentioned.

“How can we come up with a vaccine before we know anything about the virus?” Miranda asked.

“Good question,” Aurora said, “If we figure it out, I’ll let you know.”

“Maybe we should all evacuate and take a vacation to the Grand Canyon?”

Beta said without hardly thinking, “Damn, that’s an excellent idea.”

“It is?” Miranda responded with surprise.

“It would be if we didn’t have over forty thousand people to think of,” Beta said. “I’m afraid we’ll have to bunker down and get as prepared as we can for dealing with the flu.”

“The good news is,” Beta said, “only about three or four hundred people live below thirty-foot sea level. I think we can find enough room for them until waters recede.”

Two schools and a hospital were all that was needed to house the people evacuating the low-lying levee area that didn’t have family or friends to stay with. By 4 a.m. on day six the wind was up to sixty miles an hour with blistering light rain if you happened to be outside.

“Stay away from the windows on the weather side of the storm,” Sol told Destiny, “flying debris, you know.”

“Yeah, I know, it’s not my first hurricane, and while you’re reminding me to stay away from the windows, I’ll remind you too.”

He laughed, “Yeah, you know I love a good storm.”

Lisa entered the kitchen, “Destiny, can I get your help?”



“Sure, what are we doing?”

“I want to move the mattresses from the back two bedrooms into the spare room up the hall.”

“Are you afraid of the windows breaking?”

“Not really, but the last hurricane that came around had wind and water blast through the soffit, damaged the ceilings and blistered the two back rooms, I don’t want to lose another mattress.”

“I remember now. Wow, that’s been about fifteen years ago,” Destiny said.

“That was Beta’s old room, do you remember her running out soaking wet?”

“No, I must have been in the living room with dad.”

“Probably.” Lisa acknowledged.

The wind began to pick up. They could hear things flying around, banging into the house. Rain got heavier and by 7 a.m. it was still pitch dark outside. The wind whistling through the trees, the dog was whining, hiding in the back bathroom, and cracking sound of tree branches became a musical meme for Destiny who appeared to be humorously defiant of the potential hazards. She snuck up behind Lisa and made a loud mocking noise of the three sounds, “Sweeez-wheee-kack!” and clapped her hands.

“Holy cow! Are you insane?” she yelled. “You scared the hell out of me.”

“Sorry mom,” laughing almost to the point of tears.

Sol saw it coming and cringed right when she clapped her hands. He couldn’t keep his snicker in either.

“I’ll get you back, both of you,” she said walked around the corner before letting herself chuckle a bit.”

By 8 o’clock the wind was up to about eighty miles an hour and river was still doing ok. The flooding was expected after the storm passes and all the rivers dump into the Mississippi. The flood stages for some of the tributaries had already been reached but spill off areas and wetlands were away from populated areas.

By 9 o'clock it was light enough to see trees bent over, debris blowing down the road out front and an occasional unsecured air-taxi and air-car tumble as it blew away in the wind. "Somebody's going to be pissed," Destiny said as she spied out the window.

"Careful sweetheart," Sol said, "the wind will shift after the eye passes."

Sol tried connecting with Aurora and even though she heard his thoughts, the noise at his house was so loud he had a hard time concentrating to understand her replies. "I think she said the eye would be here in a half hour."

"Did she say how fast the wind was?" Lisa asked.

"A hundred, I think."

All of a sudden, a loud crash and the house shook. A large tree branch landed and busted through their roof just off the kitchen between the living room and bedrooms. Wind was swirling though the house, blasting everyone and everything with rain.

"Where the hell did that come from?" Sol shouted. "We don't even have an oak tree in our yard. Grab what you can, Destiny, get the dog, we've got to make it next door to Ms. Henny's."

Everyone was scrambling in the heavy wind and rain. They saw the house being ripped apart bit by bit and knew they were in a race to get out.

Destiny cried out, "I can't make it to the back to get Buster!"

Sol yelled, "Ok, stay close to Mom, hold on to each other's clothes real tight, stay low and run to Ms. Henny's, I'll get the dog."

They busted out the back door holding each other's hands and ran toward the neighbor's house. Barely being able to see, they made it halfway when their wet hands slipped, and Lisa fell to the ground. Lisa was 95 years old, still with a spring in her step

but by no means able to weather a hundred-mile-an-hour wind. Destiny reached down and got a good hold of her dress from the back and helped get her back on her feet. They made it to Ms. Henny's and let themselves in. She knew Ms. Henny wouldn't be able to hear a knock over the storm and who would have time to wait at the door in a hurricane.

Sol climbed through the branches of that rather large limb and made it back to the bathroom where the dog was. He feared the worst but to his surprise the dog was in the bathtub looking up at him as if to say, 'where have you been?' He grabbed Buster, a terrier breed of sorts, and stumbled back through the branches and out the door. He no sooner stepped outside than the whole front side of the house blew out and flew across the yard. Lisa saw him coming through the laundry room door and opened it just as a large gust of wind carrying a gallon of rainwater pounded her right in the face.

For the first time in years, Destiny heard her mom cuss. "Son of a bitch," she hollered." It would have been hilarious if the entire scenario weren't so scary.

Ms. Henny was Lisa's age and lived alone with her two cats. Buster was so shaken; he paid the cats no attention whatsoever. "We're getting too old for this crap," Ms. Henny said.

"Thanks for letting us crash into your house, literally," Sol said.

"You, poor things. I've got some blankets in a closet at the end of the hall."

After having his house destroyed around him, Sol remained vigilant throughout the remainder of the storm. The eye came and went, and the wind shifted to the east. All he could think about was five more hours of pounding wind and rain. "Whose house do we run to next if the sky falls on us again?" he said with a fake laugh.

The back side of the storm came upon them quickly and with maximum intensity. Anything not tied down ended up rolling and blowing away in the wind. Debris became flying damage, and the water began to rise. Creeks and rivers to the north of the city rose and the speed of the rushing water barreled over edges of the bridge and began washing the streets and land away. Though the wind was only a category two, the rising water, and as slow as it was going, was the threat they feared.

While Sol and Lisa nearly gave themselves to the first half of the storm, Beta and Vera joined mental forces to calculate their next move. In joining forces, their combined powers had a much stronger influence on the group's power. "Aurora, Phillippe," Beta projected, "concentrate together with all you have to force the barometric pressure in the storm to raise."

Suddenly, it was like a light going off, "If the earth can communicate with us, why can't we reciprocate, and manipulate earth?" She asked.

"It could work," Phillippe said, "let's give it a shot." Aurora and Phillippe closed their eyes, held each other's hands, and concentrated on the storm. With Beta, Vera, Aurora, and Phillippe all invoking their powers together to increase the barometric pressure within the storm, the eye of the storm began to grow.

"It's working," Aurora said, "the pressure's rising, it's up to 940, 945, 950, concentrate."

"Keep going, it's working," Beta said.

The realization that their powers were truly connected to the earth, and could influence it, was a spiritual revelation. Until now, they sat back and listened to the earth. It never dawned on them that they could command the earth to act.

Within ten minutes of intense fellowship, the heart of the hurricane began to grow and caused it to break up and dissipate on demand. "Had we known we could have done this in advance,

we could have saved so many people, so much trouble, and mom and dad would still have their house,” Aurora said.

“What can we do about the flooding?” Phillippe asked.

Beta replied, “Put your minds and powers together and give it a go. Try to talk the tides to recede and open a channel to the sea.”

Aurora said, “I won’t hurt to try, if it helps at all, we should try.”

Again, they put their minds together and imagined the tide going out. The eye had already broken up, no more rotation, the storm had disbanded. Now the tide was rushing back out to sea and the rivers were able to dump all that excess rainfall out away from the levees.

Revelations abound reflecting on the storm. “We put our powers together and managed to control nature,” Aurora told Phillippe. “What level of superhuman abilities does that constitute? Are we angels, gods, magicians, or wizards?”

“I think we’re more like prophets of the spirit of the earth,” Phillippe said.

“You may be right. So, what would our responsibility be and to whom would we be responsible to?” Miranda asked.

Beta stepped in, “You are neither. Not a prophet, nor a wizard. The spirits we serve are a living embodiment of the world and universe in which we live. In ten thousand years, everyone may have abilities like ours. It’s evolutionary. Our responsibility lies with the spirit.”

Weeks would go by, repairs to damaged homes and business took a lot of time and resources, but eventually life got back to some level of normalcy. Discussions resumed about the expansion, continued evaluation of the people’s economic and social affairs provided insight to their plans to institute a new value based governmental system.

“I’m sorry Beta,” Vera softly said, “I feel responsible for the recent examples of misconduct.”

“How could you be responsible?”

“The greed involved in Mr. Poole’s conduct was an obvious result of the negative forces Viceroy brought into the world.”

“We can’t blame Viceroy, it was the dark spirit that chose him, and it’s certainly not your fault. The dark spirit is part of the forces in nature, good or bad, it’s something that has always been. We have to live with it and deal with,” Beta said.

Even with all her powers, Beta had a hard time reading Vera. She could tell what everyone else was thinking but for some reason, Vera seemed to be the exception, and that increased her desire for her. She was compelled to protect Vera as if she were her other half. Vera was having a momentary experience with guilt and remorse so Beta left Miranda in charge of the compensation discussions while she attended to Vera’s strife.

