The Great Altruist

by

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Altruist (al-\textit{tru}-ist)
n. a person unselfishly concerned for or devoted to the welfare of others.
Part 1
Chapter 1

Jadzia sat on the ground with her knees drawn to her chest and tried to keep warm against the chill in the air. The wool blanket the Russian soldier gave her was damp, heavy, and had holes but it was better than just her bare skin underneath. Mud covered her face. Streaks of someone else’s blood ran down her cheek. Beneath the clumps of mud in her hair, her deep, brown eyes darted about the camp, examining the women around her.

Most of her fellow prisoners were sent to Sweden a few weeks earlier. She was one of only two thousand women left behind at Ravensbrück - left to worry if she would ever taste freedom again. Jadzia, at only nineteen years of age, was left behind with the others to an uncertain fate. The other girls her age were selected for the death march a few days ago.

Gunshots echoed against the wooden walls of the barracks. The Russian army announced over loudspeakers that Adolf Hitler was dead and the war was over. Jadzia watched the women celebrate their liberation and wave and blow kisses to the tanks that rolled by. She was overjoyed by her new-found freedom as much as the others, but her fever worsened during the night and she feared that her illness would make liberation short-lived. She and the other sick women were sprawled beside the road and waited for the doctor to examine them. Their coughs and groans were so plentiful that between the cries for help and the distant gunfire, there was never a moment of silence.

“What is your name, love?” a nurse asked in Polish with a Russian accent.

“Jadzia Konik.”

“Let me look at you,” the nurse said. Jadzia opened the blanket discreetly and allowed the nurse to check her heartbeat and lungs. “Have you had this long?”

Jadzia glanced at the rash of rose-colored dots on her bare chest and nodded.

“Doctor?” The nurse waved to a man a few paces away.

The doctor excused himself from another prisoner and smiled warmly at Jadzia as he approached. He examined the rash and grimaced. “Another typhoid case. See that she is taken to the hospital immediately.”

The nurse nodded, bundled the blanket tight around Jadzia, and supported her as she climbed into a waiting army truck on the other side of the road. She sat on the floor of the truck and waited as more sick patients boarded.

High above the commotion, atop the roof of a barrack, a young woman crouched behind a short smokestack and enshrouded herself in its smoke. She was no taller than a large flower and was completely naked, though she seemed indifferent to this fact. Her eyes were the color of fresh green grass after a rainstorm. They scoured the landscape as though searching for something precious. The warfare in the distance, with all of its gunfire and shell explosions, did not faze the girl at all. Whatever she was searching for had her complete focus.

She stepped away from the billowing smoke and inched forward to get a closer looks at the women gathered on the road. Several women huddled together near the Russian tanks and waited for their ration of food and blankets from the soldiers. Not far from one of the barracks waited another group of women – many of them sick and unable to move. A doctor and team of nurses worked quickly to tend to the girls; a great number of them were too far gone.

Amid the chaos of sorting the needy from the broken and the condemned criminals from the survivors, a few young women showed unusual poise and displayed no frustration or angst. Two of the women held hands and prayed. Another sat alone on the floor of an army truck, waiting to be taken to the hospital. The woman on the rooftop watched all of them eagerly. She didn’t know if they were too faithful to be daunted by distress or if they had simply resigned their survival as lost. She didn’t care. Satisfied with the groups of three women under her surveillance, she floated gracefully into the sky and languished over the camp. Without wings or any observable man-made method of flight at her disposal, she flew high into the sky and disappeared behind the clouds.

A hundred meters away from the army truck where Jadzia waited, the Russian soldiers led a group of German civilians, men and women, through the camp and forced them to look at the piles of corpses. The captured SS guards surrounded the ditches at gunpoint and prepared the bodies for burial.

“Look at what they’ve done!” a Russian soldier shouted in German.

“We had no idea,” a German man answered.

The army truck coughed and sputtered alive. Smoke from its tailpipe spat into the air in great plumes, and the truck carried the small band of surviving women away from the camp; hopefully forever, thought Jadzia. She watched the crowd of German women weep, all of them afraid for their lives and ashamed of what they saw. She covered her ears to block out the cries and buried her head between her knees and chest. Behind her, a woman began to sing softly. Soon another woman joined along. Jadzia strained to hear the German words the women sang:

“Fest und bestimmt in dieser Zeit des Endes, zubereitet sind Gottes Diener der guten Nachricht zu verteidigen. Obwohl Satan gegen sie hat gepriesenen, in Gottes Kraft halten sie unverdrossen.”

“The Bibelforscher,” a German woman whispered to Jadzia and rolled her eyes.

“Who?” Jadzia asked.
“Jehovah’s Witnesses,” another woman said. “They never stop singing.”
“I think it’s beautiful,” said a young girl.

Jadzia lifted her head and listened as the singing continued all the way to the hospital. She never learned what the words meant; it didn’t matter: for the first time in six years, she felt a tinge of hope, albeit fleeting.

As they arrived at the make-shift hospital on the edge of camp, a team of Russian doctors and nurses helped them get out of the truck and looked them over to prioritize their conditions. Jadzia modestly exposed the rash of red dots on her chest to a female nurse and was instantly whisked away. She was taken to a dimly-lit and dank room where nurses gently bathed her and gave her fresh clothes.

“Rest now,” a nurse said in Russian as the women helped her into bed. “The doctor will be here shortly.”

Jadzia understood little but it was enough to comfort her. She dropped her head to the pillow and dreamed of life with her family in Poland. The pleasant thoughts never lasted long though. Images of her recent nightmares flooded her mind and washed away the happy memories of her childhood. Every faint whisper of a laughter her mind conjured was juxtaposed with a frightful cry of despair from recent memory. The cries of joy and of pain echoed together in perfect, yet chaotic harmony. She worried she would never be able to remember her old life without the years in Ravensbrück muddying her memories.

As she drifted in and out of sleep, her rescue from the Nazis played like a broken record in her mind. When word reached the camp that the Russians had broken the camp’s meager defenses, the guards tried to burn the camp. They seemed desperate to destroy any evidence of their atrocities. Chaos reigned for hours as the guards executed many of the prisoners who were left behind. Jadzia was dragged from her bed and stripped naked. Forced to her knees with ten other women, guards began executing them. The girls fell over as the guns were fired. The other girls filled the barrack with their cries while they waited to die. Jadzia closed her eyes and held her breath as she prepared for death. It never came. Four Russian soldiers kicked open the door and killed the guards before they got to her. The Russians quickly ran to the next barrack where more shots were fired.

Naked and frightened, Jadzia covered her eyes and ears while the camp descended into turmoil. Outside the barrack, the SS guards were chased down: some of them fell into the hands of the prisoners who used their wooden shoes to beat their oppressors to death; others were followed into the forest and dragged by ropes to the camp where the Russians forced them to dig the massive ditches that would be used for graves. Jadzia saw none of this, but was curled into a ball on the ground, dirt and blood caked to her bare and pale skin. As the hours passed, calm set in and the freed women rejoiced, but Jadzia remained shaking and alone. Soldiers discovered her and covered her with a blanket. Two of the men helped her to her feet and to the roadside where she waited with the other survivors for a doctor.

Events from the day of her rescue soon faded as she stirred from sleep. A doctor hovered over her and gently spoke so as to not cause alarm. The doctor then conferred with the nurses in Russian. He leaned forward and said in very broken Polish: “You have typhoid fever. The delirium won’t last long, but your fever is high. We’re going to give you some medicine that will help you sleep. You should be fine in a couple of weeks.”

Jadzia nodded and managed a faint smile. The doctor smiled back and left with the nurses. She fell fast asleep, and again tried to force every dark thought from her mind and dream of her parents and the last time she saw them. When she awoke a few hours later, there was a small candle near her bed and some gruel. It had the consistency of pudding and was flavorless, but it was more than she was used to and easy to digest. A nurse came in to check on her from time to time, but after eating as much of the gruel as the nurses would allow, sleep overtook her again.

By morning, her health had not improved. Her fever remained high and she hallucinated often. More girls were brought into the room and examined. Two of them were unconscious and another too weak to speak. She, too, had typhoid fever but was not expected to live long. One girl, Kamila, was full of life and tried her best to boost the spirits of the other patients, even despite their best efforts to avoid her. The nurses loved her as well and the laughter echoed together in perfect, yet chaotic harmony. She worried she would never be able to remember her old life without the years in Ravensbrück muddying her memories.

Kamila had a strange ritual she performed every morning. She climbed out of bed and stretched her tiny frame for several minutes, first arching her back forward and back, then side to side, and taking deep, heavy breaths while groaning softly. She then gathered her blond hair behind her ears, tied it in a knot, and filled her lungs with air. Then, as she contorted her body into the shape of an S, pushing her chest out and lifting her entire body onto her toes, she sang. The songs were often folk songs from her native Poland but sometimes she would entertain the other women with an aria or even a popular song from America. The patients still asleep throughout the hospital never complained of being so violently awoken. The young girl’s voice pierced the walls and made the doctors, nurses, soldiers, and patients alike forget – even for a moment – that they were in a hospital, many of them never to leave.

When the song finished and the nurses and doctors dutifully back to work, Kamila’s ritual resumed the same as the other typhoid patients. Almost as soon as she sung her last note, she often sighed heavily and scurried away to the bathroom. Upon her return, she climbed into bed and whispered to Jadzia the same reminder: “From one hell to
another, huh?”

“The hospital’s not so bad,” Jadzia said.
“I meant the bathroom,” Kamila laughed.
“A lot better than the camp at least.”
“Well, if it weren’t for the camp, none of us would be here,” she said. She pulled the bed sheet up to her neck and took in a deep breath. “It’s strange, isn’t it?” Kamila wondered aloud, “but when I was left behind, I thought my life was over. I thought I’d surely die at the hands of the guards or by whatever army stumbled upon us. But now, I feel overwhelmed by all the opportunity.”

Jadzia looked away from Kamila and stared at the ceiling. “I don’t.”

“Why not?” Kamila asked. “The war is over now. You have your whole life ahead of you.”

Jadzia said nothing.

“So where will you go when you leave here?”

“Where will any of us go?” she wondered aloud.

“I heard a lot of the prisoners are still living in the camp.”

“I’d rather die than go back there.”

“Then where will you go?” she asked.

“I want to know what happened to my parents. And I’ll spend my whole life finding them.”

Kamila’s countenance grew sadder. “Then at least you have hope. I already know where my parents are.”

“I’m sorry,” Jadzia said. “Will you go back to Poland then?”

“I have nothing left there. A friend of mine was part of the resistance when the Germans invaded. He managed to escape. Before he left, we agreed that if we survived, we would go to America together. I suppose that’s as good a plan as any, right?”

“To have anyone to go to is a good plan.”

Kamila nodded in agreement as a tear came to her eye. Afraid to let anyone see her cry, she turned away and buried her head beneath the sheet.

Jadzia did the same.

Throughout the day, she drifted in and out of sleep. She tried to focus her mind on memories of her mother and father but sudden images of life inside the camp interfered like a period of complete silence broken by an explosion. No matter how she tried, sleep lasted just a few minutes. And when she did fall into a deep sleep, she later wished she hadn’t: visions of the gruesome tortures carried out by the prison guards invaded her dreams and produced catastrophic nightmares filled with unspeakable cruelty and molestation.

Then, as the long hours of sleep continued, the real nightmares began. They never included the long hours of work endured at the hands of shameful men whose appetite for barbarism knew no bounds. Nor of the dreadful sights of women being gathered together for execution, stripped of all their clothing, and led into a barrack where panic and then death awaited them. Nor even the awful cries of the dying she heard over the truck engines. Jadzia hoped one day these memories might disappear, maybe even dissipate from her mind like a dream upon waking. She could never get rid of the memory of her greatest regret – a mistake that may have cost her parents their lives. It fueled all her nightmares in the camp.

In the years before the war, Jadzia had a life of superb joy with her parents and grandparents in Poznan, a city in her native Poland. Then the Nazis invaded. Poznan was overrun and renamed; the Germans forced her father’s shop to close. Soon, neighbors disappeared. Her grandparents, considered too old to be useful, were led away with hundreds of other elderly people into the forest where none of them were heard from again. Her family was arrested and all their belongings destroyed. Her father and mother were separated and sent off to the camps, but since Jadzia was still young, she was sent to a facility to be Germanized. She was later sent to an orphanage until she was sixteen when she was sent to Ravensbrück to work. In the six years since the war began, Jadzia longed for word of her parents’ fate. Now that the war was over, she hoped one day to see them again. If they were still alive.

Not far from the hospital room where Jadzia slept, a small bomb fell from the sky and shook the earth. With the war’s end in sight, the sounds of warfare were slowly fading from the minds of the survivors. Jadzia was tortured by regret and slept soundly through the commotion. On the windowsill, staring at the explosion in the distance, sat a small, naked woman. She looked over her shoulder and watched the women sleep. With tremendous grace, the woman floated from the window and landed softly on the bed of the woman beside Jadzia. She placed the palm of her hand against the woman’s temple and closed her eyes. Her eyelids fluttered but then she frowned and pulled her hand from the woman’s face. She flew to another bed and grimaced as she read Kamila’s mind. She pulled her hand away in displeasure. Finally, she floated to Jadzia’s side and put her hand on her head. The woman smiled instantly and whispered: “You’re it.” In a flash of blue light, the woman disappeared.

The next few weeks went by faster than Jadzia imagined. Her friendship with Kamila grew closer and she was
eventually strong enough to eat solid food again. Within a month of her arrival at the hospital barracks, her health had improved. Patients were being released daily to make room for new arrivals. Most were dismissed with no place to go.

As the time for Jadzia’s release approached, she tried to imagine her own future. Nurses and the other patients often asked where she was going. She never had an answer for them. At night, when conversation diminished and she had time to think, curled into a ball and wondered if she would (or could) recover from the nightmare of the last six years, if she would ever have a family of her own, if her body would be strong enough one day to bear children. Alone and afraid, she forced her eyes shut, pulled the sheet over her head to block the still, cold air, and struggled to block the fear from her heart. A nagging thought persisted: Will I see my parents again – and will they ever forgive me?

Before she could conjure an answer from her imagination, she heard a whispered voice say: “Yes.”

She opened her eyes and looked around but there was no one there. Kamila and the other women had fallen asleep. She was completely unaware of the tiny, naked redhead who sat perched on the cross above Jadzia’s bed. In a flash, the young woman disappeared.

Hours before her release the following morning, a nurse approached her. “Do you have somewhere to go?” the nurse said.

“No,” Jadzia replied.

“A lot of the patients well enough to leave are going back to the camp,” the nurse suggested. “The barracks are a lot more comfortable than before.”

Jadzia shook her head vigorously. “That’s okay. I’d rather take my chances in town.”

The nurse smiled. “Of course. There’s a transport that goes to Furstenburg tomorrow, but I don’t know where you’d go from there; life is far from normal.”

“I’ll go with you,” Kamila said. “Does it pass Berlin?”

“Yes,” the nurse said.


“You can come with us to America if you want. Start a new life,” Kamila answered.

Jadzia chuckled sarcastically. “Like there’s another option.”

Content with the arrangement, the nurse left to attend to the other patients. Kamila leaned toward Jadzia and whispered: “I mean it. Come with us to America.”

She sighed heavily and slouched in defeat. “I can’t go to America. I have to find my parents.”

“Then where will you go?”

“Maybe someone in Berlin will help me find them.”

“ Wouldn’t they return to your home?”

“I want to remember Poznan the way it was before the war. No, I’ll only go to Poland if I know they’re there.”

“Then I’ll go with you to Berlin and help you.”

Later that day, the two girls climbed aboard the transport vehicle with nothing but the clothes they had
Squeezed into the truck were a few prisoners Jadzia recognized, but many looked like local Germans, the fear of being noticed etched in their faces. Kamila chatted with the other passengers, trying her hardest to make someone laugh. A few people smirked but most looked at her with suspicion for being so cheery. Jadzia knew that Kamila’s hilarity was just a ruse; she was no happier than anyone else.

After a few hours, and after picking up a few other passengers who bribed their way aboard, the truck arrived on the outskirts of Berlin. Russian tanks and soldiers monitored the streets as Jadzia and Kamila stumbled across the rubble on their way into the city. Jadzia didn’t know what she would see in Berlin, but she stood by her belief that anything was better than returning to the barracks of Ravensbrück. Despite the palpable hopelessness in the air, there were signs that people were living or, at the very least, surviving. People in search of food were everywhere: desperate men carved meat from a dead horse, women waited in lines while Russian soldiers used German military daggers to cut bread into rations. Those not in search of food climbed over mountains of rubble as buildings around them burned to the ground. Along the main roads, hundreds of wounded German soldiers lied in the gutter or on improvised cots while nurses struggled to help. From the sound of Russian fighter planes roaring overhead and the Soviet tanks crunching glass and garbage beneath their treads, Jadzia and Kamila were surrounded by chaos.

“Where will we even go?” Jadzia wondered aloud.

Kamila approached a woman walking down the street with her child. “Do you know where we can find our family?” Her German was broken, but the woman seemed to understand and pointed them down a long road where throngs of people were gathered.

In the bell tower of a church high above the destruction, the tiny woman stood on the ledge and placed her hands on her naked hips. She watched Jadzia and Kamila stumble across the littered streets and down an alley to the camp for displaced persons. As the two girls walked around a corner, the woman flew high into the sky and descended on the rooftop overlooking the camp. She folded her arms under her breasts and studied the girls continually. She never took her eyes off of Jadzia.

When they arrived at the camp for displaced persons, Jadzia grew anxious at the thought of finding her family. There seemed to be no order as people scrambled to and fro in search of food rations and whatever clothing was available. Children kept busy by playing with whatever they could fashion into a toy, but the soldiers tried desperately to organize the people in whatever way they could, some by religion, others by language, most by ethnicity. Jadzia and Kamila stood by as soldiers supplied the other refugees with food from their own rations. The chaos was overwhelming to witness for Jadzia.

“Maybe we shouldn’t have come to Berlin,” Jadzia whispered.

Kamila shook her head. “No, we’re in the right place.”

A young soldier, armed only with a pencil, approached the two girls and smiled. “Where are you from?” he asked.

“We’ve come from Ravensbrück,” Jadzia said. “I’m looking for my family.”

“I can’t help you with that now,” he said. “You will need to find them here or in the other camps. We can make sure you have food, clothing, and shelter, if you’d like.”

“Thank you,” they said.

The soldier pointed them in the direction of another soldier down the road and ran to greet the next group of people arriving. The girls waited behind scores of other refugees for several hours before receiving their meager ration of food, a bar of used soap, and accommodations in a bombed-out church a few blocks away.
Inside the church, dozens of people huddled together for warmth or fashioned partitions by hanging wet clothing. Most of the refugees kept to themselves or gossiped about politics while their children played ball or splashed in puddles in the courtyard.

Kamila and Jadzia discovered a small, deserted room that no one else seemed to want. It had a leak in the ceiling and the door’s lock had been blown out by gunfire. The girls cleared away the books and debris on the floor. The sun had begun to set and word from the other refugees informed them of the strict curfew.

As night arrived, only a glimmer of moonlight made its way through the cracks in the cold stone. Kamila scoured the room for anything soft. She found a few scraps of cloth and tried to rest her head upon her makeshift pillow. Meanwhile, Jadzia lit the only dry candle and went through the pile of rubble to gather something to burn. She found a few dry books but realized none of them were worth reading. She gathered the Nazi literature that wasn’t damp, lit a small fire on the floor, and tried to stay warm. A gaping hole overhead allowed a near-steady stream of water to fall to the ground in the corner and allowed the smoke from the fire to escape. With no window in the room, they felt as safe as could be expected.

Kamila finally gave up on the idea of getting sleep. She wedged a half-broken chair against the door as tight as possible and removed her clothes, placing them over the cracks in the stone. Kamila worked fast to gather their ration of soap and washed with the cold rainwater from the ceiling. Jadzia tried not to stare but noted how much weight her friend had gained since they first met. Instead of the frail girl who was hardly able to stand on her own, she was an almost vibrant and youthful woman. After Kamila dressed, Jadzia bathed just before the fire died out. Once clothed, and with no more dry books to burn, the girls sat with their backs to each other and did their best to keep warm. The stone floor was damp and freezing; neither of them slept soundly.
Chapter 2

Late in the night, when nary a sound was heard besides a crying child, something stirred in the dark. The girls hardly noticed the noise at first, but soon it was too close to ignore. Kamila awakened and peered into the blackness that surrounded them. Jadzia clamored for a candle and finding one, she lit it. As the fire’s light spread out across the void, the source of the sound became clear: two young men were standing quietly over them.

“You’re pretty,” one of them said to Kamila in German.

The girls shrunk back against the wall and reached out for each other’s hand. The two men, dressed as Russian soldiers, stepped closer. The larger of the two men drew a knife from his belt. Frozen by fear, the girls inched closer together and tried to scream but it was too late. The two men pounced and neither of the girls could make a sound.

Jadzia was dragged into the corner and slapped across the face by the one soldier.

“You’re next,” he said as he tied her hands behind her back and shoved a piece of cloth in her mouth.

Kamila struggled to break free of the other soldier but was overtaken by his companion. She tried to scream through the flesh of the soldier’s hand over her mouth, but it was use. She kicked and flailed as hard as she could while the men tore at her clothes. Finally, she landed a kick across the one soldier’s jaw but he reacted swiftly, striking her in the face so hard the other soldier lost his balance and dropped her. She landed on the cold slap and fell over unconscious, blood pouring from her mouth and nose.

The men ignored and discarded Kamila and rushed toward Jadzia, who had started to work herself free of her bounds. Before they could strike, a brilliant flash of blue light filled the room and in an instant, the men disappeared.

Unsure but unconcerned about what happened, Jadzia broke free, dug the cloth from her mouth, and rushed to Kamila’s side. The girl’s half-naked body lied still on the stone, blood draining from her nose and mouth. Jadzia held her friend in her arms and desperately checked for a pulse. Jadzia’s hands were shaking too much to feel anything. She pressed her head against Kamila’s bared breast but heard and felt no heartbeat. The girl was dead, and upon realizing it – and for the first time since her release from the camp – Jadzia found the strength to cry. She held Kamila in her arms and wiped the blood from her friend’s face. Tears streamed down her cheek and fell to the floor, mixing with the pool of crimson beside her.

The darkness around her abated as a gentle blue light appeared in the center of the room. Jadzia’s eyes adjusted and realized the light was not coming from the candle. The light grew brighter and Jadzia realized she was not alone in the room. “You’re safe now,” whispered a faint voice just beyond the borders of the light.

Jadzia looked in every direction around her, never letting go of her friend, and then saw a miniature and naked woman floating at eye level a few meters away. Frightened, she latched onto Kamila’s lifeless body and pressed her back against the wall.

“You don’t need to be afraid,” the woman said.

Jadzia fixed her gaze on the woman. She said nothing since she couldn’t understand the woman’s language.

The woman discerned this from her silence and said: “What language do you speak?”

Jadzia didn’t know how to reply so she said her name aloud. The woman watched Jadzia’s lips move and turned her ear to catch the sound.
“That may be all I need,” she said. “I’ll be right back.” The woman disappeared in a flash of light.

Jadzia let go of Kamila and jumped to her feet, frightened by what she saw. Before she could scream for help, the naked, flying woman returned in another dazzling burst of azure light.

“Can you understand me now?” the tiny woman asked in perfect Polish as she hovered in the air.

Jadzia nodded.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t get to you sooner,” she said. “And I’m terribly sorry about your friend.” The woman descended to the ground and approached Kamila’s body. She touched the girl’s face. She closed her eyes and promptly shook her head in disappointment. “There’s nothing I can do,” she said as she pulled her hand away. Turning away from Kamila, she flew into the air and hovered closer to Jadzia.

“Who are you?” Jadzia asked.

“My name is Genesis. Listen, I know you have a lot of questions about who I am and what you just saw. Be assured that I am a woman just like you, only much stronger.”

Jadzia, feeling safe once again, fell to the ground and sighed deeply. “This isn’t a dream?”

“No, I’m afraid not.” Jadzia’s hands continued to shake as shock set in. “What is your name?”

“Jadzia Konik.”

“Jadzia? So you’re a warrior then?”

Jadzia looked up from staring at Kamila and shook her head. “No, I’m no warrior. My parents named me after a relative.”

“I see,” Genesis said. “To put your mind at ease, there’s nothing you need to fear from me. I’m not here to hurt you. In fact, I’m going to make your life a lot better.”

“I don’t understand,” Jadzia said.

“You will in time. But this is hardly the place for us to talk. We should leave.”

“What ever happened to the men who were here?”

“Those men will never bother you again,” Genesis said. “They’re currently standing naked in front of a dozen tanks twenty miles away.” She laughed. “Oh, and before we leave, there’s something you should be prepared for.”

“I don’t care where we go,” Jadzia said. “This church is freezing.”

“You’re going to get a lot colder before you get warmer unfortunately. Get ready.”

“What about my friend?”

“I’ll take care of her,” Genesis said.

Before Jadzia could utter another word, she was no longer in the church. Trees of every shape and size surrounded her, the branches and thickets so tangled she couldn’t see past the small clearing she stood in. It was still night and the moonlight painted a blue hue across the forest, even on Genesis, who was still floating in midair a few feet away. Jadzia suddenly realized what Genesis meant by getting colder: she was naked. Upon realizing this, she scrambled around the clearing and desperately sought cover, jumping behind a bush.
“There’s no one around, Jadzia.”

“What happened? Where are we?” Jadzia asked with a tinge of panic in her voice.

“Far from the war. It may be over, but there is still too much sadness. We are no longer in Europe, but in a remote part of North America. And I’m sorry; I should have been more specific about getting colder. It’s a byproduct of traveling this way.”

“How did you do that?”

“This may be hard to understand at first, but I’m a very special person,” Genesis said proudly. “You see, I can travel through space and time as easily as you can walk.”

Jadzia looked around the clearing and noticed the absolute silence surrounding them. Not even an animal made a sound. A moment later, she emerged crouching from her hiding spot and sat with her back to a tree. Unlike Genesis who appeared to adore being naked, Jadzia modestly brought her knees to her chin and wrapped her arms around her legs. “I don’t understand. How did we just travel from Germany without feeling anything?”

“Passing through space as fast as we just did is a painful ordeal, but there is no need to worry. I know what I’m doing. Besides, I needed to get you here alone so we could talk. You may not realize this but I’ve been trying to contact you ever since the war ended.”

“And why didn’t you?”

“For starters, you were always around people. Even when you reached the city, you went to where the people were – the one place, in fact,” she said. “I never risk being seen. But when those men attacked you, I needed to intervene.”

“Thank you for doing that,” Jadzia said.

Genesis hovered over to Jadzia’s side and sat on a tree-limb just above her. “You’ll find I’m able to do a lot more than that,” she said proudly.

Jadzia brushed off her cockiness and curled up tighter into a ball as the bark of the tree scratched into her back. “I wish I had some clothes.”

“You get used to it.”

“How do you not freeze to death?”

“That’s another thing I can do!” she said with a pretentious smile. Without waiting for Jadzia to request a demonstration, Genesis flew from her perch and landed on a pile of sticks on the edge of the clearing. Her hands glowed a deep burning red and within seconds the sticks caught fire and warmed the cool air of the clearing. Jadzia jumped up and crawled beside the fire, while still endeavoring to cover herself along the way.

“Thanks!” Jadzia said. She reached toward a fallen tree, snatched a dry branch, and tossed it into the flames. Before the branch ignited, Genesis’s hands turned blue and immediately the fire went out; ice crystals covered the wood. “Why did you do that?” Jadzia said. “I’m freezing!”

“I just wanted to show you what I can do.”

“Well, you don’t need to show off!”

Genesis frowned like a stubborn child. “Fine,” she said. A second later, the fire burst forth again and Jadzia inched closer to the flames. Genesis sat on the opposite side of the fire and scowled. Stubborn and upset at
Jadzia’s lack of interest in her abilities, she folded her arms beneath her breasts and fell to the grass.

“I still wish I had clothes,” Jadzia said.

“I can get you something to wear. But they’ll just disappear again the next time we travel.”

“Next time? Where are we going?”

“You don’t want to stay here the rest of your life, do you?”

Jadzia looked around the clearing and closed her eyes as the peace and quiet lingered. “Not forever. Why did you come to me?”

“I’m here to help you.”

“Yes, but what makes me so special?” Jadzia asked abruptly. “So many people have suffered worse than me. And so many women have endured what you just prevented.”

“I have my own reasons for choosing you. I’ve actually been watching you for some time.”

“Watching me? How have you done that?”

“To me, time and space are like an enormous stream of energy, like a powerful river. To enter the stream and travel, I convert myself into pure energy. I can do the same with anything living, as I did with you. But near that stream, I can see everything that happens.”

“Like watching a fish in a stream?”

“Exactly,” Genesis said. “Only the stream is constantly moving and changing because the actions of everything shift its direction. Reentering the stream means I have to predict where things will be during the split second I need to emerge.”

A branch snapped somewhere in the distance and Jadzia instinctively covered her bare skin. Her eyes darted across the woods, but she saw nothing. “Are you sure we’re alone?”

“Completely. There are no people for a hundred miles in every direction.”

“Good.” Jadzia crawled away from the fire and knelt beside the creek that ran through the clearing. She bent over and dipped her head toward the water and took a long drink. Satisfied, she scurried back toward the fire. As she lay back on the thick and soft grass, she was happy she no longer had to sleep on the stone floor of the church.

“I need something to eat,” Genesis said. “Are you hungry?”

Jadzia shook her head.

“I won’t be gone long.” She disappeared into the forest.

Almost as soon as Genesis left, Jadzia closed her eyes and fell asleep.

Genesis returned from fruit-gathering and lay on the grass beside Jadzia and watched the moon and stars while she ate. “You’re in the best hands now,” she said aloud for the benefit of no one. “I won’t let any harm come to you.” Genesis yawned and fell into a deep slumber.

The next morning, Jadzia opened her eyes and was overjoyed that her escape from Germany was not a
dream. Not far away, Genesis’s hands glowed a bright but deep red as she hovered over the small pile of dead branches. The wood instantly caught fire. As she threw more leaves on the fire, she noticed Jadzia was awake.

“I’m sorry if I disturbed you,” Genesis said, “but I do sometimes get a little cold. Using my powers to heat myself gets tiresome. Besides, I like fire.”

Jadzia smiled and stood up to stretch.

“Are you hungry?” Genesis asked.

“A little.”

“Do you know how to clean a fish?”

Jadzia nodded.

“I’ll make you a deal: if I catch the fish, you have to kill and clean it.” She handed Jadzia a sharp piece of rock.

“Why won’t you kill it?”

“I don’t kill anything if I can help it.” Genesis hovered over the small creek and spotted a few fish just below the surface. With great elegance, Genesis focused on the largest fish and lifted it from the water with nothing but her concentration. The fish gasped for air as Jadzia reached over, grabbed the fish from its suspension in midair, and killed it with the rock. Genesis stoked the fire and moments later, the fish was roasting over the flames. While the fish cooked, Jadzia sat idly by and dipped her toes in the creek. Genesis searched the forest for mushrooms and returned with a meager supply of vegetables just as the fish was cooked. She gathered rocks in the creek and formed them in a circle, and then filled the basin with water. Using her hands as before, she heated the rocks until they glowed. Soon the water simmered.

“This might hurt a little,” Genesis said as she reached for Jadzia’s hands and touched them. Jadzia recoiled instinctively and watched her hands turn a light blue. “Eat.”

Jadzia reached into the cauldron of soup with her hands that felt frozen. The hot liquid touched her cold hands and returned them instantly to a healthy pink. As she sipped the broth, it was the perfect temperature. After each handful, Genesis reached over and touched her hands to cool them again.

“Slow down,” Genesis said as she broke the fish and tossed one half to Jadzia. “We’re in no rush.” She sat on the warm stones and reached forward with her hands to scoop out the soup. Her hands turned blue as well and returned to normal once she ate.

Jadzia finished her portion of the fish and wiped her mouth clean. She took a long drink from the creek and looked around at the forest. Animals moved about, but the sound of humans was noticeably absent. “Where are we exactly?” Jadzia asked.

“Canada. This place has the same weather as Germany.”

“Why not someplace warmer? I am naked after all.” To her surprise, her nakedness had become less of a concern the more she realized how secluded they were. Genesis was right: she got used to it. And after six long years of harassment for being the “prettiest girl in the camp,” she relished the freedom.

“I suppose I could have. But this is a place I’ve been to before and I know it’s secluded.”

Jadzia dipped her toes into the creek and watched as the fish cleaned her feet. “Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?” she asked.
“Not a bit.”

“Where are you from?”

“I don’t know. I woke up one morning as you see me now; the only memory I had was my name.”

“And there’s nothing else you remember?”

“When I first awoke, I had no idea where I came from. For months, I struggled with a feeling deep inside that forced me to find people like myself. I discovered other humans by accident, and once I saw how different I was from them, I tried to isolate myself from everything. But the feeling inside only grew stronger. That’s when I discovered my strengths.

“It was those months spent alone that showed me what I could do. And then one day, the greatest power I have emerged. I tried to lift the largest thing I could find, but it wouldn’t budge. That’s when I noticed a way to enter the stream: trying to move the boulder caused a tiny hole to appear.”

“A hole?”

“Yes, as though the air was torn in two. It was big enough to walk through and when I did, I discovered that I could move through time as easily as I could breathe.”

“Where did you go?”

“I spent, what you would consider years, travelling across the stream, learning all I could to master the power. But the feeling never went away. The more I avoided people, the more I wanted to help them. And that was before I learned of all the wars, of the millions of ways humans have invented to inflict pain on one another.”