Time passed for what seemed like forever before they finally found a little peace. The expansion to the north doubled New Providence’s geography. The last two generations were still trying to increase the population of the present generation.

As interesting as things in New Providence became, the Infinity was passing through vast and void pockets of nothingness. Deep in the vastness of space between the Kuiper Belt and the Oort cloud, the Infinity was travelling way to fast to maneuver around a small black planet. It was an extremely dense object with the gravity one thousand times stronger than the ship’s neutron core. The object appeared so rapidly the crew barely had time to react. Aaron’s stateroom lights came on, an audible ping rung throughout the ship and the emergency lighting kicked in to save more power for propulsion.

Aaron jumped out of bed and ran to the elevator that went from his stateroom straight up to the Bridge.

“Captains on the bridge,” the Petty Officer of the Watch called out.

“Commander Harris, I’ll take the watch,” Aaron said.

“This is Commander Harris,” he stoutly stated, “the Captain has the con.”

“This is the captain; I have the con. Navigator, we have to change course immediately, what’s your suggestion.” The captain asked.

“Captain, it’s gravity is pulling harder than we can push.”

Aaron asked, “Is our angle of approach high enough to just get slung around?”

The navigator looked at him and paused, “But we’ll be going .06 light speed by the point of release. Can we keep the ship together at that speed? We don’t know.”

Aaron turned back to Commander Harris, “We need to convert all available power to maneuverability,” then he addressed the Reactor Room, “Reactor room this is the captain, shut all systems down except class G systems.” By now, Jupiter’s number one reported to the bridge.

“Captain, Ensign Show, Reactor Room one reporting for duty,” he said standing frozen in military salute.

Aaron was impressed with him; he thought his number one did a good job choosing his own number one. “At ease, how much gravitational differential will we gain by putting our core into Belveris animation?”

“It will lessen 11 percent of the force and if we shut it down rapidly, we can kick ourselves out of the gripe. That’s our only chance, I like that call sir, but I think we have to hurry; our speed is increasing.”

“Lee Helm, all engines stop. Reactor Room, disengage Belveris on my mark, five, four, three, two, one, engage.” On those commands the ship jumped and gravitational force from the black planet pulled everyone to the floor. Only the strong were able to get up and move around. The ship shook for three very long minutes with water pipes bursting, the sound of the ship seemingly being split apart had everyone praying to gods they’ve

never known. All the power from the core, for the past three minutes or so, was building up and stored for a pulsar like blast.

“When we reach its farthest point of influence, we blast ourselves out of orbit. Navigator, take the countdown,”

“Aye, aye, Captain.” About a minute or so passed, “Standby to engage Belveris, three, two, one, engage.”

An ominous pause had them worrying and suddenly, like a rocket to the moon, a mind deafening boom rang out and the thrust from the stored-up energy being released kicked them right out of the black planet’s gravity. There was a lot of joy on the bridge realizing they would not be sucked into a gravitational death, but now they were travelling faster than their shield could withstand.

“Hurry Number One,” the captain called down to the Reactor Room. We’ve got to regain control and slow down, we only have a few minutes.” He then instructed the Navigator, “rotate the ship every five minutes 15 degrees while we are traveling faster than .04.”

The harrowing experience caught everyone off guard. After power was restored and the ship’s speed was back under control, they were thrown into a different course. As they worked to get back onto the original course, they had to develop a way to detect these black planets.

Aaron sat back in his cabin that evening with Maria and discussed the harrowing experience. He then wrote into the ship log. Maria laid down in the bedroom and waited while Aaron finished a glass of brandy and wrote in his private journal, “The ship and all on board nearly crashed into a planet. The deeper I go, the less I know. At what point am I not qualified? Am I going to be the one that take two thousand people to space to be buried?”

Maria could feel every heartbeat as he struggled to maintain composure. He felt so close to losing his crew twice it had begun eating at him. “Maria, what am I going to tell earth. I have to send them an update.”



“Tell them we survived. Describe the planet, send them the digital data, but please, don’t scare them,” she said.

“The crew of the Infinity managed to outmaneuver the gravitational pull of a new class of planet. This event happened on day 18,864 since leaving earth. We will retransmit near the 25,000 days mark. Best wishes from space. Digital files attached.” This transmission won’t reach earth for another thirty years.

The crew had a real scare, but nobody bothered to tell the settlers what was going on. Right after his brandy, Aaron was on his way to his bedroom when Maria rushed out into the common room. “We forgot to tell the settlers what was going on. Their power went out and the ship began to shake. That’s all they knew. They must be scared to death.”

Right about then Aaron knew he was overwhelmed. ‘How could I have forgotten,’ was all he could think of. Of course, their lights had already come back on when the ship stabilized but the first word they received came from Maria. “Greeting citizens. There is no doubt you have felt a dramatic disturbance lately but there is no further reason to worry. We have made all the necessary corrections needed to prevent future events of this nature. Channel 4 will have historical data available for this and all events while we are deployed. Please tune in to channel 4 for continued updates.”

“Thank you. How well do you think that was received?” Aaron asked.

“We’ll see by tomorrow morning,” she said.

Heading away from the planet took a lot more energy and they found themselves slowly trying to regain speed. Means to identify these hazards were developed using laser. They would shoot a beam within a 45-degree plane to the left and a 45-degree plane to the right of center and if a beam appears brighter for just a flash, which will indicate something in that area. The light travelling away from them would always look the same. Anything

different means the light stopped moving away. To test it, they directed beams to the rear and verified that the beams would disappear or flash while it encountered the black planet. That was when they realized just how big it was and how far away from it, they were. Before they got five days away from it, another zombie planet was identified wandering aimlessly in the big empty expanse of space. “Obviously formed within a solar system, what happened to their star?” Aaron wondered, “are they in orbit or are they on an endless journey?”

Their ability to identify things that did not emit light proved invaluable. They mapped the areas in their path and found objects travelling in an orbit around a dark star. Some of which had heat from gravitational tides pulling at the planet’s core, but most of them frozen balls of ice. “This resembles a comet factory,” Jupiter said. “Imagine one of these planets being flung around this star, it could find its way streaming past earth one day. Who’s to say something from here or another place like here, sent a comet that hit earth millions of years ago.”

“You right Number One, this could be historical. Let’s follow and trail of one of these bodies of ice and get a sample? Wouldn’t that be something if we find a common carbon isotope?”

Aaron is now in pursuit of a planetary rock one tenth the size of our moon. His plan was to get behind it, run into it and collect the debris. Calculating the force required and the speed necessary to acquire that force was number one’s number one. Ensign Show was quite the mathematician and gave his recommendations to the Captain. They executed their plan, pieces of the comet shattered off and collecting traps behind corner braces collected samples of pulverized icy rock. The astral lab narrowed down its composition and found it riddled with organics and even though no microorganisms were present, this icy body could act as home to such organisms.

After leaving what they called the black solar system, the Infinity was once again put back on its original course to Proxima Centauri. They still had years of travel through the Oort cloud to endure but now they would be travelling with a much higher degree of awareness and caution.

“The dead space between the Kuiper Belt and the Oort cloud was known to be void of debris, I now think I know why, its these damn black planets,” Aaron told Jupiter.

“I’m pretty sure it qualifies as a black hole,” Jupiter said.

“Yeah, well, I refuse to call it a hole. It’s not hollow and you can’t go through it. It’s an extremely dense object with massive gravitational properties. I’ll stick with Black Star or Black Planet, which reminds me, we’re coming up on another one. This time we’ll steer well enough away.”

Jupiter said, “I was talking with the Navigator, and he said if we slow down just a little more, our radar can pick up these objects on screen. He said our speed wasn’t giving the display adequate time to chart without whiting out.”

“OOD, this is the commanding officer, reduce speed to one third and steer well clear of all objects. Navigation, update status on the LX420 radial receiver and the Gunter directional radar and get back with me. If you’re right, Number One, I think we’ll be able to sleep better tonight.”

“Captain, this is the Navigator, all systems are online and working properly, we have image resolution in great detail of the approaching mass.”

“Good job, Number One. What I find unfortunate is that before leaving the solar system while I still had considerable powers, I could have and would have seen the speed differential as a factor regarding our radar. We’ve never traveled so fast before; I should have done the math. And that reminds me, without my extra powers I’ll need all the help I can get to remember things, calculate things, and anticipate things.”

“Yes sir, I understand,” Jupiter said.

“Thanks.”

They have slowed to .03 light speed, which will add years of travel time to get to and through the Oort cloud.

“I think you should take to the cryochambers first. After you are back on station Maria, Gali and I will be ready for some down time.”

“I would like to see you get some important rest Captain. You’ve been grinding so hard I’m concerned for you.”

“Thanks, Number One, but I’m fine. I’ll wait for the baby.”

“Yes sir.”

It took Jupiter three days to prepare for the cryochamber. The first day was spent relaxing, drinking, watching movies, and generally doing nothing. The second day was filled with passing down instructions to his staff, securing his stateroom and belongings, and the third he spent visiting all his stations to make sure they were prepared. He entered cryochamber bay one, reserved for executive officers, and checked in with Lieutenant Washington.