Jadzia’s mind drifted while Genesis spoke. She couldn’t help the flood of memories from the last six years from resurfacing, all of the torture and death she witnessed, pain so intense and suffering so acute that her stomach turned on end. She fought the images from her mind and addressed the awkward silence. “You mentioned last night that you are here to help me,” she said.

“I’m going to take you back in time and help you fix a mistake from your life,” Genesis said plainly as she licked her fingers clean of the soup. Her eyes widened as she watched for Jadzia’s response.

“That's easy: I want to see my parents again. But you've not told me why you came to me?” Jadzia asked. “It couldn’t have been just to help fix the past.”

“I came to a decision not long ago. I have a power that was given to me somehow. And even though I can’t explain all that I can do, I can still help. More than anything else, the one thing humanity has in common is a desire to fix a wrong from their past. They are always filled with shame and regret, self-loathing takes over and soon, they become paralyzed by hopelessness. Why should anyone have to live like that while I’m alive?

“But that’s only partly the reason I came to you. You know you’ve made mistakes but you’ve never let that change the kind of person you are like so many others. There’s one thing you want though, and it is truly noble.”

“I don’t understand,” Jadzia said.

“Sure you do. You’ve spent the last six years of your life surviving unlivable conditions, surrounded by despair, with the threat of death all around you. Besides the people with unshakable faith in God, you stood out because you thought of others. While the women around you cursed their lives, you only wanted to see your parents again.”

“How will I find them?”
Genesis grinned. “Has it occurred to you that since I already know so much about you, I already know about them?”

“Do you?” she asked.

“Yes. Come with me.”

Jadzia attempted to speak but the blue light enveloped them. They slipped into the stream of time and emerged a second later in a field of copper grass. As she looked around, she saw nothing but bare trees along the horizon in all directions and felt the crisp air gently touch her face. All over the fields were signs that autumn had gone and winter was near. She was naked, but since there was nothing to be seen for miles in every direction, she refrained from covering herself. Genesis hovered at eye level again with a forlorn expression on her face.

“What’s wrong?” Jadzia asked. “Where are we?”

“We’re in the future; about twenty years,” she said. “The camp that housed your parents does not exist anymore, and this field is all that remains of that horrid place. All the shelters, barracks, and evidence were burned and left here, where the earth reclaimed it. The people who died were left here as well.”

Jadzia looked down and saw a German pistol lied just under the grass. Rust had consumed it and as she brushed her foot against it, the brittle instrument of death crumbled. She crept away from the grass and ran to the nearest tree as she realized what Genesis was trying to say but seemed too scared to utter: her parents were dead, buried somewhere in the field. She fell to the ground and let out a terrible cry as the words reverberated in her head. Her parents were gone, and she would never see them again. Genesis hovered nearby and watched out for any signs of life off in the distance. Jadzia had collapsed against the side of the tree. Her back was bleeding from the scratches of the tree bark, but she didn’t seem to care. When the tears ran out, she just lied at the base of the tree and went numb. Before long, she fell asleep under the weight of her grief.

Jadzia awoke with a terrible headache. High above her, in the boughs of the solitary tree that supported her while she grieved, sat Genesis on one of its branches. She looked out across the horizon for signs of life. Finding none, she glanced back at Jadzia and descended to the ground. Jadzia remained numb and in a tightly-held ball, her back against the tree.

“What do you know what happened to them?” she asked.

“I do,” she answered. “But I won’t speak of it. Some things are best left unknown. You already know of the things that went on in these places.”

Jadzia shuddered as the unmentionable memories of her years in the camp returned, images so terrible that she didn’t want to imagine what happened to her parents. No doubt whatever occurred was horrid and if she was ever to live a normal life, perhaps leaving their demise a mystery would help her heal. Still, her one goal upon her freedom was to find her parents. Now that she had, she was confused over what to do. “So, what now?” she mused aloud. “Where do I go from here? Do I go back to Poland and hope to marry? Do I stay in Germany or go to America?” As the immensity of the choices before her sunk in, the tears returned and Jadzia wept.

Genesis swooped closer to Jadzia. “I’ve not brought you here to see only terrible place.”

“I’m scared,” Jadzia said.

“I know. But I’m here to help you. I want to show you something.” Genesis waved her hand as she floated away from her.

She gained control of her emotions and slowly rose to her feet. After struggling to regain her balance, she followed Genesis into a forest over a nearby hill. There, scrambling in the leaves, she saw a fox chase a small
rodent into a rotting tree stump. It tried frantically to catch its meal but the fox was left pacing back and forth, deciding if the catch was worth it.

“Watch this,” Genesis said with her hands on her hips and a broad smile across her face.

Jadzia saw nothing spectacular at first. Then, the fox ran away as the rodent scurried out of the stump and chased the fox. Just as the two animals were about to mate with one another, and as though coming out of a trance, the animals stopped and the aggressor changed once more. “What happened?” she asked.

“One of the things I learned while studying the stream,” Genesis said, “is how everything is connected. Since I can manipulate the energy within the stream, I can also modify the way things connect to it. What you’ve just seen is what happens when I take the consciousness of a fox and swap it with a rat. The rat believed itself to be a fox and began chasing the real fox to mate with it. The fox thought it saw an aggressive male rat in pursuit and ran. Once their minds were back in their bodies, their relationship returned to normal.”

Jadzia watched in awe as the rat hid in the stump while the fox hungrily paced outside. What struck her as odd was how neither seemed to notice anything had changed. “What does this have to do with me?”

“This is how you are going to see your parents again.” Genesis waited for a reaction from Jadzia, but there was none. Instead, Jadzia stared at her feet and examined the ground. “What’s wrong?” Genesis asked.

“How am I supposed to go on? They were all I had.”

Genesis settled atop her shoulder and stroked Jadzia’s hair to comfort her. “I envy you. I don’t know if I even have parents. But I want to give you the chance to see yours again.”

“What do I say to them, that they won’t live through the war?”

“I would tell them how much you miss them and how much you love them.”

“So are you going to do to me like that fox? Transfer my mind to someone else?”

“That’s certainly the safest way. I can send you back to the camp as you are now, but there are risks. Sending a complete person takes more effort. It also takes longer than just a person’s mind. If you get caught, I can get you out but not easily – or quickly. And let us not forget that you will emerge just as naked as you are right now.”

“Whose mind will I be in?”

Something stirred in the distance. Genesis peered over her shoulder at the horizon and frowned. “We need to leave. It’s no longer safe.”

Immediately, Jadzia was whisked away to the clearing in the Canadian woods before she could respond to Genesis any further. The creek hadn’t changed since they left; in fact, the small pile of twigs used to cook their breakfast was still smoldering.

Jadzia fell to the ground near the fire and crossed her legs. Her shoulders slumped; she shook her head in defeat. “I don’t know what to do.”

“I won’t put you in the minds of the people who captured you; their minds are too poisoned. The connections to the stream are unstable. Putting you in an unstable mind can have terrible consequences for you. A part of you may be lost forever. I’ll try to find another prisoner then.”

Jadzia didn’t understand completely. She had never excelled in school in Poland and much of Genesis’s abilities were incomprehensible. None of her exposition mattered; there was only one solution: she didn’t want to see her parents in the body of a German guard, a nurse, or even another prisoner. If she was to speak to her parents,
it needed to be in her own body, with her own voice. The risks Genesis spoke of were no worse than living life alone. Then another idea flashed through her mind. “What if I go back and save them? Like you saved me?”

“I’ve never done that before,” she said. “And I didn’t save you - I watched you suffer along with everyone else.”

“But can it be done?”

“Take your parents from their time and bring them here to you? Surely guards will notice their disappearance, and I’ve seen what happens to the other prisoners when just one disappoints. Hundreds of people could be killed while the Nazis look for your missing parents. That’s not something I’m prepared to watch.

“It’s different with you. You survived. No one’s searching for you.”

“You think no one would miss me?”

Genesis folded her arms in protest. “That’s not what I meant. But the chaos of the war’s end will mean many people will go unaccounted for. Besides, I can return you to the same moment you left.”

“I need to see them in person,” she said. “It has to be me.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I am. I need to see them with my own eyes, and have them hear me in my own voice. If I am captured before you rescue me, then my fate will be the same as theirs.”

“I can’t let that happen to you,” she said. “I’ve come here to protect you, to see that you are happy - not dead.”

“I’ll never be happy if my parents aren’t with me.”

“That’s a noble thought, but what do you think your parents would want for you?”

Jadzia paused and stared back at the ground. “I don’t know,” she said.

“And you’re sure you want to go through with this?” Genesis asked.

“No,” Jadzia said. “I’d rather never set foot in that place again. But if I see them again for even a few minutes, then it will all be worth it.”

“Even if I can’t get you out?”

Jadzia took a deep breath and sighed. “Yes, even then.”

“Okay,” Genesis said. “If it takes a while for you to emerge, don’t worry; I’m just trying to find a safe point in the stream. I can’t let anyone see me either.”

“How long will it take to get me out if something goes wrong?”

“I know when I disappear it all seems instant to you, but there’s much I need to prepare in order to enter the stream. In a pinch, I can get you out immediately, although I can’t make any promises where we’ll emerge. It could be the far side of the world.”

“I’ll let you handle that then,” Jadzia said.

“There’s just one more thing,” she said. “You’ll need clothes. And I can’t fabricate matter from thin air.
If you are serious about going inside the camp, there is only one place you’ll be able to find something to wear.”

“Where?”

Genesis plainly said: “In the gas chambers.”

“There are no other options?” Jadzia said as she swallowed hard. She didn’t wait for an answer; she knew Genesis was right. After taking a deep breath and closing her eyes, preparing her mind for what might lay ahead, she said: “Fine. Let’s go.”

Genesis paused and watched Jadzia in awe.

“Is something wrong?” Jadzia asked.

“No,” she answered. “I suppose I don’t understand why you are willing to go through so much just to see them again.”

“It’s not just to see them. A wrong must be righted.” Jadzia bowed her head.

Genesis said nothing at first, but after minutes passed and not a word from Jadzia, she breached the silence. “What wrong?”

Jadzia breathed deeply and ran her fingers through her hair. Then, unable to look up from the ground, she covered her eyes with her hands. “Before the war,” she began, her nose already sniffing, “my grandparents were killed by the Nazis. When they came for my father, I was thirteen. My mother and I were terrified so my father hid us in a small storage closet. The door was beneath a table; no one could see it. There wasn’t enough room for both of us, so my mother – to protect me – hid me alone.

“The soldiers broke down the door to our apartment and tried to seize my parents. My father fought back. I crawled deep inside the closet to avoid the sound of my mother screaming. That’s where I found it: my father’s gun. I picked it up and fingered the trigger. I knew I could free us right then if I shot the guards. Before I could crawl back to the doorway, my father was already unconscious. The guards…they laughed as they dragged him outside the apartment and down the stairs. My mother, her mouth bleeding, was carried out later.

“I had the gun pointed out the little door, aimed at the guard. But my finger wouldn’t move. I closed my eyes and tried again, but the trigger…it wouldn’t budge. My hand was shaking. By the time I could keep them still, my parents were gone. It was my fault. I have to tell them the truth.”

Genesis rushed to her side as Jadzia wept. “I don’t think any of this was your fault. But if you want to ask for their forgiveness anyway, I’ll help you get it done.”

Jadzia nodded and wiped her eyes dry. After taking another deep breath and toughening her countenance and straightening her back, she said: “Let’s go.”

A second later, they were gone.
Chapter 3

When Jadzia emerged from the time stream, it felt as though several minutes passed. She stood in a room she hoped to never see with her own eyes. Her bare feet stood atop the cold concrete floor of the gas chamber. The still air smelled of death. Jadzia’s eyes adjusted to the faint moonlight that seeped through the ventilation hole. The floor was covered with the corpses of a hundred naked, hairless women. Jadzia held back tears and rushed to the corner of the chamber where the clothes of the women laid gathered in a heap. In the pile of clothes she found a shirt with a purple triangle on it. She figured if the Jehovah’s Witnesses in this camp were as well-regarded as they were in Ravensbrück, then she might have a better chance of moving about unmolested. She found a pair of pants that fit and dressed quickly.

Genesis appeared in a flash and led Jadzia to the door. Once outside, the women looked around for any sign of the SS. The camp was silent. Genesis raced to the nearest barrack and waved Jadzia across the road. Two guards emerged from an adjacent barrack and headed off to the nearest guard-shack.

“Is this it?” Jadzia whispered.

Genesis nodded.

Quietly, Jadzia opened the barrack’s door and crept along the wall. Genesis followed.

The camp’s barrack looked similar to the one in Ravensbrück. Musty and dank, the wood smelled of mildew and the ground dry and barren. Not even an insect could be found. The smell of sewage filled the air and mixed with the scent of death. All throughout the open space where the men slept were the unmistakable sounds of human suffering. Some prayed to God for strength while others mourned their own fate.

“Are you okay?” Jadzia asked.

“I’ll be fine.” Genesis hid behind Jadzia’s neck where the girl’s long hair covered her.

“Where and when are we?”

“Well, the end of the war is still three years away,” Genesis whispered. “The camp we’re at is not far from your own.”

“How much time do we have?”

“Are you sure that is something you want to know?”

“Yes.”

“Tomorrow. I’m sorry to give you so little time, but there are seldom places in the stream where they are completely alone.”

“Where is my father?”

“He is here. When you’re done speaking to him, we’ll go to your mother; she’s in a nearby camp.”

“Where will you be?”

“I’d like to stay close by, if that’s alright. I can hide in your shirt pocket.”

Jadzia nodded. Genesis climbed into her pocket as she tip-toed along the corridor amid the bunks. They
were stacked three high and two or three prisoners occupied each bed. Most of them faced the wall. After searching as fast (and quietly) as she could, she stumbled upon a man who resembled her father. His face looked older than it should have given the few years they spent apart. His hair had thinned and his body frail. Unsure of what to say if he awoke, she studied his face and noticed just how the life, the spark, and the vigor had fled, all of his vitality replaced with a frown, the hopelessness drawn in all the wrinkles.

Time dragged on as Jadzia did nothing but watch her father closely. She knew she could not prevent the inevitable, so she tried to remember him the way he was before it arrived. Genesis said and did nothing but allowed Jadzia the opportunity to be with her father in whatever way she wanted. He shifted his weight and slowly, his eyes opened and focused on the young girl’s face before him. Within mere seconds, he concluded the woman’s smile was none other than his daughter’s.

“Jadzia?” he asked (just to be sure), to which she nodded. “How are you here?”

“I can’t tell you that; it’s too dangerous. I want you to know that I’m safe.”

“I’ve missed you so much,” he said as his eyes grew full with tears. “Your mother and I have been worried sick about you.”

“I know, father. I can’t stay long, but I wanted to make sure you know how much I love you.”

He smiled. “I’ve never doubted that for a moment. I’m just glad to know you’re alive.” He reached out and touched her cheek. “Even if I died tomorrow…”

“Don’t speak like that,” she said. She began to weep. “I don’t want to think of this horrible place anymore. I just want to be at peace with you.”

“I love you, Jadzia,” her father said. “You’ve grown into such a beautiful woman. I hope, when this war is over, we’ll be together again.”

She couldn’t hold back the tears. She tried to keep her cries muted, but the thought of her father’s death, just hours away, was too unbearable. “I hope so, father,” she said. “I love you so much.” She looked down and paused. The guilt of her father’s suffering weighed heavily. “There’s something else I need to tell you. The day you and Mama were separated, I could have saved you.”

He shook his head. “I don’t think anyone could have saved us, my dear.”

“But I could have, Father. And I’m sorry.”

He sat up in bed and pulled her closer. “You have nothing to apologize for,” he said. “You did not bring any of this upon us. Is that what you’ve been thinking all this time?”

She bowed her head and nodded.

“Look at me.” She looked up. “Don’t seek my forgiveness. Nothing is your fault, Jadzia.”

He smiled warmly. She burned the image of her father deep into her mind, ever mindful she would never see him alive again. They held each other’s hands for several minutes. Then she felt a gentle nudge on her breast, a signal from Genesis to get moving.

“I need to leave, father.”

“Yes, dear,” he said. “You must leave this place.” He reached toward her and tenderly kissed her cheek. “Tell your mother – if you see her – that I love her.”

“I will.” She kissed her father and softly embraced him. A noise stirred around the corner and Jadzia
smiled at her father one last time. He smiled back and turned away as she left. Jadzia hurried back to the door and
cautiously stepped into the road outside. Retracing her steps through the camp, she crouched near the truck and
watched the guard’s shack for any sign of movement. She stayed low to the ground and made her way back to the
crematory. Once outside, she hesitated.

“What are you doing?” Genesis said.

“I can’t go back in this room.”

“You should,” she said. “If we leave now, the guards will find your clothes here on the ground and it
may raise suspicion. They’ll also see the flash.”