“Drink this, sir,” the lieutenant said, handing him a small paper cup.

“What is it?”

“It’s to protect your insides.”

Right after drinking the vile concoction, he was directed toward the restroom. He wondered why until he got there and realized his insides wanted outside. He stayed on the toilet violently flushing his entire system. The ordeal took about ten minutes, and he emerged lighter, weaker and three shades paler. The lieutenant then gave him another cup, “Drink this sir, it’ll make you feel better.”

“What is it,” he said again.

“It’s to protect your insides.”

“Oh, hell no, not again.”

“No sir, this is a coating to protect you now that you’re clean.”

He drank it down. It was thicker, tasted much better and it did calm his system down. Next the lieutenant gave him a jar of salve.

“And what’s this for?” Jupiter asked.

“Change into this jump suit, enter the pod, and heavily apply it to open and sensitive areas. Ears, nose, eyes, anywhere there’s an opening including your privates. I suggest applying to your eyes last so you can see what you’re doing.”

‘Including my privates?’ he thought.

Jupiter started putting on his lips.

“Heavier,” the lieutenant said.

“What does this do?” he asked.

“We’re basically going to freeze you, these areas are prone to frostbite and freezer burn, the salve will help protect those parts.”

Jupiter looked at him like he was crazy, then dug out a handful and went right down the pants. He then caked up his ears, nose, and eyes. “Ok, he said, I think that does it.”

The lieutenant took the jar and helped him back into position. The canopy was closed and filled with a gas to put Jupiter in a medically induced coma, once he was under and stable, a nurse on both sides of the chamber inserted IVs to facilitate the transfusion to replace his blood with a human antifreeze specifically designed for this specific cryogenic application. After the body was prepared, they completed the freezing process.

Jupiter was a hundred percent correct when he told Aaron this was the most vulnerable time. It was expected to take two to three days to thaw, another day to reacclimate their blood and regain system functions and yet one more day to be brought back out of the medical coma. On occasion, patience took a few extra days for their muscles and nerves to reestablish connections.

Jupiter thought the digestive drink he had was bad, wait till he wakes from having his brain frozen.

## Chapter Fourteen

Groups of young people between 15 and 30 years old began to group together. Within the areas they associated themselves with, be it technologically, earth, or animal, they formed little groups. One group referred to themselves as Techies and started a trend of wearing hats to identify their group. They gathered outside shops, clubs, and libraries, in the malls and on the streets to display their support for their identification. A fedora was the prefer cover for a techy heavily into computer science, a group inclined to possess business or management skills adopted variations of a bolo, engineers were partial to ball caps. Young people from the earthly powers thought the hats were silly and made fun of the techies behind their backs.

The average citizen didn't pay much attention to it. One group, eager to stand out among their peers, chose to be called The Innovators. Adopting nicknames was another attempt for recognition and independence. They were engineers and architects drafting plans for the creation of cities in the sky.

Savin was a techy and Blanca had an earthly affiliation but had been friends for many years. Savin asked Blanca one day to refer to him as S-King.

"I am not calling you that silly name," she said, "if I call you anything, it will be your name or Dumb Ass, take your pick, and grow up already."

"I'm sorry, I get a little carried away," he said.

"I know, but why do you have to try to become something, instead of just being yourself?"

"Because we're different, and just want to be identified as such," Savin said with commitment.

"Everyone's different, but by your example, being different apparently means being the same as other people."

The expansion of New Providence turned out to be much more than adding more housing and business. Determined to

bring them into the future, their future, the techies got their feet in the door by convincing the city planners to incorporate many of their designs. Included in the plans for a city in the sky, pedestal office buildings high above ground would be connected by aerial tunnels and trams. Each building would have its own aerial parking under the domed building. Flying cars were a reminder to only a few how much times have changed, most everyone else never thought about a time when we didn't fly everywhere. Most people have never seen a terrestrial vehicle other than the recreational toys of the privileged.

The idea for the expansion was to have all the buildings high above ground to save the earth's surface from mutilation and pollution. Additionally, you can fit more people up than you can out and save a lot of space. Pavement tended to increase the temperatures inside the cities so returning the land back to earth and grass would make the city more comfortable. Land based vehicles were prohibited in the expansion city limits, except for the all-terrain recreational vehicle park at the north of town.

The buildings would stand 150 feet in the air on three huge, curved legs supporting a dome shaped office building or apartment complex. Each would be capable of housing between forty to sixty offices or two hundred apartments with four hundred parking spaces. New models of the aerial vehicles were low profile, sleek, lightweight, could seat five, extremely quiet and agile. They had all the bells and whistles and were easier to fly. The automatic controls also made it possible for anyone to be able to operate them.

The aerial cars were already in use, now it was time for the buildings. The production of the plexiglass domes employed many people. With new technology, the material was lighter than traditional plexiglass and much stronger. The Space Needle design, along with the clear dome and connecting trams, signaled the future more than any other individual achievement. For people with exceptional achievement credits or humanitarian



contribution credits, the opportunity to be the first to have a house of aerial design was perceived to be an incentive.

Savin rambled on to Blanca about all the innovations they had developed and had submitted for approval. He was obviously excited and proud of his work, but she was not as impressed and didn't want to fuel his rambling. She had hoped that he could relax a little within his own confidence and pay a little attention to her. She and many other earth inclined people gave the techies much advice regarding wind, hurricanes, lightning, tornados and heat, anything weather related, to incorporate into their designs. After all, a modern building that gets blown away or falls over doesn't fit very well into a futuristic world.

"I was thinking of going to the Pavilion this evening, there's an orchestra playing in the square around eight, do you want to go with me?" Blanca asked him in between design descriptions.

"Sure, are your friends going?"

"I was going to go with Taya and Venus, unless you want to make it a date?" she said.

"No, it's ok, they can come." Savin was a little emotionally insecure and didn't feel comfortable alone with a girl and even though he knew he'd be the butt of their jokes, which was easier to deal with than his fear of intimacy.

Blanca was mature for her age, but more than that, she was more in control of thought and emotion than most people. As an earth person to also have people skills, made her doubly capable. She saw something in Savin and thought, given time, could help him develop into a leader among his peers. "Now save your work for work, leave your hat at home, and fight that feeling to flee. Come to the Pavilion with me. Me." She reiterated. "You don't have to be afraid."

"I'm not afraid." He said.

She looked at him, "Oh really?" then lifted her blouse exposing herself.

He jerked back in shock, “What are doing?” Looking left and right to see if anyone else was looking.

“That’s what I’m talking about. You spend all your time dreaming of a building, every now and then you need to experience life,” she said.

“Ok, I’ll try,” he gathered himself, “can you show me that again?”

She laughed, “Now you’re getting it.”

“No, really, can you show me again?”

“Maybe later, if you’re good,” she said.

They arrived early and met with Venus and Taya outside of Lowry’s Swanky Tea House. Blanca saw Aurora walking up the steps with Phillippe who were frequent visitors to the orchestra’s performances. “Excuse me,” Blanca said, “I’m going to go say high to my aunt.”

She walked over to Aurora and gave her a welcoming hug. Aurora and Phillippe were all dressed up, “You look fabulous,” Blanca said.

“We love a night out. What are you doing here?” Aurora asked, having never seen her at an event like this.

Blanca looked back at her friends then turned back to Aurora, “I’ve got a boy on the hook but he’s a nibbler afraid to take a bite. I figured a little classy music can add a few years of maturity and get him to become a little more observant,” motioning her hands up and down her body.

“Careful girl, that’s how you got here,” she laughed.

Blanca laughed with her. “Come meet him.” She took Aurora’s hand and led her over to her friends. “Hey guys, this is my Aunt Aurora. Aurora, this is Savin, Taya, and Venus.”

Venus said, “She talks about you all the time.”

Aurora replied, “Don’t believe it, she exaggerates,” laughing with her hand on Blanca’s shoulder. “You kids enjoy yourselves; this orchestra is amazing.” With that, she took her leave.

Everyone knew who their Prophets were, and Aurora was idolized by the people of earthly persuasion. Blanca was in total awe of her and couldn't have been prouder to be related.

“So, what are we doing here?” Taya asked.

Blanca started to speak, “You know we have a new system where the more you do, the more important you are, and the best-connected people get most credits. They get first shot at things, the best houses, and vehicles. Right?”

“Yeah,” Taya said.

Blanca took Savin's hand, “We need to be a part of that crowd. I don't want to have to wait for a hand me down vehicle or wait a half hour for a table at La Dock's. Savin's a genius at creating architectural masterpieces, we on the other hand, are the least influential of the spirits. Even Gwen has a shoe on our back. It's not right. I thought we could meet and try to figure a way to level the playing field.”

“But your aunt is one of the Prophets,” Venus said.

“Exactly, that's why we're here. Aunt Aurora and Aunt Beta have too much integrity to hand out favors to family and friends. However, if they saw firsthand how important we were as a team, maybe we'd be more important and given the extra credit needed to live the high life.”

“What can we do?” Venus asked.

Suddenly Savin had a thought and figured out Blanca's motive. “Does my work with the expansion have anything to do with this soiree?”