Jadzia shook her head but quickly conceded the point. She took a deep breath, held it, and entered the
room. Genesis crawled from her pocket and said nothing. Jadzia stripped off her clothes and held her breath, but the
scent from the floor climbed inside her nostrils. Desperate for air, she hunched over and gasped, quietly coughing to
catch her breath. Genesis reached down and put her hand on Jadzia’s shoulder while she cried.

“I’ve said all I can to my father,” Jadzia said. “Seeing him again was much harder than I imagined.”

“It was hard for me to watch too. I almost changed my mind about saving him.”

“You did?”

“I’m not cold-hearted. But I need to be responsible.”

Jadzia coughed again under the weight of the stale air. “Thank you for caring at least.”

“Are you sure you want to go see your mother now?”

“What choice do I have?” she asked rhetorically, ever mindful to keep her eyes closed and her breathing
shallow.

“You forget that we can always come back to this point in time. If you would like to rest and settle
yourself for a while, we can return later.”

Jadzia’s emotions had become impossible to control; her hands were shaking and her voice quivered as
she spoke. “I suppose you’re right.”

“Then we’ll see your mother shortly. She will always be here at this point in time.”

Jadzia nodded as Genesis closed her eyes and gathered her strength. A brief moment later, in a flash of
light, they were gone.

In the clearing once more, Jadzia and Genesis arrived at nearly the same moment they left. The fire still
smoked and the rocks in the creek were still warm to the touch. Jadzia fell to the ground and gasped for fresh air. She
drew long, deep breaths into her lungs and opened her eyes widely, soaking in the pleasant sights of the forest.

“Would you like something to eat?” Genesis offered.

“No, thanks,” Jadzia said. She stumbled to the bank of the creek and drank the cool water from her
hands before splashing some on her face. “My stomach is churning. I couldn't hold anything down if I wanted.”

“For what it’s worth,” Genesis said, “I’m incredibly proud of you. Saying what you did to your father
must have been very difficult. It took tremendous courage.”
Jadzia accepted the compliment and laid her head on the lush grass and closed her eyes. “Do you mind if I rest a bit?” she asked.

“Not at all.” Genesis left Jadzia to sleep and picked berries from the nearby bushes and ate.

Although exhausted and nauseated from the experiences of their morning, Jadzia dreamed of only the happiest memories of life with her father.

Genesis, on the other hand, found it difficult to sleep that night for the first time in ages. Even though her new life satisfied her desire to help people, something was missing. She tossed and turned all night while the voice of her conscience called out: “Do more.” Unsure of what that meant, she resolved anyway to listen to its command. Seconds later, she closed her eyes and entered a deep slumber.

The following morning, Genesis awoke refreshed and gathered whatever food she could find from the surrounding countryside before Jadzia awoke. After eating to her heart’s content, she lay along the grass, closed her eyes, and enjoyed the symphony produced by the woodland creatures, trees, and trickling water.

Jadzia awakened after almost an entire day of sleep and wiped her eyes clean. She first sought privacy behind the fallen tree beyond the border of the clearing, and then washed her hands in the creek. Her nerves still rattled by the prior day’s exertions, she ate the food Genesis collected and tried to calm her pulse. But then she realized what still lied ahead and that it would be just as taxing as before. Just the thought of her mission caused her pulse to race again.

“Are you alright?” Genesis asked.

“I haven’t slept this well in years.”

“I can sense you’re nervous.”

“I am. How do I say good-bye to someone forever?”

Genesis remained silent. There was nothing she could say to answer her question.

“Is there no way we can save them?” Jadzia asked again.

“Anything can be done. The question is whether it should. I’ve witnessed extraordinary pain throughout history, and there is much I wish I could interfere with. I’m just not sure if I’d be doing the right thing. Maybe things should be allowed to unfold as they are. Otherwise, where would I stop?”

“Have you ever thought of stopping all of it?”

“You mean all suffering?” she asked incredulously. “Again, I don’t think that’s why I’m here.”

“You’re here to help people, aren’t you?”

“Yes, but life needs to be allowed to run its course.”

“What about me?”

“I don’t have the answer you want, Jadzia. Perhaps I should never have to come to you either. Maybe one day I’ll regret all of this. Maybe stopping all human suffering is what I’m here to do. I’m still finding my own path.”
“How do you know?”

“I don’t. All I know now is that I’m going to help you to the best of my ability. You have my word.”

Jadzia capitulated and said: “Then I should be more grateful. I’m just being selfish.”

“Wanting your parents to escape death is hardly selfish. The power I wield must be used responsibly though.”

“I know,” she said. “Promise me – if there’s any way to save them – you’ll save them.”

“I give you my word.”

The two women sat silently on the grass, neither of them eager to begin the day’s agenda. Genesis never wanted Jadzia to feel pressured. If she felt the need to spend several days more resting, Genesis had the time. She started to doze off when Jadzia stood up and readied herself to leave. “Is it time?” Genesis asked.

“Yes. I want to see my mother.”

“Right away.” Genesis bolted from the ground and rushed to Jadzia’s side. Seconds later, they were gone.

Nighttime ruled the camp when the two women arrived. The moon cast its light all across the grounds and Genesis cautiously canvassed the area, making sure the path was safe. She crawled through the window of a nearby building as Jadzia reemerged from the stream.

“Keep your eyes closed,” Genesis said.

Jadzia obeyed as Genesis led her by the hand through the dark to avoid the bodies that lied on the floor. Once she found clothes and was dressed, she left the gas chamber and hid behind a nearby guard shack. Genesis stayed in front of her at all times and motioned her to follow when the path was clear. She eventually led her down the moonlit road to the barrack where Jadzia’s mother was kept. She hid inside the pocket of Jadzia’s coat as they entered the shed.

Inside the barrack, the beds were stacked as they were where her father slept. The women were skin over bones; many had lost their hair, their faces drenched in ennui. The stench, juxtaposed against the fresh night air, hit Jadzia like a punch in the face. She covered her mouth and nose and gathered her composure before she moved on to find her mother. The women were gathered several per bed, but her mother was nowhere to be found. Behind the rows of bunks lied a group of women gathered on the floor, stacked against each other like sardines with hardly any room to breathe. To Jadzia’s chagrin, her mother was surrounded on all sides. She cautiously approached her mother and touched her leg, stirring her awake as calmly as possible.

Her mother awoke and carefully looked around when she saw a beautiful, familiar-looking woman standing above her. Like Jadzia’s father, her mother did not take long to recognize her. “Jadzia?” she whispered.

Jadzia got on her knees and said: “Yes, Mama, it’s me.”

“I thought I’d lost you.” Jadzia’s mother began to cry.

“I’m fine,” she said as she reached out to take her mother’s hand.

“How did you get here? You don’t look sixteen.”

Jadzia felt a slight pinch on her breast from Genesis in her pocket, reminding her not to divulge too much. “I can’t tell you how I got here. It isn’t safe. I came to tell you that I love you.”
“I’ve missed you so,” her mother said.

“I’ve missed you too. And father too.”

Her mother was aghast. “Have you seen him? Where is he?”

“He’s in a camp like this one not far from here. He wanted me to tell you he loves you and hopes to be with you soon.”

She knew her words would go unfulfilled and as hard she tried to contain it, a knot formed in her stomach and her emotions took over. Tears followed.

“What’s wrong?” her mother asked, stroking her daughter’s cheek.

“This is all my fault, Mama.” She wiped her eyes with her sleeve.

“You don’t mean the day we were taken, do you?”

She nodded.

“Dear, if you had pulled that trigger, we’d all be dead right now. More guards would have come and they would have found you.”

“You knew?”

“I saw the gun in your hand. Right then, I prayed that God stay your hand. And he did. Now we have a chance to live – after we survive this.”

“I should have done something. I could have saved you.”

Her mother smiled. “Someday we’ll be together again, when all of this is over.”

Jadzia nodded, afraid to speak.

“This darkness has to end someday,” her mother said. “I just know it. And our life will return to normal.”

Jadzia’s sorrow increased with every word her mother uttered. She leaned forward and hugged her mother tight. “I love you so much, Mama. Be strong.”

Her mother held her daughter’s face in her hands and said: “You should go, my dear. I don’t want to see you get captured. I can’t bear to think of losing you.”

Jadzia listened to her mother and turned to leave. As she walked toward the door, she stopped and turned around, hoping to see her mother one last time. Like her father the night before, Jadzia’s mother had turned away, unwilling to see her only child walk away, possibly forever.

Genesis never stirred until they were outside the barracks and behind the truck a short distance from the gas chamber. There she flew out of Jadzia’s pocket and hovered at eye-level. Jadzia was visibly shaken by the experience and just stared at the ground, unable to move. Genesis waited and said nothing.

“Get down!” she said suddenly. “Someone’s coming.”

Jadzia dropped to the ground and hid in the shadows of a nearby wall. Genesis dropped out of sight too and flew off just as a guard rounded the rear of the truck. “Is someone there?” he shouted in German. Jadzia
remained perfectly still.

He circled the truck and came within inches of the shadow where Jadzia hid. The lamp from the guard shack shone directly in the guard’s face, so Jadzia was shielded from being discovered. The guard paused a moment, then looked over his shoulder to make sure no one was nearby. Jadzia held her breath as the man approached the wall and began to unzip his pants to urinate. Disgusted, she moved away from him. Then she made a mistake. Creeping from the shadow, her shoe emerged just enough to be caught in the guard’s line of sight. He blocked the light and looked into the shadow and saw Jadzia’s frightened face.

“Please, sir,” she whispered.

The guard quickly zipped his pants and smiled. She recoiled against the wall. The guard seized her and covered her mouth, her cries muffled against the flesh of his hand. She struggled and kicked but the guard already had the upper hand. “Dolf!” he shouted.

Another soldier rushed to the guard’s aid and helped bind her hands. Jadzia cried out for Genesis but she was nowhere to be found. The two men forced her to her knees and drew their side-arms.

Jadzia turned away from the men, closed her eyes, and prepared herself to die. Then, without a warning, there was silence. She opened her eyes and saw Genesis, quietly hovering over the men. She sat up and saw the petite time-traveler’s handiwork: the German guards were unconscious, with no sign of injury.

“I’m terribly sorry for leaving you,” Genesis said. “I couldn’t be seen.”

“Since it appears you came back before any serious damage was done, I suppose I should forgive you.”

Genesis turned away, ashamed for disappointing Jadzia. “What can I do to help?” she asked.

“For starters, can we get out of this horrible place forever?” Jadzia answered.

“Of course,” Genesis said.

Before Genesis could prepare for departure, more guards rounded the corner. Just as they were about to catch a glimpse of the two women, Genesis rushed to her friend’s side, grabbed hold of her, and disappeared, unsure of where they would end up. The flash of light had hardly dissipated when the guards arrived and saw their unconscious colleagues, now awake and unaware of where they were and what had happened.

Genesis emerged from the stream with Jadzia in tow, both of them unaware of where they were. They stood in the middle of a city street, with people bustling about everywhere, many of them aghast at the sight of a naked woman in plain sight. Jadzia, suddenly aware of their stares, came to and ran to the edge of the street and jumped behind a garbage container. Genesis hid herself behind Jadzia’s neck where her long hair obscured her. It wasn’t long before Jadzia realized what was different from where they just left: they were in a country she’d never seen before.

“Where are we, Genesis?” she asked.

Genesis peeked out over Jadzia’s shoulder. “I have no idea. I told you that I could get you out in a pinch, but I had no time to prepare. We could be on the far side of the world.”

“I think you’re right.” Jadzia looked up at the signs hanging from the buildings, all of them in bold Japanese writing. “Are we in the same time as when we left?”

“No, but I don’t know when we are. I had to get you out of there as fast as possible.” Genesis climbed atop the container and flew around the corner cautiously. Jadzia stayed where she was, inches from the garbage, but
safe. A moment later, Genesis returned and said not a word. She paced back and forth along the rim of the container with her arms folded and seemingly unconcerned with her detection.

“What is it?”

“I sense something wrong,” Genesis answered.

“Yeah, I know. We don’t know when we are.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

As Genesis finished her sentence, both of the women were instantly blinded. A deafening roar growled down the street as everything that stood fell to the ground. The two women’s eyesight returned as the massive flash of light subsided. Jadzia tried to discern where the sound came from and as she peered around the nearby building, a wall of fire raced down the street, tearing every building down where it stood. Genesis raced in front of Jadzia as the fire approached and raised her arms high over her head. With a powerful scream, Genesis pushed her hands toward the debris and instantly, a wall of energy surrounded the two women. The wall changed into a bubble and encased them. Massive chunks of wood and fallen structures bounced off of the bubble like they were made of rubber. The fire rushed over the bubble and warmed the interior air. Genesis channeled more of her power into the bubble and instantly, the air cooled to normal. Jadzia remained curled into a ball.

The fire passed a moment later, but no one standing before the explosion remained. Genesis caught her breath and picked up Jadzia and carried her back behind the container, which had toppled and been crushed, its contents vaporized. Jadzia soon came to and tried to gather her bearings.

“What just happened?”

“I think a bomb just went off,” Genesis said.

“No bomb could have done that!”

The two women looked up as the sky darkened. Towering over the city was a massive cloud, formed in the shape of a mushroom. “This must be something new,” Genesis suggested. A terrible wind blew down the city street. Jadzia, no longer worried about her nudity, walked onto the street and looked in the direction of the blast. Genesis hovered nearby.

“How soon can we get out of here?” Jadzia asked.

“We should leave now.” Genesis picked up a scrap of newspaper that rolled down the street like tumbleweed. She read the date aloud: “August 6th, 1945.” She grabbed Jadzia by the hand and pulled her out of view of the street. In a flash of blue light, the women vanished.
Genesis and Jadzia arrived back in their temporary home in the forest clearing in Canada just moments after the first nuclear bomb detonated over Hiroshima, Japan. Both of them collapsed to the ground, still numb. Dazed and tapped of energy, Genesis ran to the bank of the creek and drank as much water as she could manage. Jadzia followed suit a moment later and splashed water in her face. They both collapsed to the ground and struggled to regain a sense of normalcy. In the span of an hour, Jadzia saw her mother for the last time, was nearly executed by German guards, and watched a city destroyed by fire. Now, all she wanted was to close her eyes and see nothing, to feel nothing.

Genesis likewise was exhausted from their activities. While Jadzia experienced the brunt of the emotional drainage, Genesis felt her power rapidly fleeing. Her powers were put to their harshest and most demanding tests since she first discovered them. She hoped they would not need to be used anytime soon. She was glad she chose this particular clearing in the woods, and so far from civilization; no one would find them here; no roads led there and the brush and forest were too dense to penetrate. Genesis knew she could relax and renew her strength.

The moon rose and the two women curled into balls on the grass and slept soundly. Neither of them said a word to each other since they arrived. During the night, Genesis awoke from a chill in the air. Her strength had returned remarkably fast. She warmed the ground with her hands, to which Jadzia rolled over in the direction of the heat and fell into a deeper sleep. Genesis lied on her back and watched Jadzia deep in sleep. She was the only human she had ever revealed herself to, with no family to protect her, completely vulnerable and naked, and with only Genesis to rely on. As she dozed off to sleep, she wished in the deepest part of her heart that her own true path might be revealed to her, that her own true potential be realized.

As the sun raised, its beams struggling to reach deep inside the forest and gently kiss the skin of the two women asleep on the dew-soaked grass, a brisk wind rustled the thin branches of the forest’s thickets. More and more harmless creatures rose to greet the day and the song of birds returned to the forest; the squirrels scurried to and fro, frolicking in the brook. Genesis and Jadzia awoke at the same time, the stiff wind rushed along their bare backs as the sun’s light warmed their faces. As they sat up and looked about, the cold and gray forest was displaced overnight by the sudden appearance of small green buds darted along the trees’ branches. Spring had arrived.

Genesis flew into the air at great speed; the dew wicked from her skin by the friction. Once she passed the tree-line, she picked up a powerful burst of speed. A sonic boom was left in her wake as she sailed across the atmosphere. Back on the ground, Jadzia remained on the grass, rolling over into the warm grass in full view of the sun. As she bathed herself in its warmth, she raised her arms high above her head and yawned. A few minutes later, Genesis returned, and at full strength again.

“I hesitate to say ‘good morning,’” she said, “but I’m glad yesterday is over.”

Jadzia arose, stretched and yawned, and quickly sought out the fallen tree behind a patch of bushes. “I’m glad too,” she called out from her makeshift lavatory. “Promise me I never have to see another person die.”

“Do you see now why I’m opposed to killing anything?” Genesis asked rhetorically.

Jadzia emerged from the bushes and said: “Yes, but that poses a bit of a problem.”

“What’s that?”

“Who’s going to make our breakfast?”

Genesis laughed heartily. “I suppose this means I’ll need to find some more vegetables.” She disappeared into the woods and scoured the ground for something to eat.
Jadzia slowly stepped into the creek. The water was still cold, but Jadzia didn't care. She sat on the bank and
dangled her feet in the creek and then slid her body under the water when she realized it was just deep enough to
cover her body. She floated atop the icy water for as long as she could tolerate before climbing onto the warm grass
where she dried off in the sun.

“So what next?” Genesis asked as she entered the clearing with a trove of mushrooms and herbs in tow. She
couldn’t carry much in her hands, but she gathered the vegetables into a ball and pushed it through the air as
though its own gravity held it together. When she reached the banks of the creek, she set the ball on the ground and
separated the food.

Jadzia yawned again and stretched. “Can I just stay here forever?”

“You can. You’re far from the war. There’s no one around.”

“I’d sure love to,” she said. “But the feeling I had last night when I went to sleep hasn’t gone away.”

“What feeling is that?” Genesis asked.

“I know you said your power needs to be used responsibly, and I agree. In fact, I’m glad the power you
possess is in the hands of someone so wise and considerate – even if you do brag too much.” Genesis frowned.
Shaking off her barb, Genesis sat beside her on a boulder. “Tell me truthfully,” she said, “if you could
do anything with the power I have, what would you do?”

Jadzia sat up and mused aloud: “I know saving my parents would be a selfish act, but I must admit, I’d
still save them if I could. On a larger scale, I’d do anything I could to stop that bomb from going off. I’d probably
prevent the whole war.”

Genesis didn’t say a word in reply for several minutes. She merely acknowledged the words of her
friend and nodded as she weighed their larger implications. “I have to be honest with you,” she said finally. “When I
flew off earlier this morning, I made a special trip into the future. I had a few questions of my own. I wanted to learn
more of the bomb, who made it and why. It wasn’t pleasant. I travelled as far into the future as I could and the fear
of that thing still dominates humanity. The terror of it has never gone away. It ended the war, however, but the
Americans had to drop a second one to do it. A new war simply replaced the one that just ended.”

Jadzia’s hopes of life returning to normal diminished. “No matter what happens I want you to know that
I am eternally grateful for giving me hope, however short-lived it may have been. And I saw my parents before they
died. I can’t thank you enough.”

“You’re very welcome,” she said.

Jadzia began to fidget with a clump of grass and threw pieces of it into the water as she said: “Have you
ever considered doing what I suggested? Preventing the war?”

“No I never have,” Genesis said, “until yesterday. I know what I said about using my powers
responsibly, but after learning how many people died from that one horrible thing, the responsible thing is to prevent
it.”

“What should we do?” Jadzia asked.

Genesis leapt off the rock and began hovering back and forth across the clearing as though pacing.
“Preventing something as complex as a world war isn’t going to be easy. I don’t even know if it can be done.”

“Why not?”
“A war isn’t started by just one event or person; it’s a composite of grudges, disagreements, even old wars left unsettled that set the stage for the next one.”

“Then we need to find out how and where the war started.”

Genesis shrugged her shoulders and snorted. “Hah!” she said. “That could take ages.” She said: “I have it! I’ll be right back.” She disappeared suddenly, and just as quickly, returned out of breath.

“Where did you go?” Jadzia asked.

“The future. Everything we need to know is in the history books.”

“How far did you go?”

“As far as I could. The stream gets muddy the further I travel and travelling far into the future - at least in the vicinity of Earth - is near impossible. Still, I found out all we need to know.”

Jadzia smiled with delight. “So all we have to do is go back to the very beginning and stop whatever started it, right?”

Genesis caught her breath and sat on the boulder near the creek. “No, it’s not that simple, I’m afraid. You see, the further we go back, the riskier everything gets for you.”

“Why?” Jadzia said. Her excitement waned.

“Watch this,” she said. She hovered over the creek and watched the fish swim about. “Remember how I told you the stream is like a river?” Suddenly, the creek divided. As though an invisible barrier was put in place, all of the water on one side of the creek merged to the other side. It all happened so quickly that many of the fish couldn’t swim to the other side of the creek. The fish gasped for air when she released the barrier and water flooded both sides again. “If we change something in the past, it will divert the stream of time and change your future.

“So, if we went back to the moment Germany invaded your country, we could prevent the start of the war, or we could just stall it. In either case, a change like that could preserve your parents, and possibly millions more. But consider if we prevented the Hitler from seizing power: that occurred before you were born. Anything prior to that point may decide whether you will even exist. Remember, your existence depends on your parent’s conceiving you at the exact moment they did. If we prolonged that by even the smallest unit of time, you might never be - or you may be a boy. If we go back to a point during the first war, it may interfere with your parents ever marrying. Or your parents may still marry and conceive you, but some innocuous event in the stream may mean the death of your father when you are five, or they may both die and you’ll end up an orphan. More than likely, though, you will never be conceived in the first place. And when we returned to the present, you would exist in a world where you never existed. The paradox that would create might be disastrous. It may not even be possible to bring you back. You would be stuck in the past.”

Jadzia buried her head in her folded arms as she listened carefully to Genesis explain the dangers of time-travel. As much as her heart yearned to save her parents, she wondered if taking such a risk was necessary. Her parents weren’t angry at her for not killing the guards. Even the feelings of regret over that event had begun to subside. Perhaps she could just beg Genesis to take her parents from the camp so they could live together here in the forest. As she condemned her own selfishness, the thought fled her mind as quickly as she thought of it. “I’d sacrifice anything to save my parents,” she said. “But how could I think only of myself while so many good people suffer?” She covered her face and began to cry. Genesis rushed to her side and sat atop her shoulder.

“I won’t leave you,” she said.

“You can’t stay here forever, will you?”

“I have nowhere else to go either. But don’t worry,” she added, “you’re in no rush to decide what to do
regarding the war. It won’t be stopped overnight anyway.”

Jadzia wiped her eyes dry. “I feel like I have nothing left. My family is gone, I have no home. I don’t even have any clothes to wear! My only friend is you.”

“Of all the people I could have chosen, I’m proud of choosing you,” Genesis said. “And by the way, if you want clothes, I can always find you some.”

Jadzia lied back on the grass and stretched out in the noon sun. “We’re in this together, right? If you don’t get clothes, I don’t get clothes!” she said, laughing.

Genesis laughed as well and said: “The offer stands.” As Jadzia bathed in the sun, Genesis flew into the sky and hovered several meters above the creek. “Get some rest,” she said. “I’ll be back soon.” With that, Genesis shot into the sky at tremendous speed and disappeared from Jadzia’s view.

Jadzia closed her eyes and meditated on the choices set before her. There were but two paths to choose from: she could leave her old life behind and start anew – perhaps here, in the forest; or she could save the lives of millions of others and possibly negate her own existence. Her selfish part chose the former path; it cared not for the lives of others, but was interested only in self-preservation. But as Jadzia followed that road in her mind, she was left with a sinking feeling in her gut. She would be alone, without family, and she wouldn’t even be able to live with herself. The other choice risked her life, perhaps even unnecessarily - after all, even Genesis could never be sure if their efforts would be successful. And if they failed, would Genesis be able to go back and fix the events that would allow for Jadzia’s conception?

As despondent as Jadzia felt over losing her parents, she could not ignore her youth, the decades of potential life that lie in front of her. Besides, she had sworn to herself that she would never return to the camp where she suffered for six years, but what if her attempts to prevent the war forced her to witness other atrocities, heinous acts so wicked she could not imagine them in advance! But still, the thought of giving away all she had to save even one life left her with a feeling of deep and profound satisfaction.

Relieved with her decision, she went to the pile of food and ate what she could. A moment later, Genesis arrived in a flourish and sat atop the stone by the water. Jadzia ran cool water from the creek through her hair and returned to Genesis’s side. “I’ve come to a decision,” she said.

“Good.” Genesis, having already read her mind, did her best to feign ignorance.

“You already know, don’t you?” Jadzia asked.

“I do. And I have to admit, I admired you wholly before I ever met you. But now,” she said, “I stand in awe of you.”

Jadzia pulled her hair behind her head and used a small twig to hold it in place. “I couldn’t live with myself any other way.”

“I just hope I can learn something from all this too.”

“What do you mean?”

“I came to you in a desire to help you, but I still have no idea how I’m supposed to do that. Something deep inside of me yearns to help people. Maybe this is my calling: bringing an end to suffering.”

“I can’t imagine a loftier goal. But how will any of this work?”

Genesis flew to Jadzia’s side and then sat next to her. “You won’t be able to travel as you did before. It will be far too dangerous. Besides, if your goal is to prevent a war, you won’t do much good as a young Polish girl walking around Nazi Germany.”
“Let me guess: the fox and the rat?”

Genesis nodded. “I’m afraid there’s no other way. I’ll need to put your mind in the bodies of people we wish to control.”

“Won’t they suspect something?”

“Well, to the people listening, perhaps. That’s where your knowledge of history will play a part. But to the person whose body is borrowed, no, they won’t know a thing. Instead of switching your minds like I showed you earlier, I can hold onto their mind inside the stream.”

“Where will you be?”

“I’ll never leave your side,” she assured her with a touch on the hand. “I’ll hide in a pocket, the fold of a garment, wherever I need to. Trust me, switching minds back is a lot faster to do than sending your entire body.”

“What will happen to my body though?”

“With your mind absent, your body will fall into a deep sleep. Your body will stay here in the clearing.”

“Where do we start?”

Genesis lifted off the ground and hovered in front of Jadzia. “If we’re going to make a significant change, we need to go back to the beginning of key events and attempt to change their outcome. But we shouldn’t go back too far at once, or the chances of a paradox increase. From what the history books in the future say, the war officially began when your country was invaded.”

“So, what do we do? Stop the tanks from invading?”

“No, that would just stall it. The only way to prevent it is to change the minds of the people in charge?”

“How am I supposed to do that?”

“We need more information first. The invasion was started by the Germans and Soviets though, so they must have been planning it for a while.”

“Okay,” Jadzia said. “Let’s start there.”

“There’s one more thing we need to deal with before we do anything,” Genesis said.

“What’s wrong?”

“I’m going to get the information we need from the future, but you will need access to it as well.”

“How?”

“That’s the problem. There are two options: I can memorize all the history books on the war and dictate them to you. Or I learn all we need and then share it with you. To do that, I’ll need to do something I’ve never tried before. Once inside the stream, I can manipulate all forms of energy, including my own. I should be able to transfer the knowledge from my mind into yours. And of course, you’ll also have access to the minds of the people you inhabit.”

“Will they have access to mine after I leave?”

“Only if I can’t sever the link. But I won’t put you in the mind of someone unstable unless there’s no
other way - and if you agree to it first.”

“Are you sure you know what you’re doing?”

Genesis scowled. “Yes. I mean, I’ve only done this with animals, but I wouldn’t take the risk if I wasn’t completely confident.”

Jadzia wasn’t convinced. Genesis might excel in her abilities as she claimed, or she could be bragging again. Either way, Jadzia needed to trust her. “How long will it take?”

“To transfer the knowledge, you’ll need to be conscious inside the stream. It will take me some time to gather all the information I can, so you might be alone for a while.”

“Whatever it takes,” Jadzia said confidently. She stood poised and ready to go, her hands at her side.

Genesis hovered away from Jadzia, closed her eyes, and gathered her strength. An instant later, blue light shot out from between Genesis’s breasts and enveloped both of them. The light faded and they were gone.
Chapter 5

Jadzia’s first conscious journey into the stream was nothing at all like she imagined but was exactly as Genesis described. She didn’t see anyway; she just seemed to sense the world around her. Below her was what appeared to be a magnificent torrent or water rushing, all of it moving in the same direction. It had the appearance of water but as she got closer it looked more like a massive spider-web, only instead of each thread connecting to a central point in a lattice, each thread connected to every other thread at every conceivable point. Occasionally, waves gathered below its surface and all the while she was looking at it, points and threads disappeared. She assumed these represented the deaths of living things, but new threads constantly appeared in their place so it became harder to track the longer she was there.

Above the stream and next to her was a marvelous collection of points and thread bundled together. It looked like a massive tapestry weaved by an amateur but at the same time well-designed. She watched as the mass formed threads to different points in the stream and then reached out to connect a thread to her. As it did, she immediately heard the voice of Genesis.

“This is the stream,” she said. “I’ll need to gather information for awhile. Once I’m done, I’ll connect to you again.”

Jadzia didn’t know how to respond and she didn’t need to. Genesis severed her connection to Jadzia. Millions of tiny threads connected to other threads all over the stream. Energy travelled from the stream along the thread to Genesis. Once the energy reached Genesis, the thread disconnected, disappeared, and was then replaced by a new one that connected to yet another thread or point.

This went on for what felt like hours in Jadzia’s mind. Eventually, Genesis’s task was done and all the threads were severed. A thread reached out and connected to Jadzia and Genesis’s voice could be heard again.

“If I send the information along this one strand, we’ll be here forever. I’m going to form what will look like a rope; this will let the energy travel to you faster. Don’t worry: I know what I’m doing.”

The thread disconnected before Jadzia could respond and instantly, Genesis created a huge network of threads that wound around each other and braided each strand to every other strand. Finally, once the rope was formed, Genesis connected to Jadzia, and a powerful surge of energy shot out of Genesis along the rope.

Jadzia’s mind reeled from the impact. After a few seconds of feeling shocked as if by electricity, Jadzia adapted to the sensation and relaxed her mind. Before she could do so, the surge suddenly stopped and without a warning, she was thrust from the stream and onto the grass in the clearing.

Jadzia tumbled along the grass and grabbed her head as it ached. Without warning, she let out a terrible scream as though a knife were being twisted in her temple.

Genesis emerged from the stream a moment later and rushed to Jadzia’s side, cradling her head in her lap, trying to calm her.

“I’m so sorry!” Genesis cried. “I didn’t mean to hurt you!”

Jadzia flailed along the ground and rolled into the creek as she stumbled to regain her balance. Every time she tried, a dizzy spell forced her to her knees again. Out of breath and unable to control her movements, Jadzia panicked, afraid she might die.

Genesis watched helplessly as her attempts at consolation were rebuffed. Jadzia was simply unable to stop screaming or flailing about. As she struggled to stop hyperventilating, Genesis quickly formed a shield of energy around Jadzia as she lay on the ground, writhing in agony. Genesis gathered as much oxygen from the
atmosphere as she could and forced it into the shield with Jadzia. Eventually, her breathing settled to normal.

Genesis released the shield. Jadzia’s naked body lay on the grass by the banks of the brook, completely unconscious and unresponsive, although her pulse was slow and her breathing shallow. Comatose and paralyzed, Genesis lifted her into her arms and carried her into the shade of a tree.

For weeks, Jadzia lay motionless. Her condition didn’t change, except that her pulse did eventually quicken to normal. So did her breathing. Genesis never left her side for long. Several times a day, she poured small amounts of water down Jadzia’s throat and once a day she gave her a nectar she made from honey and bitter fruit she was able to find in the forest.

As summer approached, Genesis continued to stand by her friend while she recovered. There was a glimmer of hope: one late afternoon in July, Jadzia’s toes moved. Genesis’s attempts at making contact were futile but the prospect of Jadzia returning to full health helped her cope with the tremendous guilt that kept her depressed.

The days grew hotter as August neared, and Genesis spent most of the day with Jadzia in the shade. When night arrived, Genesis would often swim and play in the creek to cool down but she always returned to Jadzia’s side.

During all this time, she never entered the stream or left the vicinity of the forest. Then one morning in early September, Jadzia stirred. She grimaced at first, but then slowly opened her eyes. Genesis stood back a good distance as she was afraid that Jadzia would be angry with her. Jadzia sat up and looked around the clearing. The grass was still rich and green, the air humid and warm, and the creek a little shallower than she remembered. She was still naked, like she was when she fell asleep, and her hair was considerably longer. Oddly enough, her nails were neatly trimmed and her skin clean. She looked around for Genesis and found her halfway across the clearing sitting on a rock with her legs bent, her knees against her chest. Genesis was looking away from her, a look of shame and guilt governed her countenance.

Jadzia stood and slowly regained her balance. After stopping at the creek for a drink, she walked purposefully toward Genesis, eager to talk.

As she neared, Genesis sulked further, burying her face away from Jadzia’s gaze.

“What’s the matter?” Jadzia asked.

Genesis faced Jadzia as tears streamed down her face. “I’m so sorry!” she cried. “I had no idea that would happen to you; I swear!”

“Do you think I’m angry with you?”

She nodded.

“You told me before we left that you’d never done it before. How were you supposed to know?”

“I thought you were going to die,” she said, the tears still rolled down her cheeks. “I’ve never killed a person before.”

“And you still haven’t,” Jadzia replied with a smile. “There’s good news, though. It worked!”

“The transfer? You remember everything?”

“Like I was there watching it happen. I can’t believe it really. I figured the memories would be hazy like my own, but they’re so vivid and real. Is this how you remember things?”

“It’s not a blessing. I don’t forget anything.”
Jadzia reached and took Genesis into her hands. “Listen to me,” she said. “I’m not angry with you. You’ve given me a gift. And I’m so grateful for that.” She extended her arms and Genesis lifted into the air under her own power.