“It could,” Blanca said, “You're in a unique and prestigious position, we're highly competent visionaries, yet for all our abilities, we're a foot note in the subculture. We want to be relative; how can we help you become even more important and in turn become more important ourselves?”

“I get it. I'll think about it, I'm sure something can be done,” Savin said.

“Thanks,” Blanca said while sensually adjusting her blouse and giving him a raised eyebrow.

Taya looked at Venus and whispered, “What was that all about?”

After the concert, the kids met up with Phillippe and Aurora as they exited the pavilion. Savin, who was normally shy, didn’t appear to have a problem talking freely with Phillippe. “You know all the buildings in the expansion are being designed by our group. We call ourselves the Innovators.”

“No but that’s very interesting.”

“The girls have been absolutely critical providing us with advice regarding the weather so we can account for all the structural requirements to withstand whatever the earth can throw at it.”

“Interesting,” Phillippe said, wondering where he was going with all this. “Keep up the good work,” he said, cutting the conversation short so they could get away. He would later tell Aurora of his strange conversation and she would agree that it sounded strange and suggested they were up to something.

“Thanks,” Blanca said, thinking he dropped a pretty good hint. “Do you want to come over for a drink?”

Savin still wasn’t yet to the point where he could take a hint, “No, I think I’ll go home and get ready for another day in the trenches.”

Business went on as normal for the next couple years while the expansion was rising into the sky and people began to acquire real estate. Then one day a surprise came to New Providence no one anticipated. After nearly 60 years, some members of the fourth and fifth generation that left New Providence returned. A Day of Reconciliation was in order. They left many years ago over differences in how to govern and manage New Providence. Angel’s first daughter, Lisa II, was the first child born in New Providence and was now the oldest person

in New Providence. It was her generation's children and their children that had authority issues, to which many chose to leave.

With Angel now gone and a new value-based entitlement system instituted, some felt it was time to return, if allowed.

A group of ten showed up on the steps of the courthouse at about eight o'clock in the morning. Now, well over a hundred, they looked quite ragged and out of place. Their clothes were handmade and the road they travelled on looked exceptionally rough on their way back home. They asked to see Lisa II, which alerted the clerk to something strange.

"Lisa II hasn't been part of the council in years," the clerk said, who then contacted Lisa II, "There about a dozen old people here at the courthouse to see you."

She knew who they were and why they'd returned. "I'll be there shortly," she said.

Lisa II was pushing 180 years old by now and took her sweet time at everything she did. She arrived about nine o'clock. She recognized Jack III from behind the others right away. His was her first born, and the reason she stayed away from all her great, great, grandchildren. "High Jacky, is everything alright?"

"I'm sure you're not happy to see us, but after all this time, can we bury the hatchet?" Jack asked.

"What's on your mind?"

"We know Grammy's gone. We know you instituted a new system of governance. We also know you probably don't have long left and want to apologize and tell you we love you while we still can."

"So, which of the three brought you back?"

He said with his head held down, knowing she knew, "the system, but honestly, I missed you."

She asked them to follow her inside so she could sit. "What it is that brings you home?"

"Your new system accounts for the sacrifices of the people, the way we grew up did not. That was always the issue,

we couldn't see working and toiling for those who did not reciprocate. Your new system seems fair, something that hard-working people appreciate."

"I'm not involved with it, if anything, I'm a recipient of services due to being needy," she said.

"I understand, but the system itself is something that we had always advocated for and now that you've adopted it, with all humility we'd like to come home and be a part of it. Is there anything we can do to make amends and be welcomed?"

Lisa II wasn't quite sure what to think. Her oldest son returns after 60 plus years and asked to 'come home'. When he left, he swore he'd never return and cursed the entire council accusing them of being fools among some other very personal things he said to her.

"Son, you broke my heart when you left. You said a lot of mean things, which still affect me. I loved you; I still love you, but our community did well without you and despite you."

"I know. Mom, I cannot express my regret deeply enough. It wasn't our place to dictate policy and our lack of faith and respect for the council was shameful. For myself, I don't deserve a second chance, but we're here because we realize our mistake and have families of our own that don't deserve to pay for our mistakes. Our children and their children have so much to offer. Can we make up on their behalf?"

She looked at him with a tear in her eye, put her arms out and said, "Come here, son, welcome home. Now you're still going to have to talk with Beta, she's the head of the council."

"I feel so old, my great granddaughter is head of the council," he said.

"How do you think I feel," she said.

Beta didn't have a problem at all. The ten that returned were an advanced party representing everyone else. All total there were eighty-four people, fifty of them children or grandchildren to the original group.

The younger generations were clamoring to get on the list for an apartment in the expansion while the older generations preferred to stay in Old Town. A term that would become affectionately associated with the original New Providence settlement and cultural center.

Beta asked Miranda to instruct the housing authority to find temporary housing for the long-lost citizens and met with Jack to discuss how things worked now. After meeting with Jack, she was preparing for her weekly council meeting when Miranda rejoined her in chambers.

“Bet you didn’t know your niece was picketing a new apartment building in the expansion.”

“Blanca,” Beta concentrated, “Come see me in my office, please.”

Blanca got the message and thought her ploy to get into a new apartment was working. She rushed down from the expansion and reported to Beta’s office.

“I’m sorry, you’ll have to wait, the council is in session,” the clerk said. She waited in the lobby while connecting with her friends, “I’m waiting to see my aunt Beta,” she said.

“She agreed to talk to you?” Taya asked.

“Kind of, I stood outside the new apartment building up in New Town with a sign saying, ‘Only Rich People Need Apply’ and the next thing you know I got an invite to talk with her.”

“Girl, I don’t think you thought that through.”

“I got a chance to plead my case, didn’t I?”

“Let me know.”

The council wrapped up, on their agenda was the lost generation and advancing the credits to the unfortunate. What was not discussed were the requests for capital properties, cars, housing, farm equipment and boats. That would be a separate meeting for Joseph, Miranda and the office of management being held next week.

“Come in, Blanca,” she said standing at the doorway. They sat in opposing chairs, “How have you been?”

“Good, and you?”

“Just peachy. So, you don’t like the system and feel the need to protest?”

Blanca felt the condescension in her voice, “No, I just wanted a chance to talk and thought the protest would facilitate my chances.”

“Well, you’ve got my attention.”

“There are a lot of us that feel we are not being represented. We work as hard as everyone else and would like the same chances to get into a new apartment in New Town.”

Beta asked, “Who are you referring to, who do you represent?”

“A few friends and I, others that have roots in the earthly spirits.”

“So, you think you’ve earned it and are unhappy that you’re not getting what you think you deserve?”

“Yes, I guess.”

“Darling, of all my nieces, nephews and cousins, I thought you had a better outlook as to how the world works.” Blanca looked at her confused. “You look a little confused,” Beta said.

“What do you mean?” Blanca asked.

“You’re my niece, of course I want you to have the best, but I have a responsibility to everyone. There are many people depending on me, Aunt Aurora, and Miranda. You’re not doing without and there are tens of thousands of people that you know nothing of their commitments and sacrifices yet being related to us is supposed to bump you up on the list.”

“Ah, but...” she started to interject, but Beta stopped her.

“Sweetheart, we have you on the list, but you’ll have to wait your turn. The list is public, feel free to do your research and see the contributions to the city that the people above you on the



list have made. They deserve a fair shake as well, don't you think?"

Blanca knew nothing about the other people on the list and having Beta chastise her politely yet firmly like a child, put her in check. "Maybe I jumped the gun a bit, I just felt undervalued and reacted. I'll do whatever I can. I work hard and would just like to get out on my own."

"And you will, be patient. By the way, another sign stirring up conflict would probably drop you down the list rather than raise you, if you know what I mean."

"Yes ma'am."

Blanca left Beta's office feeling as immature as she'd been acting. 'Ouch,' she said to herself.

A short time later, "Blanca," Taya called, "what did she say?"

"She said I'm on the list, I just have to wait my turn." She wasn't about to tell her she had her ass handed to her.

Beta told her mother of great grandfather Jack's return.

"So, Grandpa Jack returned." Lisa wasn't impressed. "What did great grandma Lisa have to say about it?"

"I believe they made up," Beta said.

"I'm surprised. You know he's why she never came around," she added. "Apparently when he left, he made her feel so bad she didn't talk to anyone but Angel for years. What made it worse, he blamed her, and she wasn't even on the council making the decisions."

"Maybe time does heal all wounds."

"I'm glad she's ok with it, but I don't want to talk with him, so please, don't go inviting him over here for dinner or anything. Ok?"

"Ok."

Sol walked in just in time to hear dinner. "We're having someone for dinner?"

“No, we’re not having someone over for dinner,” Lisa said.

He then read her mind, “Never mind.”

Beta spoke up, “Vera and I would like to invite you all over for dinner sometime though.”

Sol said, “That’s nice, we’d like that.”

Sol liked Vera, Lisa not so much. Ever since Beta was gifted with powers, Lisa wanted Beta her to find someone and become a Supreme Counselor in the Traditional sense and have children. Her acceptance of Vera was cordial, as if she were waiting for Beta to conclude a fling and move on.