She climbed a small pear tree and picked some fruit, tossing a pear to Genesis who quickly caught it and began to eat.

“So, what next?” Genesis asked.

“After we eat, I want to prevent World War II.”

Genesis was taken aback by her sudden determination and brevity. “Are you sure you feel all right? You were just in a coma for four months.”

“Actually, I feel great,” Jadzia said. “Maybe it’s because I had another decent night’s rest. Or maybe I just feel so well-protected.”

“It’s good to see you so lively.”

Jadzia climbed down from the tree, her arm cradling half a dozen pieces of fruit. She set them in a pile on the grass and devoured one in a matter of seconds. “This is pretty good.”

“Where would you like to begin?”

“Well, I thought we should start with the invasion of my country, but that will only delay the war.”

Genesis finished eating her pear and tossed the core under a bush. A squirrel quickly rushed down from a tree and absconded with it. “You’re right,” she said. “Britain and France would let Hitler get away with anything at that point.”

“That’s what we need to change then,” Jadzia said. “We need to prevent the meeting in Munich from happening.”

“I have another idea,” she mused. “Either way, we need to be careful. I recommend we first watch what happens without our intervention before making any changes.”

“But we already know what happened?”

“We know what history books say happened. I want to see what happened with my own eyes.”

“Whose mind should I transfer to?”

“Obviously we can’t ever use Hitler’s - his mind is too poisoned. I’ll need to enter the stream and find the right mind first.”

Jadzia set the fruit aside and readied herself. “Let’s go.”

A few moments later, Jadzia opened her eyes and looked around the strange room. She looked at her hands which were those of a man. A nearby mirror affirmed what she expected: she was in the body of a German officer, his uniform decorated with medals and neatly pressed. His face was weathered but still clean-shaven and his eyes hidden by the brim of his hat.

Genesis arrived a few seconds after Jadzia regained consciousness in her new body. She flew around the
room, making sure it was secure from prying eyes.

“If my memory serves me correctly,” Jadzia said, “I’d say I’m in the body of Hitler’s Chief of the General Staff, Ludwig Beck.”

“The Munich Agreement hasn’t been signed yet. It won’t be for another couple of months.”

“When are we?”

“It’s May, 1938. From what I could discern, Beck is about to meet with Hitler later today.”

“Where are we?”

“In Berchtesgaden.”

“I thought I was supposed to just watch.”

“You will shortly. His assistant is coming. When he does, I’ll slip into the stream and merge your consciousness with his. He won’t know you’re there and you’ll have no control over him. It may feel like a lucid dream at first.”

“But you’ll be watching me, right?”

“Yes. You’re in no danger, but when the meeting is over, we’ll decide what to do next.”

“What about my mind? This guy is a Nazi.”

“But the link is stable. He must not be poisoned entirely.”

Just then, there was a knock at the door. Genesis disappeared, and almost instantly, Jadzia could no longer speak. She could only hear the officer’s voice.

“Come in,” Ludwig said as though coming out of a daydream.

His assistant entered and said: “Sir, the car is waiting.”

“Very well, then,” he answered and followed the assistant out the door.

Genesis was right: watching the drive to the meeting with Hitler through Ludwig Beck’s eyes felt like a dream at first. The commute was short and soon Beck was escorted into a large, well-adorned room with a dozen officials seated casually and Chancellor Hitler at a desk.

The officials remained seated as Beck entered the room. Hitler, though, was quick to greet him with a hearty hand-shake.

“Please join us,” Hitler said with a smile.

The other officers and staff members smiled and greeted Beck in their own ways, some simply nodded and smiled, others shook his hand as he sat down.

“I’d like you to explain the details of the memo you sent us,” Hitler said. “I thought you were in favor of our plan to declare war on the Czechs.”

“Yes, I am,” Beck said.

“That’s not what this suggests,” another officer, Werner von Fritsch, interrupted.
“We’ve had this conversation before, Werner,” said Beck. “You know I believe that war with the Czechs is the only way to take back the Sudetenland. I just don’t believe that time is now.”

“Oh yes,” said Wilhelm Keitel, the Chief of the German High Command and Germany’s war minister. “You’ve made that quite plain when you questioned the Fuhrer last year.”

Beck ignored Keitel’s bait and turned to Hitler. “Fuhrer, I only said what I did because the facts did not support your belief that France was on the verge of a civil war.”

Hitler wasted little time on thinking of a response. “You’re entitled to your opinion, Ludwig. But your calculations are childish.”

“We need the Sudetenland, Fuhrer, I agree,” Beck said. “But we should not use it as an excuse for war. Germany is not ready. To the French, an attack on the Czechs will be a matter of honor. They already have the strongest army in Europe. We shouldn’t give the French people an excuse to band together.”

Walther von Brauchitsch, the head of the Wehrmacht, cleared his throat and said: “I agree with Herr Ludwig. The Wehrmacht is not as strong as she was before the Great War. War right now would be premature.”

Keitel interrupted again. “Fuhrer,” he said, “you yourself said last year that we need both Austria and Czechoslovakia for Lebensraum. I can’t think of a better time than now.”

Hitler sat against his desk. “I know what I said,” he began. “We do need to act quickly, but I don’t want to war with Britain and France – those hate-inspired antagonists – just yet. The key is to plunder those lands without letting these small wars escalate out of control. Our economy is too fragile. We will need to deal with the English and French eventually; no doubt within a few years. But we’re falling behind them, gentlemen; both are already well-armed. But they need to respect our place in Europe too, and to that end, war must begin sooner than later.”

“As I said in the memo, my Lord,” Beck said, “I agree that Czechoslovakia’s existence is intolerable. They are a threat to Germany and must be eliminated, by war, if necessary. I only beg that Germany wait until the Wehrmacht is prepared. I also ask that you reconsider my suggestions for reorganizing the hierarchy.”

Keitel rolled his eyes, a cue Hitler noticed but did not address.

“Thank you for coming,” Hitler said, after which the room cleared out. As it did, he said: “Ludwig, stay, please.”

Once the room was empty, Hitler approached Beck and reached for his hand. “I have always respected you, Ludwig. You’ve supported the Nazi party for years and I know you are wise.”

“Thank you, Fuhrer,” Ludwig said.

“But you are still imprisoned in the idea of the hundred-thousand-man army - those old men who led Germany to its downfall so many years ago.”

“I just don’t want my Fuhrer to get caught in a larger war. There is too much to contend with.”

“And what would you have me do?” Hitler responded. His temper began to rise.

“Fuhrer, your advisors are wrong. Keitel wants war at any cost. The radicals in the party are miscalculating our odds. Please, consider my suggestions to reorganize the advisory leadership. The anarchy in the military will only get worse and the fate of the Wehrmacht will be too grim to imagine.”

Hitler stepped back and said nothing as he weighed Beck’s words.
Beck continued speaking carefully. “If we risk a long war, and we lose, the consequences will be worse
than Versailles.”

Hitler spun around in a rage. “I won’t let that happen! We’ve worked too hard to show the British they
can’t demean us any longer!”

“Yes, Fuhrer,” he said. “What of the meeting I suggested?”

“You’d have me play the diplomat?” Hitler sneered.

“Of course not. As I said last year, we must lay the political ground work first. I can think of no better
way than to meet with Chamberlain himself. The British Prime Minister wants to avoid war. Let him argue with the
Czechs for you, Fuhrer. Meanwhile, you can prepare the military if he fails.”

“That won’t stop me,” Hitler replied.

“Nor should it, Fuhrer. We just need more time.”

Hitler looked down at the floor then turned around and went to a window. He stared at the ground
below for some time before facing Beck, who remained at attention. “You go, Ludwig.”

The Fuhrer’s tone was decisive and Ludwig did not risk angering him. He immediately left Hitler alone
and said nothing to anyone as he returned to his office.

Before Ludwig Beck was far from his meeting with Hitler, the young Polish girl who inhabited his mind
disappeared, restored to the naked shell left behind in a grassy clearing in western Canada. Once in the comfort of
her own skin, Jadzia took a deep breath and stretched her limbs in all directions, excited to be in a youthful body that
was not sluggish and aged like the German officer’s.

Genesis returned to the clearing a few seconds later. “I think we have our mark,” she said. “He is
already against the war; he just needs a little coaxing.”

“Yes,” Jadzia replied, “but he still favors war. If he has his way, war will only be delayed. That’s not
what we’re going for.”

“You have to remember something: the longer the war takes to start, the more time the other nations
have to prepare. If the war begins late enough, it may not be nearly as destructive. Remember, war is already going
on in China. We’re trying to prevent it from going global.”

“I suppose you’re right. What do we do now?”

“Well,” Genesis said, “Ludwig Beck has a friend in the head of the Wehrmacht, the German army.
History says that Beck tried to convince the other Generals to resign so Hitler would abandon his plans. That may be
the best time for us to intervene.”

“But if they don’t resign as before, then the Munich Agreement will still occur.”

“Yes,” Genesis said. “We need to make sure the British don’t appease Hitler this time. Would you like
to rest before we go?”

“No, I’ll be fine. We can rest when the war never happened.”

In a magnificent display of blue light, the two women vanished.
An instant later, Jadzia was back in the body of Ludwig Beck. He was seated in his chair at a desk when she assumed control of him. She stood up and walked around, acclimating to the old man’s body again. Less than ten seconds later, Genesis appeared.

“This isn’t so bad, I suppose,” Jadzia said as she stumbled around the room desperately trying to walk like a man. “Of course, I prefer my own body - even if it doesn’t have clothes.”

“I would think you’d be getting used to it by now,” said Genesis.

“Being naked or in a man’s body?”

“Both.” Jadzia finally found her stride and walked around the office a few times, practicing her gait.

Genesis stood on Beck’s desk, gently sipping some tea from his cup. “So here’s the plan,” she began. “Von Brauchitsch isn’t far off. We’re still a couple of weeks away from the Munich meeting, but we need someone who will side with us. Hitler is giving a speech to the Generals later today where he hopes to prove that Beck is wrong.”

“What day is it, August 10?”

“It is. Remember: if we fail, Beck will resign a week from now and the only way he’ll be able to regain favor with Hitler is by calling the summit to Munich. If that happens, we’ll need to get to Chamberlain somehow.”

“He’s too weak-minded,” Jadzia answered. “And if we use his mind, I can’t suddenly contradict him entirely, can I?”

“You could, but it’s always easier to use a mind that is already leaning in the direction you need to push. If Munich happens, we’ll have to get to everyone involved - Chamberlain, Daladier, even Mussolini if we have to. To do that, you’ll be switching minds back and forth and I don’t know how well that will work. Hopefully, we won’t need to go down that road.”

There came a knock at the door. Genesis ducked into a drawer in the desk and Jadzia answered the door.

“Herr Beck,” von Brauchitsch said. “You called?”


Walther von Brauchitsch entered the room and promptly sat in the chair in front of Beck’s desk. Jadzia circled the desk and sat, forcing the old man’s body to smile as she did so. “I think you know the reason I asked you to come here,” she said.

“Yes, I think I do,” Walther affirmed. “I’m just not sure what you would like me to do about the current situation.”

“We’re in the same position, Walther. The Fuhrer is going to choose war, no matter what we do it seems, but we need to stave off its culmination as long as we can.”

“What do you think I can do?”

“You’re Chief of the German Army, for God’s sake! You don’t think that position carries influence?”

“It might, Ludwig. But it also carries with it a responsibility - to do as the Fuhrer demands.”

Jadzia rolled Beck’s eyes. “You know better than anyone that the fall of Austria and Czechoslovakia
will only provoke the British and French to hit us with everything they’ve got. And they will not hit the SS, Walther, but the Wehrmacht - your men.”

“Yes, and I’ve made known my position against the annexation clear, even to the Fuhrer himself. Beyond that, what can I do?”

‘Beck’ leaned across the desk and paused before responding. A moment later, Jadzia said: “I’ve already spoken with the General Staff regarding the facts. I’ve asked them to resign if Hitler proceeds with invasion. If the military stands as one against war, the Fuhrer will get the message - and be forced to accept our position. From what I can gather, the General Staff is on the fence; they need a gentle nudge. You can provide that.”

“I think you overestimate my ability to persuade.”

“Perhaps,” Jadzia said. “But they know I’m right, Walther. They just need another voice.”

Von Brauchitsch shifted his weight in his seat. His stoic expression was etched as in stone, but emotion began to show. He covered his mouth with his hand to cover the change in countenance. After an uncomfortable moment of silence, he said: “The SS has too much control. I fear they wish to take over the Wehrmacht, and this worries me. But the Fuhrer...” he paused. “I’m afraid I cannot take sides in this debate.”

Jadzia slouched in the realization that von Brauchitsch was going to need harder persuasion. Then Jadzia remembered a detail from the history books that might prove useful. “Does this have something to do with your wife?”

Walther’s expression changed immediately to fury, as he jumped to his feet and leaned over the desk, inches from Beck’s face. “How do you know about that?” he demanded, pounding the surface of the desk.

Jadzia remained calm. “It doesn’t matter how I know, Walther. But I suppose I can see why taking action might make you feel as though you are betraying the Fuhrer.”

“How is what you’re asking not an act of betrayal?” Walther shouted. “What you’re suggesting is nothing less than a putsch!”

“Not at all. I want Hitler to stay in power,” she forced the words out of Beck’s mouth. “I just believe that war at this time is a bad idea. And I meant no disrespect to Charlotte, your wife. Personally, I find her more agreeable than Elizabeth, if you don’t mind my saying so.”

Walther stood erect and then stepped back, nodding in approval of Beck’s sentiment.

“From what I’ve heard, your wife is an ardent supporter of the party,” Jadzia said, no longer trying to win over Walther’s support with logic but with delicate pandering. “And I find it remarkable that the Fuhrer, so steadfast against divorce, encouraged you as he did. He clearly has great respect for you.”

Walther’s blood settled and his stoicism returned. Jadzia stood and humbly leaned forward. “As do I, old friend,” she said. “If the Fuhrer values your input so much, why not use it to prevent calamity for Germany? A war is a bad idea; we both know that. Help me convince the officers to stand together with us, and resign if Hitler chooses to go alone.”

The Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht Heer listened cautiously; the gears of his mind turned and worked out the solution Ludwig Beck presented. He sat motionless and stared at his contemporary, until finally he stood and said: “I’ll make you a deal, Ludwig: I myself won’t do anything, but I won’t stop anyone else from acting. I have too much personally riding on this issue and cannot take the position you want. However, should you be successful in your endeavors, you will find no enemy in me.”

Jadzia, against her own will and pleasure, raised an arm in salute and accepted Walther’s conditions with a smile and handshake. Walther smiled in return and left.
Once the door was closed, Genesis emerged from her hiding place and rested atop Jadzia’s shoulder.

“Do you think we were successful?” Jadzia asked.

“Let’s talk about it in the clearing. I’ll find out the results while you wait.”

“Very well,” she said. “Let’s go then.”

Ludwig Beck stood alone in his office and smiled in the belief that he did his best to convince his friend, completely unaware that his words were in fact controlled by a nineteen year-old Polish girl.
Chapter 6

Jadzia returned to her youthful body in the clearing and waited for Genesis to arrive from the future with news of their success. It was nighttime in the clearing and the moon was buried deep beneath a thick umbrella of storm clouds. Soft rain fell to the earth as Jadzia sat in the open air, closed her eyes, and listened to the sound of the droplets fall on the leaves.

Genesis appeared in a flash several minutes later and again rested atop Jadzia’s shoulder.

“How did we do?” Jadzia asked.

“Well, on a positive point, Walther’s comment about ‘doing nothing but not stopping anyone else’ is now a famous quote. Besides that, it doesn’t look as though his mind was changed. I think the personal issue surrounding his wife weighed too much on his decision. I can’t say I blame him: Hitler lent him 80,000 Reich marks; Walther couldn’t be part of a coup.”

“So what next? We go to Munich.”

Genesis hovered into the air and folded her arms beneath her breasts. “About Munich, I’m worried that may prove too harmful for you.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, if I need to transfer your mind from person to person over and over again to control the outcome of the entire meeting, I’m not sure how that will affect you in the end. It may not hurt you at all, but the mind is a delicate thing - I don’t want to risk hurting you again.”

“I think it’s very nice that you worry about me like that, but I’d like to take that chance.”

“Why? I mean, I know you want to prevent the war but this is getting too dangerous.”

“If not my life, whose?”

Genesis backed away from Jadzia in stunned silence. Her jaw dropped at the cavalier attitude with which she regarded her possible fate. “I have so much to learn from you,” she said aloud, but to herself. Indeed, Genesis often prided herself on her altruistic nature; the calling she felt was her destiny in life, the knot in her stomach that compelled her to help people in danger. And although she had taken risks of her own, none of them have been so dangerous as to endanger her own life.