Sol and Lisa both work in the only clothing factory in the city. Sol maintained all the equipment and Lisa supervised the fifty seamstresses. Beta mentioned, “Dad, the ten people that showed up at the courthouse looked pretty ragged, and there’s another seventy-four on the way. They’ll undoubtedly need new clothes which reminds me, isn’t the factory a little understaffed right now?”

“We could use some help.”

“I’ll add you to a list of employers. I don’t want to waste too much time getting them integrated into our society. How many can you use? She asked.

“I could use another maintenance technician and your mom said she was about five people short last week so make it six and we should be good.”

As she prepared to leave, Beta said, “If you think of anything else, let me know. I must get going, Phillippe said he thinks the nursery needs a new roof and all the builders are up in New Town trying to score additional contribution credits. I tell you this new system has highlighted people’s desire for more. More of everything.”

A couple weeks later, Beta and the gang gathered at the steps of the courthouse to give her annual address. She looked out over a minimal crowd and wondered why she continued this

tradition. Only about 120 people gathered in the square to hear her speak compared to past years that had up to two thousand. The autumn leaves began to turn and littered the square with a beautiful orange and yellow blanket reminding Beta that, even with all the changes they have experienced, there will always be changes.

“Good afternoon to family, friends, neighbors, and citizens of New Providence. On this day, November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2262, I am pleased to bring you updates for the year and lay out tentative plans for the upcoming year. As always, I start with the census, our population has risen to 50,022 as of this morning. The expansion of New Providence was officially named New Town and New Providence was officially renamed Old Town.” She stopped and looked over the crown of mostly older people, “New Town has built thirty-two new, state of the art, apartment buildings and begun accepting residents. Fifteen new office buildings hover high above the city and forty-eight businesses have applied for leases. The boom in technology has created a demand for more jobs than we can fill. We have shifted employees from nonessential positions to essential and critical positions and we’re still in need of more employees.” For the older crown she wasn’t saying anything of much concern. “1992 families welcomed 2047 births this year and eighty-four people returned home after an extended stay abroad. We have not heard from the Infinity this year but hope the upcoming year brings us news. We wish the 210 retirees a leisurely and well-deserved vacation and finally we say goodbye and rest in peace to the sixty-nine souls who expired this year.”

She took a moment of silence then continued, “This address is more than just statistics, we have incorporated a new form of government, one that is designed to fairly credit people for their contributions and support our citizens in need. This coming year, we will be taking reservations for world travel excursions as bonus vacations for deserving candidates. New

resource management companies will begin operations in various places afar and open many opportunities. We predict a shortage of about seven hundred workers next year alone, so as a society, if we are to continue to grow, our families will need to grow as well. Of course, we've had many more events than discussed here today and to see them all I encourage you to read my article in the Daily Bulletin. In closing, ladies, and gentlemen, enjoy some private time together and help close our population deficit."

She felt her plea to increase the population was wasted on the small crowd but anyone paying attention throughout the city would have got the message.

Beta told her crew, "I can't believe I have to invite them to procreate. We should be having about 3700 births a year. We won't hit the critical mass and a cessation period for another eighteen years at this rate."

"Are we in a hurry?" Phillippe asked.

"Not really," Beta said, "but fluctuating growth rates cause shortages or overages in the work force. Right now, the demand for workers is stalling progress and limiting supply."

Miranda asked, "Do you want Joseph and I to plant a seed in their heads?"

"Be careful. If you do, don't do a blanket input. Do it case by case, we don't want to overwhelm the ones that are actively in sync with a healthy family plan. Do you know what this conversation reminds me of?"

"What."

"Our children," Beta said. By our children, she meant her generation, Miranda and Joseph, Aurora, and Phillippe. "What are you waiting for?"

"You're right, I think we've waited long enough," Miranda said, "I'll talk with Joseph and hopefully give you a happy update soon."

Aurora felt what they were talking about and concerned that she'd been trying and so far, unsuccessful, didn't want to engage the conversation.

## Chapter Fifteen

Maria felt Gali kicking away then without much more warning began having labor pains. Aaron was already out and about roaming the ship as he often did when he wasn't on the bridge. Maria called down to medical for assistance in having a wheelchair and attendant bring her to main medical. She stayed there two hours before telling Aaron, who would have known telepathically had he not been so busy with updates and repairs in Reactor Room 2.

Aaron rushed to the labor and recovery room and called the bridge, "Commander Cort, Maria's in labor, I'll be in medical for a while. Add another OOD to the roster in my place till I return."

"Aye, aye, sir. Good luck, we'll take care of everything."

Gali was born at 11:54 a.m. day 21,945. Aaron and Maria would have their one and only child at the age of ninety. Though their life span was about 180 years, ninety was still a little old to become parents, but that didn't stop them. It's been a part of their plan for thirty years and they have accepted everything that comes with it.

Gali became the 572<sup>nd</sup> baby born aboard the Infinity since they set sail.

The empty space between the Kuiper Belt and Oort cloud turned out to be not so empty. Wayward planets, moons and asteroids flung out of their orbits, found their way in, and flew though the empty expanses of space in front of them nearly untraceable. Though they've only encountered a few, the possibility of many had to be considered. With no stars to provide light, their only detection source was the lasers they beamed out from the ship and two radar systems. Even though they had modified and increased the beams to be used in navigation, it was an all-hands exercise on the bridge. They could not afford to have another object sneak up on them.

After their initial entry into interstellar space and having the scare with the black planet, months would go by at a time with nothing to see or nothing to do, With years to go before reaching the Oort cloud one third of the crew would enter cryo-sleep, six years later another third would enter, six year later crew one would awake, and the final third would enter. Aaron, Maria and Gali would be in the final group.

Holograph theaters became a common relaxation and off duty past time for much of the crew. Two social clubs were frequented by many of the younger generations but misconduct at the clubs was dealt with harshly. Some of the settlers stayed in their perspective areas and have gone years without seeing anyone from the crew. Many settlers preferred not to be reminded they were on a spaceship except for occasionally viewing the skies from the observation decks.

By now an entire generation has had time to be born and grow to adulthood in space giving them undisputed proof of the effects of space. Physiological changes and evaluations established disparaging evidence of degradation. The ship's chief medical officer, Dr. Hazel Cook, had been compiling data and analyzing the crew since they left and was now prepared to brief the captain on her findings regarding the long-term effects on the body. Aaron, Maria, Commander Cort, and Dr. Cook met in a small meeting room adjacent to the officer's mess so they could enjoy some refreshments while they go over and discuss her findings that were expected to take a couple hours.

"I wanted to have this study done by last year and now that it's done, I wish I could have had these results five years ago," she said.

"That's not too encouraging," Aaron said, "what dire consequences are we looking at?"

Maria sat there reading her mind as she spoke, not paying too much attention to her spoken word, but more so to the underlying concerns and objective conclusions.

Dr. Cook continued, “We’ve become use to the artificial gravity from the Neutron core, but at about 70% of the earth’s gravity, our bodies have begun to show minor challenges in the older subjects and potentially more grave issues with the children.”

“What kind of changes?” Aaron asked.

“Decreased body weight, muscle mass and bone density just to name a few,” she said.

“So, why are children more at risk?”

“With regard to the gravity, the differences are enough to suggest we couldn’t adapt and accept the physical changes but add the low-level radiation from the Neutron core, the artificial electromagnetic field of the ship and lack of sunlight, the children’s life expectancy is estimated to be half of what it would be otherwise and progressively getting worse for each generation after. Each generation will experience more degeneration than the prior one and I haven’t seen anything to suggest that the effects could stabilize. We too, will be losing years and the longer we’re out here the more progressive the effects will be for us as well.”

“We’ve been able to handle low level radiation since our DNA was altered, why is it a problem now?” Aaron said.

“It could be that it’s a different type of radiation or that it compounds the other issues, also by not having anywhere to discharge the accumulated amounts received, we may simply be experiencing overexposure.”

Maria saw in Dr. Cook’s psyche that she was scared and concerned for the entire crew. “Dr. Cook, are you suggesting we’re screwed, or could there be a solution?”

“Finding a planet capable of supporting life or going back to earth are the only things I can think of. Grant it I’m just a doctor, but our bodies aren’t meant to be out here, and I believe the ship is killing us.”

“We knew it wouldn’t be easy, but it sounds like you don’t think we can survive out here.” Aaron said.



“I think we have a time limit,” she replied.

“Anything else?”

“As a matter of fact, there is, between the bulk of our nutrition being synthetic and stress from isolation or work, are just a few reasons our crew and settlers have had a large decrease in reproductivity. The present reproductive rate may not be sustainable in the long term to perpetuate a society, especially if life expectancy is shortened.”

Maria asked, “How much time, in your opinion, do we have to find a new home or return?”

“It’s too hard to tell, but my best guess would be about sixty years. By then, we may not be unable to recover.

“Excuse me,” Commander Cort jumped in. “I just got a message from Ensign Show; we may have a bit of good news. Though I can’t speak about the medical aspects of our situation, the team we had working on the navigation systems and shield have come a long way and may have figured out the hyperdrive. I believe we’re very close to correcting our speed deficiencies.”