Whatever stress Jadzia may have felt was imperceptible from the outside: she sat on the grass, her arms behind her, back arched, her head thrust back with her eyes closed, her entire body bathed in the rain that fell more rapidly now. “Let’s rest for the night,” Genesis said. “We’ll go to Munich in the morning.” She quickly assembled a net of leaves and draped it under the tree like an umbrella. She then warmed the ground so they didn’t sleep in the mud and the women huddled under the net and fell fast asleep.

As day dawned over the clearing in the Canadian wilderness, Genesis and Jadzia awoke and prepared themselves for the day. After discussing all they knew of the meeting at Munich, during which Britain and France would try to appease Adolf Hitler, the time-travelers realized that their success depended on presenting a united front against the German dictator. The history from the future confirmed that the British Prime Minister’s desire for peace would ultimately betray his sense of reason. More importantly, Genesis and Jadzia had to ensure that no agreement at all was signed with Hitler, he being a serial betrayer. Instead, the other parties would have to apply a
heavy hand on Hitler and not cave. Such a task might be easy for the French representative, Edouard Daladier, who opposed caving in to Hitler, but the real challenge lied in forcing Chamberlain and Mussolini to speak words unlikely to come from their mouths unaided.

Like Hitler, Genesis reasoned that the German Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, would be unlikely to link minds with on account of their poisonous ideology. As a result, their attempts at convincing Hitler to pursue any course other than war might be worse than an uphill battle - it may be impossible.

“You know enough about history to wing this,” Genesis said to Jadzia. “At this point, it may not reasonable to expect war to be prevented; it will likely only be delayed.”

“I understand,” Jadzia said. “The longer we postpone the inevitable, hopefully the fewer people will die. Where will you be?”

“If I need to switch you in and out of minds,” Genesis explained, “I’ll need to stay in the stream. Don’t worry; I can read your thoughts. When you want to switch, just think of the person’s name and you’ll be transferred instantly.”

“Okay,” Jadzia said. “Let’s not wait any longer.”

“When you awake, you’ll be in the body of Deladier.”

In the blink of an eye, Jadzia was in a room surrounded by all the familiar faces of those participating in the Munich Agreement. The men were milling about the room, shaking hands and making insincere chit-chat. Chamberlain was the first to approach Jadzia who presently resided in the body of Daladier.

“I hope your trip was enjoyable,” he said.

“As enjoyable as it can be, Mr. Prime Minister,” Daladier answered.

Without wasting a moment, Daladier walked straight toward Hitler and extended a hand. Hitler received him and smiled as warmly as the man could muster.

“I have only one thing I wish to say, Mr. Chancellor,” Daladier said. “The French people will not stand by and desert the Czechoslovakians.”

Chamberlain was taken aback by his friend’s uncharacteristic boldness. “Mr. Ambassador, I really think...” he began, but Jadzia quickly thought of his name and instantly saw Daladier through the eyes of Chamberlain, who continued: “...that I agree with you. Nor can the British, Mr. Chancellor. We’ve come to tell you that should you attempt to annex the Sudetenland, we shall be forced to honor our commitments.”

Hitler’s translator worked quickly, feverishly translating the words into German. Hitler reacted as Jadzia expected: he leaped out of his chair and took an aggressive posture. Through the translator, Hitler replied: “This is unacceptable! The German people trapped inside the Sudetenland are being abused by the Czechoslovakian government and you would have me stand by and do nothing?”

Mussolini entered the discussion, but before he could utter a word, Jadzia visualized his name and was transported into his body. He said: “I agree with the representatives from Great Britain and France. We will do whatever it takes to prevent German aggression in any part of Europe.”

At this, several German officers in the room scuffled about as one of them reached for a document inside a nearby desk and pulled Mussolini aside, whispering something in his ear. His words, in Italian, were amazingly translated by Genesis, whose voice from the stream Jadzia could suddenly hear: “Mr. Prime Minister, what are you doing? We have your assurances that you would stand alongside Germany.”
Mussolini ignored the officer and said to Hitler aloud: “I will defend Germany!” Jadzia panicked at the words uttered by the body she believed she had complete control over. What’s going on? she thought. Immediately, she was transferred back to Daladier.

“We do not wish for war, Herr Hitler,” Daladier said, “but we will not accept any other resolution to this discussion but that you give up the idea of expansion in Europe.”

The officers in the room who were capable of understanding Daladier’s words were speechless, either from the bold words of the Frenchman or from a seething rage that was testing their self-control. One of them approached Hitler from behind and whispered something indiscernible in his ear. He acknowledged with a nod.

Jadzia seized the moment of silence and jumped back into Chamberlain’s mind. “We’ve spoken with the Soviets,” Chamberlain said, “and they have agreed to honor their commitments to the Czechs, Mr. Chancellor.” Jadzia hoped no one in the room was able to call her bluff. From the reactions of von Ribbentrop and Hitler himself, it seemed as though her ruse worked. Angrily, Hitler stormed from the room, followed by his translator, von Ribbentrop, Mussolini, and eventually, everyone but Chamberlain and Daladier.

Within seconds, Jadzia was pulled into the stream where she said to Genesis: “Can you put me in the mind of anyone in that room with Hitler?”

“I’ll try,” she said.

A brief moment later, Jadzia was in the mind of Hitler’s translator. Hitler was pacing back and forth across the office while everyone said nothing. In an effort to show poise, he said: “Gentlemen, this has been my first international conference and I can assure you that it will be my last! If ever that silly old man comes interfering here again, I’ll kick him downstairs and jump on his stomach in front of the photographers.” Everyone in the room laughed, as did Jadzia, delighted by the reaction her efforts had on the man who killed her parents. Jadzia thought of the clearing, and a second later, she was there.

Jadzia, safe in her own body once more, fell to her knees and laughed at Hitler’s tantrum. She would need to wait for Genesis’s return to confirm if her efforts had the effect she hoped for, but the laughing felt good nonetheless.

Shortly, Genesis arrived and fell to the ground, exhausted and out of breath. She soon turned over on her back and took in several deep breaths, her pulse eventually settling to normal.

“So was it a success?”

“Not really,” Genesis said. “Which doesn’t surprise me. After all, even when he did sign the agreement, he broke it soon afterwards, so Britain and France standing up to him didn’t seem to do much - at least not with regards to his resolve.”

“Did it prevent the war at all?”

“A couple of weeks. But with Hitler angrier than before, the war was actually more violent. I guess we actually made it worse!”

“That’s a disappointment. I thought for sure I had gotten to him.”

“I’m sure you did, especially on a primitive level. But the man is evidently more complex than most of the history books give him credit for.”

“What happened with Mussolini?” Jadzia asked.

Genesis shrugged her shoulders. “Probably just a poor link between your mind and his. He’s probably
just as poisoned as the Nazis.”

“Something tells me changing that one man’s words wasn’t going to affect that much anyway. As for Hitler,” she said as she began pacing across the clearing, “we need to start earlier...” She continued her pacing for several minutes, her mind deep in thought.

“Jadzia!” Genesis called.

She stopped and faced Genesis.

“There’s not much we can probably do once Hitler comes to power. If we go back further than that, it may be before your conception.”

“I understand,” Jadzia said. “It isn’t about me anymore - it’s not even about my parents. I know what they would have me do. They gave up their lives honorably. Why should I do less?”

“Because you still have a life to live. They didn’t have that choice.”

“We’ve been over this!” she said. “There is no life for me in a world where this war existed.”

Genesis flew into the air and hovered within a few feet of Jadzia, who stopped pacing once Genesis approached. “You have nothing to prove to me,” she said. “And there’s no need to be a martyr either. There are small corners of the world that never know of what happened in your homeland. I can bring you there, you can start a new life with the native peoples, and you wouldn’t even have to wear clothes!” she laughed.

Jadzia smiled at the suggestion. “That is tempting,” she said as she stepped forward and brought Genesis closer to her with her hands. “How could I leave all those innocent people to die and go off and live in the middle of nowhere?”

“You already live in the middle of nowhere.”

“Only until we stop the war. Then I want to return and rebuild my life before the war. But I have the power to go back and make a better world for everyone.”

“You’re wrong,” Genesis said. “I have the power. And what would you do if I didn’t want to continue, if I just left you here all alone. You don’t even know what year it is, do you?”

Jadzia suddenly realized the truth of her words. She always assumed the year was 1945, but there was no reason to conclude that she wasn’t somewhere in earth’s distant past or future. “You wouldn’t do that. You’re here for the same reason I am: you have a desire to help people.”

“I know,” Genesis said. “I just wanted you to realize that we’re in this together. And if something happens to you, it won’t just be you who is affected.”

Jadzia fell the ground and bowed her head in shame. She crossed her legs and buried her face in her hands. “I’m sorry,” she said. “I didn’t realize I meant that much to you.”

Genesis swooped down from the sky and stood on her knee. She reached out and touched Jadzia’s cheek, now soaked in tears. “You’re my best friend. Without you, I’m all alone in this world.”

Jadzia wiped the tears from her face. “I’m not trying to be selfish, but I feel like I was freed from that awful place of torture to do something grand. And returning to Poland only to have a family of my own seems selfish somehow.”

“But that’s what every other survivor is doing,” Genesis said. “They’re getting on with their lives. I came to you, not to sacrifice your life to a greater cause, but to reward your courage. I can’t do that if you don’t
exist.”

“What should I do, then?”

“I can’t tell you that. You need to decide which path to choose, whether you want the life of a survivor or the life of a martyr.”

Jadzia lay back on the ground and just shook her head as she felt overwhelmed by the divergent choices, both opposed to each other.

“On a positive note,” Genesis said, “you’re in no rush. As I said before, I’m in no rush to leave you. If you want to stay in this clearing for the next twenty years and sort out the direction of your life, you can. The war will always be there waiting for you to fix, as will your life after the war.”

“When I go home, to what time will you send me?”

“I won’t be able to take you to the point you left - if you stay five years, you’ll return to 1950. Anything else will cause a paradox.”

“That’s what I figured,” she said. “Don’t worry; I’ll decide quickly.”

“No rush,” Genesis said. She flew over to a nearby tree and began gathering fruit. “But since it looks like we may be here through the night, you’ll need something to eat.” She tossed a piece to Jadzia, who promptly ate and went to sleep as the sun set. Genesis ate as well and sat at the top of the tree and watched the moonrise as day turned to night. She occasionally looked down to check on her friend, and as the night grew colder, she moved Jadzia to a more comfortable and warmer place in the clearing. Genesis later dozed to sleep herself on a tree-limb and wondered how long Jadzia would wait to decide her future. As her thoughts turned to dreams, the knot in her stomach returned. And until they two girls left the clearing, it never went away.
Chapter 7

The next morning, Genesis and Jadzia awoke and began their day as they had since they first arrived in the clearing. They never spoke of their conversation the day before, nor did Genesis try to coax her friend to make a hasty decision. Rather, she prepared a fish that Jadzia caught from the creek (her newfound vegetarianism had given way to hunger) and they feasted on the last of the fruit from the surrounding trees and enjoyed their breakfast.

After their meal, both of them bathed in the creek which was getting colder now that autumn approached, but Genesis did her best to warm the water using her powers. Jadzia dried in the sun and decided to go exploring in the surrounding woods, with Genesis as an escort and protector. Few of the animals in the forest were of any danger and the ones that were seemed to avoid Genesis as she approached, as if aware of what she could do. Much of the forest was dull and impassible, the brush too dense, thickets too cumbersome to traverse around or over (especially considering Jadzia’s state of undress), and the areas that could be penetrated were encased by a river that was too cold and too rapid for Genesis to warm effectively. Upon their return to the clearing, the women relaxed and laughed on the banks of the brook. Jadzia shared stories from her childhood and Genesis regaled her friend of trips through time and space. Night approached quickly, and the fire Genesis started amidst a pile of dry limbs and leaves helped cook another fish and keep the clearing well-lit as their conversation lasted long into the night, their gentle laughter and giggles filling the air.

As time passed, and Jadzia had still failed to decide a course of action, the two women fashioned a comfortable life in the forest clearing. Days turned into weeks, and as winter approached, Jadzia began to feel the effects of her nudity. She attempted to make a covering out of leaves but it made her skin itch. The animal skin she found in the forest and cleaned in the creek proved uncomfortable as well. Genesis offered to move them to a warmer climate, but Jadzia refused, claiming that this was her new home and she would never leave her home again as she was once forced to.

Snow soon fell and the shelter Jadzia made from branches, vines, and leaves that did so well against the rain was useless against the weight of the snow. That was when Genesis stepped in and used her power to create an energy bubble, a shield that swallowed a significant part of the clearing and creek into its realm. Inside the bubble, the air, ground, and water were warm and so Jadzia never experienced the darkest, coldest parts of the Canadian winter. Several times a day, Genesis left the comfort of the bubble to fly high into the sky and channel the sun’s warmth into the shield. Jadzia never spent more than a few seconds alone. When asked if she ever wanted solitude, Jadzia told Genesis that the isolation she spent in the death camps was all she needed for a lifetime. Spring arrived, followed by summer, autumn, and again winter, but Jadzia kept silent as to her future ambitions. Their conversations would often last days, and rarely did they argue about anything substantial. Quickly, their friendship grew stronger and soon, they came to view one another as sisters. And as the years passed, Jadzia and Genesis grew closer still.

Both of them eventually forgot what it was like to not have one another in their lives. Genesis shared everything with Jadzia, the knowledge she gained from within the stream and from her travels before they met. On a few occasions, they would choose a topic to learn about and Genesis would gather all the information she could from the past, present, and future and shared it with her closest friend. This gave them an endless variety of things to talk about.

Unexpectedly, as time went by, Jadzia’s memory lapsed. Many of the details from her past she now forgot - even the names of her parents on a few occasions. Genesis never worried that something might be wrong, nor did Jadzia. However, the condition soon worsened and she started forgetting where she was. Genesis refrained from sharing any more knowledge, suddenly fearful that Jadzia’s mind might be damaged by her powers.

Genesis never aged a day in all their years together but still looked as youthful, vibrant, and voluptuous as ever. Jadzia, at thirty years of age, and nearly ten years to the day since their last conversation about preventing World War II, finally decided her own fate. She climbed from the tree shelter Genesis helped her build a few years earlier and found her swimming in the creek. Jadzia sat on the banks and dipped her toes in the water, her expression sullen for the first time in years.
“Is something wrong?” Genesis asked as she waded to the edge of the water and climbed out.

“No,” Jadzia said, “but I’ve come to a decision about my future.”

Genesis did not need to be reminded of their last discussion. Even though she loved every moment of her time with Jadzia, she had secretly wished that each day in this clearing would be their last. Several times, the knot in her stomach was so painful that she thought of broaching the subject, but in accord with her promise all those years ago, she kept silent. “What brought this on all of the sudden?” she asked.

“You talked in your sleep again.”

“I’m fine, really,” Genesis said. “I’ve coped with this for ages before we met; I can wait a little longer.”

Jadzia shook her head. “There’s no need to wait,” she said. “I know what I want.”

Genesis rung the water from her hair and sat on the warm rock in front of Jadzia to dry off. “Okay,” she said. “What would you like to do?”

“I want to stop Adolf Hitler.”

“How do you propose we do that?”

“Stopping the invasion of my homeland didn’t work - and probably never will. Denying him what he wanted only emboldened him further. So I think there’s only one thing left: we need to stop him from seizing power.”

“That’s not going to be easy. After all, he was legitimately elected into office.”

“There seems to be only one event that will change his ascension.”

“And what of your parents?”

“Don’t worry; this happens after they’ve married. It shouldn’t change events in Poland too drastically.”

“That’s quite a gamble. What event are we talking about?”

“The coup in Munich, when Hitler tried to seize control of the government. I can’t remember the year or a lot of the details. I only remember he was tried for treason and should have been sentenced for five years.”

“But he was sentenced for five years.”

“Yes, but didn’t he serve less than that?”

“Eight months,” Genesis said, now worried that Jadzia’s memory was failing her so frequently.

“Maybe if he served his full sentence, it could change everything.”

“What makes you conclude that?”

“Nothing. It just seems like a pretty good place to start and it won’t also jeopardize my future, which I know is a major concern for you.”

“Thank you for thinking of me.” Genesis stood and hovered into the air, already gathering her strength for the leap into the stream. “So all you want to do is change the judge’s sentence?”

“Yeah, pretty simple, right?”
“When would you like to leave?”

“Now,” Jadzia said. She hopped to her feet and placed her hands at her side.

“When you come to, you’ll be in the body of the Presiding Judge, Georg Neithardt. He’s the least likely to put up a fight. But remember, this guy likes Hitler already, so you’ll have to push his mind hard to get what we want.”

“Got it. Wait! What’s the guy’s name again?”

“Neithardt,” Genesis repeated. “Are you sure you’re okay to do this?”

Jadzia rubbed her temples and took a deep breath. “Yeah, I’m fine,” she said. “Let’s get this over with.”

In a flash of blue light, Jadzia and Genesis abandoned their home in the clearing for the first time in nearly a decade.