“That is good news,” Aaron said. “Dr., you’ve painted an ugly picture, but I thank you just the same. I have many people to talk to and once the decision is made regarding our next steps, unless there is anything else, I’ll let you get back to your patients.”

“You’re going to speed us up, aren’t you?” Maria asked. She could read him without effort and didn’t need to ask but she wanted to gauge his confidence.

“Yeah,” he said, “if they indeed corrected the hyperdrive navigation and shield, I believe we can cut our travel time in half or better. If I still had all my powers, I could do the math myself. That’s what the team’s been doing.”

Aaron’s anticipation grew to an obsessive need to get to the bridge and check on the team working on the hyperdrive issue. “Captains on the bridge,” the Petty Officer of the Watch announced.

He walked over to the chart table and asked, “Do you have an update on the hyperdrive?”

“Yes sir,” the Junior Officer of the Deck answered, then turned and asked, “Lieutenant Jonas, can you take the Helm?”

“Yes sir,” then announced, “Lieutenant Jonas has the Helm.”

Lieutenant Commander Wells lead the team trying to figure out way their speed was so limited. “Through computer simulation we were able to increase the speed to .2 light speed.”

“That’s five times faster than we can presently go. How did you do it?” Aaron asked.

“The problem was our electromagnetic field. Because of the ion thrust trailing the ship, the EMF was stretched behind us. We corrected it by increasing the directional solar targeting system bringing the center of the field up to the front of the ship where it can deflect those microparticles that were eating our shield.”

“So, as far as your simulation shows, we can reach .2, what about spotting objects in our path?”

“That was an added benefit to increasing the solar targeting. By increasing power to the targeting system, an additional 5 degrees of space both positive and negative from the course setting, lit up so nothing’s going to be sneaking up on us.”

“When can we test it?”

“We just need to get with engineering to install EM sensors in rotary sections Q-4, 6 and 8 and apply the power boosters, we should then be able to verify the EMF. The simulation showed no damage to the shield and no residual vibration to the ship once we’ve reached a 28 percent increase in the EMF forward,” Lieutenant Commander Wells said with great enthusiasm.

“I’m buying someone a steak dinner if this works,” Aaron said. Real animal meat was rarer than gold. With only one animal farm in section 8-G of the settlement, it’s been said that getting a

real steak was harder than giving birth. He then asked, “Where is Ensign Snow?”

“He’s working on the layout for the EM sensors.”

“I’m impressed with the initiative. Are you responsible, or is he?”

“We worked it out together, but I couldn’t have asked for a better assistant.”

“Yeah, that’s what Number One said too.”

Aaron was excited about the possibilities of .2 light speed and redid the calculations in his head all the way back to his stateroom. At the new rates, Jupiter would still be in cryo-sleep by the time they reached the Oort cloud. He would then have to figure out if he wanted, he and his family in cryo-sleep while Number One completed the Oort mission. He knew he would have to face it and for a control freak to give up the wheel was typically a decision they were unqualified to make. He knew he would have to let Maria make that decision.

Aaron and Maria talked about the ship, increasing the speed, cryo-sleep, and everything mission related. They determined they’d wait to see the actual results of the tests before making any determinations or decisions. She did give him her opinion that the mission, regardless of intention or scientific benefit, wasn’t worth the lives of the 2800 crew and settlers aboard, not to mention their baby girl. “Above all, we need to survive to be of value to anyone. No one would benefit from our loss,” she said.

For a dedicated pioneer, Aaron didn’t concern himself so much with his own sacrifice, but the way Maria put it, made him realize their life was the litmus test and being able to get the word back to earth the challenge.

It took three days to get the sensors installed and online. Diverting power to the EMF took another day. It was now time to test. Just as when they initially left earth, it would take a while to slowly gain speed. They had a head start by traveling at .03

already so within a few days they passed .05, the point where the shield was being degraded. So far so good, Aaron thought as they inched closer to .06.

“Captain. Recommend course correction 1.26 degrees starboard to K4B236,” the Navigator called out.

“Very well, Helmsman, correct course 1.26 degrees starboard set course for K4B236,”

“Aye, aye, changing course 1.26 degrees starboard, setting new course to K4B236,” the Helmsman repeated.

He then ordered, “Increase speed, all head two thirds to .08 light speed.”

“Aye, Aye, increasing speed, all ahead two thirds to speed .08 light speed,” the Lee Helmsman repeated.

It took another fifteen minutes to gain the speed and the ship seemed to be rock solid.

“Captain, the cameras tell a wonderful story,” the Officer of the Deck said.

“Put it on the main screen,” Aaron said.

Looking up at the main screen, he saw the four left front and four right front cameras, each with an expanded view and complete spectra-analysis of the space ahead of them. A computer-generated simulation of objects deep out in space appeared when objects were present, allowing them plenty of time to change course if they needed.

“Captain. Recommend course correction 1.22 degrees to port to K4B235,” the Navigator called again.

“Very well, Helmsman, correct course 1.22 to port, set course for K4B235.”

“Aye, aye, changing course 1.22 degrees to port, setting new course to K4B235.”

After correcting the course, the second time Aaron asked the Officer of the Deck to take the con. “I’m going below for about a half hour. Slowly increase speed in increments of .02.

Ultimately, I'd like to get to .2 light speed. If the ship acts funny in any way, back it down. I'll be back shortly to take back over."

"Yes sir," Commander Harris said as Aaron turned and headed toward the elevator. "This is Commander Harris; I have the con."

"Captains off the Bridge," the Petty Officer of the Watch cried out.

Aaron went to talk with Maria. It was time for that talk about the mission and cryo-sleep. He no sooner set foot in the cabin, and she was standing there ready to go. Gali was fast asleep, and Maria had Commander Cort's teenaged daughter, studying on the sofa, to baby sit.

"You knew I was coming for you?"

"At first no. I was just going to come up and have lunch with you, till I felt you leave the bridge on your way here. It worked, didn't it?"

"It's awesome. You know, lunch sound like a good idea." They left and went to the officer's mess and grabbed something quickly off the buffet line. "Can you tell how fast we're going?" he asked her.

"No, should I be able to tell?"

"We should be doing about three times faster than when the shield started to fail."

"Really. So, everything is working out?"

"Yes, after we eat, stop up at the bridge with me. I've got to relieve Commander Harris, but we can still finish our conversation about the cryo-sleep plan, unless we run into a conflict."

"Ok," she said, "I'd like to see what they did anyway."

He didn't wait to get to the bridge. By the time he entered the elevator he had already recommended they stay awake all the way up to the Oort cloud. "By the time we get to the inner ring, Gali will be about nine. If I wake Number One, and we spend a

few months to update and turn over, he can do the bulk of the cloud sifting and recovery while we sleep.”

“I thought you wanted to be in charge of the Oort research?”

“That was before our good doctor enlightened us to the need for a home. It’ll still take about ten years to get through the cloud, another six years to get to Proxima Centauri. From there, we must decide whether we’re going to be, all in or all out.”

“I’m not sure what you mean,” she said.

The door to the Bridge opened, “Let me take the watch and I’ll explain.” They stepped onto the Bridge, “Captain’s on the Bridge.”

“Commander, are you ready?”

“Yes sir.”

“Anything out of the ordinary?”

“No sir.”

“What’s our current speed?”

“Last order to the Lee Helm was .16.”

“This is the Captain; I have the con.”

Maria asked, “We’re doing .16 light speed? We were only doing .05 when we started busting up.”

“Look at the main screen, see this over here,” he pointed, “there’s something there so the computer gave it a shape so we could see it. The distance stats are over here, direction and speed over here,” pointing again, “pretty cool.”

“That is cool. Now, what did you mean about being all in or all out?”

“There’s no way around me having to make the decision, we either go forward with uncertainty or backward to earth in defeat. There is no easy answer, do we give up and go home or are we committed, live or die, to find a new home?”

“I don’t think there’s anyone onboard that hasn’t already wrestled with the thought that this could be a one-way cruise without a happy ending,” Maria said.

“The issue still remains, like you said, it isn’t worth the lives of 2800 people especially our daughter, so before we get too much further, I need to decide whether to go for it or return to earth.”

“You really are having difficulty with this, aren’t you?”

“I’m thinking of you and Gali, if you say go, we go. If you don’t want to take the chance, it’s not too late to turn around. We’ve done it once before.”

“Why did you want to come out here in the first place?”

“I was called to come out here.”

“What’s changed?”

“Other than no longer having my powers or a daughter, nothing.”

“Well then, I came because I believed in you, and my powers supported that, whether I still have them or not, doesn’t change that.”

“Ok, then, we’re going for it. I love you and it’s because I love you, the decision caused me so much trouble. If you thought I was making a mistake, you’d tell me, wouldn’t you?”

“Of course.”

“So, what do you think about cryo-sleep when Gali turns nine?”

“Sounds like a plan to me,” she said.

“Captain, we’ve reached .16 light speed,” the Lee Helm said.

“Very well, increase speed to .18 light speed.”

“Aye, aye sir, increasing speed to .18 light speed.”

Maria asked Aaron, “Can I ask a stupid question?”

“There’s no such thing,” he replied.

“Why does everyone repeat what you say?”

“Two reasons, maybe three or four, the first is to confirm that the order they heard is the order that was intended, reason two is every command is recorded in the ship’s log for

verification of facts and events, and the third may very well be tradition.”

“You said maybe four.”

“Yeah, the fourth is I like it.”

“Aye, aye space sailor man,” she said with a laugh.

The crew of the Infinity would travel through seemingly empty space for the next eight and a half years, rarely coming across a wayward asteroid and with very little disruptions to the plan. An occasional electrical fire or ruptured pipe gave them just enough excitement to remind them of dangers still abound. After Gali’s birth and Maria’s influence on the crew, fears and insecurities lowered, confidence rose, and the crew’s reproduction rates began to rise again. Doctor Cook increased screenings of the crew and because Ensign Show was a mathematical genius, she solicited his help in developing a statistical map of how the long-term effects of space and the ship would alter their chances of survival.

It was time for Jupiter to thaw and return to work. The process took a few days. After his body reached eighty-four the human antifreeze was replaced with his blood that was warmed to 84 degrees as well. They restarted his heart and as his blood started flowing through his body it began to warm naturally. By the time the transfusion was complete, his body temperature rose to 93 degrees. Up to this point, everything was academic, the procedure had been done many times and the system hasn’t had a critical flaw during these first three stages. As soon as the patient’s heart begins is where the true monitoring begins. The last 9 degrees of body heat were generated from the internal heat of his blood as it heats and flows through his veins, but the next few degrees will increase after he regains consciousness. For that duration of time, his brain must struggle with the aftereffects of being frozen. Headaches, convulsions, blindness, paralysis, and seizures are among common symptoms of awakening. On a rare occasion death. The risks were always there but the process was



critical to be able to extend their lives long enough to participate in the mission.

They gave him a shot of Epinephrine and within seconds Jupiter jolted out of his coma at 6:05 on day 21,984. He had been in cryo-sleep for less the nine years of his twelve-year schedule. He woke shivering violently and coughing up fluid that built in his lungs as he thawed. The salve he applied prior to going to sleep thickened over the years and annoyed him to no end. It would be another hour before he quit shivering and his headache to go away. He thought to himself, 'I don't want to ever do this again.'

Jupiter's description of the entire cryo-sleep adventure had Aaron worried for Gali. "I don't want Gali to have to undergo that so young, but we need this opportunity. We have a lot of time to go before we reach Centauri; we need this down time, but Gali doesn't. Aaron talked with Maria about it, "Let's talk with her about participating in the junior officer program instead of cryo-sleep and allow her to attend the academy while we sleep. She has her whole life to rest at her convenience."

Maria, being partial to emotions, initially was against the separation but agreed that Gali should have a say.

Gali wasted no time, "You don't have to tell me what your friend went through, I know. I also know you want me to consider the academy. I'll save you some time. I do want to stay awake while you sleep, not because it's risky or discomfoting, but my vested interest in your welfare requires me to stand guard. I will learn, I will take care of you and later, I can choose my own rest."

Aaron looked at Maria with a surprised look on his face. "We have a soldier," he said.

"More like a hero," Maria conceded.

"It's not hero to do what must be done, and what would that say of us if we didn't try. You need the time off and I need time to become valuable."

Maria said, "Ok, I'm ok with it. Aaron?"

“Ok then. It’s settled, wake us up when we get through the Oort cloud or anytime if you need to.”

Gali was true to her intent and visited them in the cryochambers every day after class. She brought books to read, a fruit snack and a sip of brandy. She sat next to them and talked to them, believing telepathy could penetrate the frozen depths of time and give comfort to her parents. She didn’t drink the brandy; it was a symbolic offering to her dad and would give it to the orderly on her way out. He in turn, drank it.

Gali, and her friend, Sasha grew up together. They were about the same age and Maria and his mother, Grace, were friends. She was vigilant in keeping her promise to Maria to look after Gali while they were asleep. Gali and Sasha had much in common and they grew fast. Gali would be about nineteen by the time her parents would awake. Both of Gali’s parents have at some point been connected to superhuman power. The very genes that connected Maria and Aaron to the light have now created the heir to supernatural forces.

When Gali graduated from the academy, Ensign Show, now Lieutenant Commander Show presided over the ceremony. Jupiter stood in for the family and couldn’t have been prouder of Gali. She finished the course as the youngest officer of the crew and had the highest score they’d seen since the school was established. To everyone on the crew, there seemed no doubt that she was special and potentially still controlled some of the powers her parents once had.

Officially being pinned Ensign was a highlight in her young life, she was proud of herself and knew her parents would be proud as well, yet it was difficult to be happy. Every day that passed while her parents were asleep was another day without a hug, another day alone. She could feel their presence when she visited but it wasn’t the same.

Up on the bridge, Commander Cort called down to Jupiter, "Sir, the last of the sample traps have been filled. Our collection process is complete. Standing by for orders."

Jupiter hurried his social responsibilities and winked at Gali, "We're done. The collection is complete." They both knew what that meant, they could speed up and cruise out of the Oort cloud. The sooner they leave, the sooner they can wake her mom and dad.

A couple months later, Aaron and Maria were brought out of sleep a few years early and were able to accelerate their travel to Centauri.

In his briefing, Jupiter acknowledged that the increase of power to the core additionally increased their gravity, slowing the progression of the good doctor's prognosis. "Increasing the ship's gravity allowed the body to stop wasting away," he said.

"How far away from Proxima are we?" Aaron asked.

"About four years at .2," he said.

"Can we go any faster?"

"I don't think so Captain. The core can only grow another 12 percent before we risk collapse." No one knew the ship's core like Jupiter, "We can go to full speed .275 light speed for no more than 20 days at a time then return to two thirds for 20 days. Doing so could shave a few months off our schedule at best but I believe in this case, slow and steady will win this race."

"Very well," Aaron said. "Have the OOD maintain course at .2 and let's go find us a home."

Traveling out passed the Oort cloud toward the nearest star to our sun, woke the entire crew. Reflecting on the travels through the solar system, asteroid belt, to the outer planets and beyond, passed the Kuiper belt into interstellar space and out through the Oort cloud, making them realize what a wide ride it had been.

Four more years of travel to Proxima Centauri flew by without incident. It took four days of intermittent bow thruster

bursts to slow down enough to acquire an orbit thirty million miles from the red dwarf. Everyone was awakened out of cryo-sleep as the Infinity began its approach. Reaching Centauri signified the completion of the first leg of their overall mission. As the ship moved into position for orbit, Aaron announced over the crew's intercom, "Attention all hands, this is the Captain, today is day 24,174, we have reached Proxima Centauri," he paused. Cheering could be heard from every cabin, office, workspace, and passageway as the crew stood still listening to the announcement. "We have journeyed far and sacrificed much to get here. We will be orbiting Proxima Centauri for the next month and can be viewed safely from observation decks D-2 and D-3. I have instructed the watch commanders to establish holiday stand down, duty section schedule only for the duration of our time in orbit. The light from this star will take over four years to reach earth and my official report will take about 68 years to reach home, but rest assured, our families, friends, and history books will know of our success. Congratulations, get rest and enjoy some time off, you've earned it."

Aaron handed the microphone back to the Petty Officer of the Watch who proceeded to make a handful of prepared announcements concerning parties, dances, bingo, and other activities that would be sponsored throughout the ship during the stand down. Aaron then met with his key commanders to discuss their next steps. "Number One, how long should we stay in orbit?"

"I'm inclined to believe staying here until we can complete a full work up of the core's integrity and examine the best possible location to head to next should take about two months."

"Time is not exactly on our side. Our orbit speed makes the decreased gravity an issue," Aaron said.

“Captain,” the Navigator said, “we have an anomaly at 52 degrees latitude. We spotted it when we first approached, it went away but now it’s back.”

“Can you see it on screen?”

“I can’t see it from my monitor, put it on the main screen, maybe someone else’s eyes are better.” He transferred the feed to the main screen and pointed out the area in question.

Commander Harris pointed, “There, right there, do you see that. It looks like a heat wave or something.”

Aaron said, “More like ripples in a pond. What is it?”

Lieutenant Commander Show figured it out. “It’s a planet.”

“There are no recorded planets around this star,” Commander Harris said.

“It’s not recorded because it has a vertical orbit, it never passes in front of the star, so we’ve never been able to see it. Don’t look at where you think it is, look at the other stars in front of where you think it is.”

They stared at the screen for five minutes in silence. “I think you’re right,” Aaron said, “the stars over here” he pointed, “disappeared. Something is definitely there.”

Jupiter looked at Aaron, “What are the odds of finding a planet orbiting a red dwarf on a vertical plane? You can’t dream this stuff up. Have you ever heard of such a thing?”

Aaron was equally perplexed. “I suppose if a Uranus’ moons can do it; a planet can do it around a star. Weird or not, I’m taking it. Let’s get behind it and trail its orbit. We can track and analyze it with just the duty section, can’t we?”

“Yes sir,” Commander Carter said.

Aaron said, “Commander, the watch is yours, do your thing.”

Commander Carter then gave his commands to the helm, lee helm, and navigator. They got in behind and followed in its orbit.

A month in orbit turned into two years. Before Aaron knew it, his 25,000-day report was due. Aaron, Maria and Gali took turns contributing to the mission summary with stories, data, and perspectives. The transmission would not reach Earth for 68 years and they had no way of knowing if they would be able to pick it out among all the white noise. Retransmitting over and over for a week may help.

## Chapter Sixteen

Miranda and Phillippe finally had children, six in all, Aurora and Joseph had three of their own. Beta and Vera considered adoption or artificial insemination, but ultimately decided their lives had a different meaning and purpose. Old Town became a resort get away for the young that hustled the skyline of New Town. High rise domed offices and apartments sprang up north near the Mississippi river and filled as fast as they could get built. The young were drawn into the city of all things new. Nostalgia stayed back in Old Town; technology had taken over a large part of society. Our honorable prophets felt the loneliness of knowledge as the young sprang passed them.

For as much passion as older people enjoyed, their peace and serenity of retirement in Old Town was enough, but occasionally would visit with family in New Town to remind themselves that the journey's not over. While many of the older homes were converted into rentals others were simply abandoned.

Sol and Lisa's generation passed away some years ago so now, the seventh generation, has become the oldest living generation which included all the prophets. Miranda and Aurora were 174 and 176 years old respectively and knew they would soon be telling everyone goodbye.

The techies had retrofit New Town with amazing technology. Efficient use of robotics and programing allowed for custom comforts in each home. The credits required to maintain a nice apartment in the city demanded the people be active in earning the credit, which in turn became a calculated result of luxury. The better the technology, the harder they worked to get that technology, and the harder they worked, the greater the demand for technology. It was self-perpetuating envy and greed, but for the earthly and people spirits, luxury was a circumstance they didn't need to obsess over. Their observations gave them songs from the birds nesting in the spire pillars, the contentment

of the ocean's tide washing sand on and off the beach, the embrace of loved ones or babies suckling their mother's milk, their luxury came from within. As Angel once said, "If it wasn't for yesterday, today would not exist, without today, no dream of tomorrow could come true." Those words reminded Miranda to stop and smell the roses and to reflect on the present."

They impatiently waited for word from the Infinity but with every day passing without word, was another day to wonder if they had perished out in space. Their lives had turned out so different. Miranda remembered meeting Aaron at the fountain. It was mysterious and magical, yet life's choices don't come with preset outcomes. She would not have thought when she was young that her first love would go to space and never return. She was happy with Phillippe, but a part of her heart left with Aaron and had ached ever since. Maria wanted something other than what her council wanted for her, so much so, choosing to leave earth seemed more appealing than the alternative. Finally, the fateful day arrived, bringing them word from the Infinity, their 25,000-day report was received by high frequency radio signals from the Alpha Centauri star system.

On the day the message arrived, all the gang was visiting family in New Town. Beta and Vera had just finished decorating their new apartment, the entire top floor of Hope Tower, the tallest in the city. Everyone came by and some stayed. They created a written transcript of the signal to be read aloud. Everyone's presence would increase projecting power and the whole world would hear Miranda's voice. The four spirits sat together on the sofa, each with one hand holding onto the three braided handmade rope. Angel made it for her mother back during the comet and gave it to her as a reminder of hope, faith, and love. Each braid represents one of the traits and together could overcome all human strife. This would be the second time the rope would be used symbolically for prayer.



Each of them laid a hand on the rope and Miranda began reciting the message, “Greeting from Proxima Centauri, four light years from home,” it began. Beta had a hold of Vera’s right hand while she sat on a stool across from the gang. She leaned over and touched the rope. Beta was the powerhouse that acted as a booster to their spirits in one momentary consciousness. As their combined powers joined, people everywhere slowed to a stop and listened to Miranda’s voice as she relayed the message. “If you are receiving this transmission, you will know we have survived at least 25,000 days out into space. On day 24,174 we reached our nearest neighbor. In our travels, we have seen planets, moons, asteroids, and comets up close. Gravity proposed many challenges, and we had a few close calls but, we made it.”

Miranda paused for a moment and handed the message to Aurora, “Take the next paragraph, then pass it on,” she said.

Aurora then continued, “We discovered a planet in an odd orbit around Proxima capable of supporting an underground settlement. We’ve found pockets of frozen water and can generate an atmosphere within the caves. Heat is generated from the molten core. For the past two years we have worked to build a home here. We have the basics, but it goes without saying, there’s no place like home.”

People in coffee shops and restaurants held on to every word. The celebration slowly turned as the tone of the message seemed to turn to buyer’s remorse. She continued speaking, “We’ve learned that the Oort cloud and Kuiper belt are rich in resources, but there can be no future for humanity outside our solar system. It is just too vast and desolate to explore; we would never be able to get word back to earth if we were to continue. Therefore, the decision was made that the Infinity will be returning home with a whole new crew of young people. Those of us in advanced years will remain in this makeshift settlement for our remaining days, our mission complete, and a permanent memorial of our endeavors.”

Aurora felt a tear forming in her eye and handed the message to Phillippe. “Why wouldn’t they do the cryo-sleep and return with the crew?” she asked.

Phillippe continued, “Maria and I have a daughter, her name is Gali, she will be returning with the Infinity. She is more than capable and though it breaks our hearts to say goodbye, she will care for the crew and settlers on their journey home. Please welcome them as the heroes they are.”

Vera could see the darker, more pessimistic view of things, which gave her a unique perspective for the lighter side of things, and delivered a comment, “We speak of hope, faith and love as virtues, but by them staying and sacrificing themselves, sending their children back through space to earth alone should tell us that their hope, faith and love belongs here on earth, that we are already in Eden. Maybe that’s the message they’re giving us, that we should make the best of what we already have?”

By holding Beta’s hand, Vera’s voice could be heard for the first time by thousands of people. She had always been like a ghost in Beta’s shadow, but her short message of prosperity on earth suddenly became the message people chose to believe.

Joseph was last to read from the message. Town folks were holding hands and acknowledging each other as they felt the emotions the crew must have felt. “Our eternal light returns with Gali, receive her with love and acknowledgement that we are all truly blessed. The future of humanity is there on earth, even if there was life out here in the darkness, it would not have been meant for us. When Gali returns to earth, please tell her that we are proud of her. Farewell.”

A tear rolled down their cheeks as they bowed their heads and privately said goodbye. Miranda stood up once again, this time with the rope in her hands and lightly wrapped it around the back of Phillippe’s neck, pulling him closer and gave him a kiss. The lights in the tower’s windows dimly light the city and the flying cars reflecting off the tram’s tunnels and tubes reminded

her that times are meant to change and appreciating what you have right now is the only real reward in life.

The people out in town were back to living their lives within moments of the broadcast. Many felt sad that so many would not return, others felt good that so many would return. The gang grouped together at the huge window and looked out over the city, reminiscing about the time they shared with their kindred spirits.

Beta spoke with a solemn tone, “Aaron gave everything to follow a dream he was sure was right. Maria gave everything to help protect them on their travels. Their sacrifice may appear to have been misguided or wasted, but I contend that the powers of the earth used them as sacrifices so the rest of humanity would realize how good we have it.”

“But if that were the case,” Miranda asked, “wouldn’t you have known?”

“You might think so, but even I don’t have all the answers. If I had known, I might have advised against it, thereby defying the powers to be. If I knew and said nothing, I don’t think I could have lived with myself. At some point, we must acknowledge, we live by the grace of a higher power.”

Beta went on to say, “The most exciting thing about life is what we must experience for ourselves. We each get a chance to accept and understand life through our own eyes. Our chance led us to a city in the sky, a trip across the universe and someone to share it with.” She then turned to Vera and confessed, “I love you.”

Nodding her head in agreement, Miranda turned to the people in the room and held her glass of wine in the air, “May I have your attention?” she announced, “To each and every one of you, may you always remember our heroes, may you enjoy the experiences ahead of you and may you always strive to make things better.” Her toast was more than symbolic, she meant each

wish. How these children choose to live their lives will be decisions made long after she's gone. Her powers of the human spirit will recede back to the earth until the next Tricentennial, meanwhile, all the people she'd cared about throughout her life will have to rely on the lessons they'd learned.

Aurora felt a similar concern. For nearly a hundred and fifty years they've harbored an unimaginable responsibility and soon will be leaving their people alone without the grace of their powers. The thought that their society went 150 years prior to the Tricentennial unrepresented was of little consequence, sometimes her ego got in the way.

Beta, on the other hand, had it figured out a long time ago. Life was going to change regardless of reasons or circumstance and in the end, there would always be choices leading to outcomes, which would lead to more choices. She looked back at the children in the room and knew that when the next Tricentennial comes and the powers of earth are once again received, new generations would endure the influences of the light and the dark, nothing she could do could change that. After smiling at the children, she turned to the adults and raised her glass for a toast, tapping her fingernail to her glass, "As we wish our brave men and women a safe journey home, we should also take just a moment to reflect on our relatives, past and present, that have sacrificed so much for us to make it this far. On their behalf, I toast the challenges that you will face and wish you the character to meet those challenges with the honor, hope, faith, and love they deserve, cheers."

The End.