When Jadzia opened her eyes next, she was in front of a courtroom in the body of the Presiding Judge as Genesis promised. Currently, Hitler was in the middle of his final speech before the court handed down its sentence. With passion and charisma uniquely his, Hitler’s words reached, not only the people sitting in the court, but apparently, the judges as well. If Jadzia was to call this mission a success, she needed to convince the people present that Hitler was to serve his full sentence.

“For, gentlemen,” Hitler concluded, “it is not you who pronounce judgment upon us, it is the eternal Court of History which will make its pronouncement upon the charge which is brought against us. The judgment that you will pass, that I know. But that Court will not ask of us: ‘Have you committed high treason or not?’ That Court will judge us ... who as Germans have wished the best for their people and their Fatherland, who wished to fight and to die. You may declare us guilty a thousand times, but the Goddess who presides over the Eternal Court of History will with a smile tear in pieces the charge of the Public Prosecutor and the judgment of the Court: for she declares us guiltless.”

The people in the courtroom applauded and cheered constantly throughout his speech, as though they were in a theater. Jadzia’s challenge to persuade the other judges might be an impossible one, so she wasted no time.

As she forced her ideas to the judge’s vocal chords, she spoke in a language she did not understand. She recognized it as German and although the words were unfamiliar, she was certain Genesis could fill in the blanks. She forced the old man’s body to its feet and shouted: “Sit down, Mr. Hitler!” The room fell silent and Hitler obeyed reluctantly. The other judges looked at one another in dismay at their colleague’s uncharacteristic actions. “You may believe that the Court of History may find you free of guilt, but the Court in Munich finds you nothing but culpable in the deaths of the twenty men who lost their lives as a result of your failed putsch.” She paused and looked around the room and made sure all eyes were on her as she delivered the coup de grace. “My associates may plead otherwise, but I not only find you guilty of high treason, I also find no reason to...” Jadzia stammered. She tried to force her ideas to the man’s throat again, but coughed instead. What’s wrong with me? she thought.

All eyes in the court were fixated on the Presiding Judge. Hitler remained motionless. Jadzia started her idea again: “I find you guilty of high treason and wish to sentence you to...a prison term of...” Her words found no articulation in Judge Neithardt. “To a prison term of...” she tried to say again. Still, she could not complete her thought. Genesis provided no answer. Again, she attempted to pronounce sentence: “No more than eight months!” Shocked at her own words, she covered her mouth and sat down. The court erupted in cheers as the other judges concurred. Genesis, if you’re listening, please get me out of here! she thought.

Seconds later, she was back in the clearing in the shelter she called home. Genesis appeared immediately and shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know what happened,” she said.
Jadzia gripped her head. “Was there something wrong with his mind? Was it poisoned?”

“He agreed with Hitler, but he was no Nazi. His mind was normal compared to theirs.”

“It was like there was a block in my throat, as though I had no other choice but to utter what I did.”

“Are you okay?” Genesis asked.

“No, my head hurts,” she answered as she held her head between her hands. “Is something wrong with me?”

“Of course not! You probably just need some rest.”

“Okay,” Jadzia said. It was nighttime in the clearing and so she climbed into the tree shelter and laid her head against her pillow of cotton Genesis made for her. Within mere seconds, she was asleep.

Almost an entire day passed before Jadzia awoke, and when she did, Genesis sensed something different. Jadzia at first acted as she always had when they were alone. She laughed a lot and stayed in the shelter until the sun set. As they ate dinner, she stopped eating suddenly and looked at Genesis with a look of concern painted across her face.

“How old am I?” she asked.

Genesis didn’t answer at first. She laughed instead, convinced that her question was a joke. Jadzia’s expression didn’t change though. “You’re almost thirty,” she answered.

“I should have known that,” Jadzia said. “I’m having a hard time remembering a lot of things about myself. I remember everything I’ve shared with you and most of the knowledge you’ve shared with me. But huge blocks of my memory aren’t there anymore. Am I just getting old?”

Genesis smirked at the suggestion. “I doubt it. Most people don’t lose memory of their age until they’re eighty.”

“Then what’s wrong with me?”

“I don’t know,” Genesis said. “I have an idea though. Come with me into the stream; I want to check something.”

Jadzia was back in the stream, conscious as she was when she left the shelter and when Genesis first transferred memories into her. The stream appeared as it had before, and so did Genesis, a massive bundle of points of light and threads weaved together in the rough shape of a female. A single thread reached out to Jadzia and connected to her.

“I’m going to look into your mind. I promise it won’t hurt, although it may feel weird,” Genesis said.

A gentle jolt later, Jadzia felt what she perceived to be Genesis inside her mind. True to Genesis’s word, she felt no pain but instead, felt her friend’s emotions coursing through her. As Genesis probed deeper, their thoughts and feelings melded, as though their souls began to merge. Instead of just watching Genesis’s memories play out in her mind, she was finally able to understand the intense feelings she so often tried to explain in words but couldn’t - the knot in her stomach, the uncontrollable desire to help people in need, the very altruism that ran in her blood.

Genesis suddenly withdrew from Jadzia’s mind and pulled her instantly out of the stream and back to the shelter. Once Jadzia felt at home in her body again, Genesis resumed their conversation.

“Your description of missing memory was more accurate than you realize.”
“What do you mean? What’s wrong?”

“The links in your mind are disappearing. That seems to explain why your memories are no longer there. It looks like something is eating away at them.”

“What could possibly do that?” she asked.

“It’s strange, but it looks like…the new information you have.”

“What information?”

Genesis tried to meet Jadzia’s eyes as she spoke, but she could only hang her head as she realized what was responsible for her friend’s illness. “The information I gave you.”

Jadzia sat back against the tree that supported the shelter and said nothing for a moment. Across the shelter, Genesis was crying. “Do you think this is your fault?” Jadzia asked.

“Of course I do!” she cried.

“But you didn’t know this would happen to me.”

“How are you not mad at me? I would be furious if someone took away a chunk of my life!”

Jadzia approached the woman she loved as a sister and smiled. “How could I ever be angry with you? You’ve given me a second life - a new life. More importantly, I have your friendship. If I have to sacrifice a part of myself for all that, then so be it.”

“I’m so sorry, Jadzia. I didn’t mean to do this. I thought I knew what I was doing.”

“It’s okay,” Jadzia said as she reached out to Genesis and embraced her. “You did nothing wrong.”

Genesis was inconsolable though. Once Jadzia had hugged her and tried to assure her of her forgiveness, Genesis left the shelter to be alone with her thoughts. She raced high into the sky and hovered with nothing but the moon to watch her as she cried. Devastated and furious with herself, she experienced real sadness for the first time. Far below in a tree-house sat the beautiful young woman she charged herself to protect. Now, the poor girl was dying (a fact she neglected to tell her) and she was scared Jadzia might never forgive her. Terrified of being alone again, she resolved in her heart to keep her knowledge of Jadzia’s impending death a secret until she discovered a way to repair damage.

She returned to the tree shelter a few hours later. Jadzia was already asleep so Genesis tried her best to remain silent as she flew onto her perch above Jadzia’s makeshift bed. To no avail, Jadzia turned over and looked up at Genesis.

“Where did you go?” she asked.

“I needed to think,” she said.

“I thought you’d left me.”

Genesis floated down to the pillow where Jadzia rested her head. “I’ll never leave you, Jadzia.”

She smiled. “There’s something I still don’t understand,” she said.

“What’s that?”
“I’m confused why I wasn’t able to control Mussolini and that judge? Did you see something wrong in my mind?”

“Actually, no,” Genesis said. “I checked for that. Whatever is ailing you is only affecting your memory, not the way your mind functions.”

“So what caused it then?”

Genesis shook her head. “I really don’t know. What did it feel like?”

“It felt as though I had no control, like something was holding me back. Almost like having a rope tied around my waist and when I tried to run, it pulled me back. No matter how hard I tried, whatever tugged in the other direction was always stronger.”

“What do you think it was?”

Jadzia didn’t reply at first. She just shook her head. A moment later, she said: “It sounds crazy, but it felt like the hand of God, like some higher power wouldn’t let me succeed.”

“You mean to suggest that World War two is meant to happen and there’s nothing we can do to stop it?” Genesis asked incredulously.

Jadzia said: “No, that can’t be possible. I’m just telling you what it felt like...inside my mind.”

Genesis flew back to her perch and said: “Get some sleep. We’ll decide what to do in the morning.”

She turned on her stomach and went promptly to sleep.

Genesis remained awake for several hours, desperate to find a means to save her friend. No scheme she could devise seemed to be sufficient enough to correct Jadzia’s ailing memory.

Jadzia awoke just before the sun arose and climbed down from the tree-house to gather food. After cutting through the brush to find some berries and a fruit tree, she returned to the camp and prepared breakfast. Genesis was nowhere to be found, which alarmed Jadzia a little since she had never abandoned her in the clearing for more than a few seconds – except last night. Then Jadzia remembered the promise Genesis made the night before, that she would never leave her. Confident that she would not be alone long, she ate her half of the food and swam in the brook (which over the years had grown into a river) for most of the morning.

As promised, Genesis returned and said nothing for quite some time. Jadzia kept busy around the tree-house meanwhile, scribbling in a notebook she had fashioned from leaves and twine, and a pen she made from a hollowed twig and ink made from berry juice. Genesis remained outside, sitting on her favorite perch above the shelter. There, she watched the birds play and occasionally flew around with them around the clearing. Soon, she entered the shelter and called to Jadzia to join her. She climbed through the hole in the roof and sat beside Genesis.

“What’s on your mind?” Jadzia asked.

“You said something last night that made me curious. About whether World War two can even be prevented.”

“It was just a feeling,” she said. “The problem is probably in my mind somewhere.”

“I’m worried you might be right,” Genesis said.

“How is that possible?”

“If what you said is right, that there is an unseen force propelling the war, then there must be a good
reason - and there will be nothing we can do to stop it.”

“I can’t believe that!” Jadzia said. “I can’t give up like that!”

“I’m not giving up on anything. I’m in this to the end with you. If you want to keep trying to stop Hitler, we’ll decide where to go next and get to work.”

“Good,” Jadzia said. “Because I’ll die before I give up.”

“I won’t let that happen either.” Genesis was suddenly tempted to tell Jadzia the truth that her life was going to be tragically cut short as a result of her arrogance. She suddenly recalled the time when they first met, when she used her powers simply to show off in front of Jadzia. She disgusted herself. If Jadzia was going to survive, Genesis knew that the answer would be found in humility, the only quality she desperately lacked. “Where will you go next?”

“I want this to be over. No more head games and forcing people to say the right things,” Jadzia said in a huff.

“What option is there?”

“I know you’re not prepared to take a life and I won’t ask you to do anything you don’t want. But I’m not taking any more chances.” Jadzia fidgeted with her hands, her knees suddenly trembling.

“You want to kill him, don’t you?”

“There’s no other way to stop this. Hitler needs to die.”

“It will be hard to get to him. There were a lot of people who tried to kill him and never got anywhere near him.”

“I want you to send me to the first War. As close to Hitler as you can.”

“Are you sure you want to do this?”

“He can’t rise to power if he was killed in the war.”

“Clearly,” she agreed, “but are you sure you want to take a life? It’s not like killing a fish, Jadzia.”

“It doesn’t matter what I want. We’ve been over this, and I won’t let me parents – or anyone else - die needlessly as long as there is air in my lungs.”

“Whatever you want,” Genesis said.

Jadzia readied her mind for the transfer and an instant later, the two women disappeared.
Chapter 8

The French countryside was scarred by the constant barrage of German shells that fell from every direction. Deep in the trenches, French soldiers covered their heads as planes shot across the sky, dropping bombs all across the landscape. An infantryman climbed from the trench and looked across the battlefield. German soldiers breached the barricade a hundred meters away until they hit the French bulwark and prepared to defend themselves.

Jadzia awoke in the body of a soldier covering his head in the trench. The sudden shock of the violence around her, and its counterpoint to the peaceful clearing she just left, forced her to the ground, cowering.

“Get up!” a soldier shouted at her. “We need to move!”

Jadzia crawled to her knees and followed the troops out of the trench. The gunfire began immediately as the French charged the rampart and the Germans stormed to meet them. Soldiers on both side collapsed around her but she forced her way across the battlefield with a single focus. If Genesis had done her part as Jadzia hoped, Hitler would be on the other side of the bulwark. Behind the German line, Jadzia saw her mark: running along a trench was a slender message runner. He never saw her coming. She tossed her rifle to the ground and withdrew the pistol from her belt. A bomb fell a dozen meters away and the shock threw Jadzia just where she wanted - she tackled Hitler to the ground and the two rolled into the trench.

She climbed to her feet and pressed her boot across Hitler’s neck. Hitler looked terrified, but Jadzia disregarded the guilty feeling in the pit of her stomach and readied her gun. There, in the moment when a Polish woman in a French soldier’s body stared her parent’s future murderer in the eye, she had no change of heart. She grimaced and pulled the trigger.

Nothing happened. She squeezed the trigger again, but still nothing. The gun jammed and Hitler seized the moment. In the second during her distraction, he swiftly reached for the knife at his side and plunged it deep into the soldier’s chest. Jadzia fell to the ground, dropping the gun, and Hitler climbed atop the soldier and reached for the pistol. He placed the gun to Jadzia’s forehead as she whispered: “Genesis, where are you?”

Hitler winced at the soldier’s curious words and pulled the trigger.

Jadzia never felt the brief flicker of pain the French soldier undoubtedly did as Adolf Hitler squeezed the trigger and ended his life. Genesis fulfilled her pledge at the last possible moment and transported Jadzia back to her body in the clearing.

Jadzia fell to her knees as she emerged from the stream and clasped her head.

“Are you all right?” Genesis asked.

“I’ll be fine. Thank you for getting me out of there.”

“Sorry it took so long. Something was holding me back.”

“Me too,” Jadzia said. “I couldn’t pull the trigger. Do you really think the future can’t be changed?”

“I’ve never actually done something this involved before. Maybe the momentum of the stream is too great to alter its direction. Perhaps the hand of God is involved. Or maybe the future can never be altered. If that’s the case, I’ll have to come to you for nothing.”

“I thought you said you weren’t going to give up.”
“I won’t,” Genesis said.

Jadzia climbed through the hatch in the roof and sat atop the shelter as a steady drizzle descended. Genesis left her alone since there was nothing left to be said. But as the hours passed and the rain intensified, Genesis grew concerned for her friend. She opened the hatch and saw Jadzia sitting with her closed eyes, a stoic expression on her face as she remained motionless. Genesis climbed onto the roof and knelt beside her and faced the storm as it descended on the clearing. Lightning struck nearby trees and thunder shook the shelter, and yet Jadzia refused to move - even after Genesis petitioned her to go inside.

“Come inside, Jadzia,” Genesis said. “We built this thing so we didn’t have to be naked in the rain.”

“I’m not going anywhere!” Jadzia said.

“But why?”

“How do I know you won’t leave me?”

“Leave you? Jadzia, we’ve been together for ten years. When have I ever left you?”

“What are you talking about?” Jadzia shouted. “I’ve only been here a few days!”

Genesis said nothing. She sat frozen by Jadzia’s words, terrified that her memories had faded so quickly. She climbed back onto the roof and sat next to Jadzia until the rain stopped an hour later. Neither of them said anything. Genesis read Jadzia’s mind and watched the fear and rage course through her. Jadzia was scared of being abandoned, afraid that her inability to control her actions in the past was related to her failing mind. But Genesis sensed something far more sinister at play: the future may really be set in stone, and there might be nothing she could do about it. In that case, Jadzia would die for nothing, as not even her parents’ fate would change.

Jadzia sighed in frustration as the sun emerged from behind the clouds and forest canopy. She climbed through the hatch in the roof and collapsed onto her bed, soaking the mattress of leaves. Genesis poked her head through the roof.

“Are you feeling alright?” she said, trying to mask that fact that she already knew what was wrong.

“I feel like I’m going crazy. All these memories keep coming and going at the same time. I’m so confused.”

“How long have you been here with me?” Genesis asked.

Jadzia looked at her incredulously. “Ten years, of course. Why?”

“Because an hour ago you yelled at me and said you have been here a few days.”

“I don’t remember saying that! What’s wrong with me?” she cried.

Genesis could hold back her secret no longer. She descended from the roof and landed on the small stump beside Jadzia’s bed she used as a table. “There’s something I need to tell you. And I’m afraid you’re not going to like it.”

A knot formed and twisted in Jadzia’s stomach. She had never seen an expression on Genesis’s face that was so hopeless. She could only assume it meant the worst. “I’m dying, aren’t I?” Jadzia asked plainly.

Genesis nodded and bowed her head.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”
“I didn’t want to scare you.”

“Is there nothing we can do?”

Genesis shook her head. “I’m not a surgeon. It doesn’t matter. I know the truth.”

“What’s that?”

“It’s my fault,” she said. “I did this to you when I forced all that information onto you. There’s no other way to explain it.” Genesis began to weep. “I can’t believe I let this happen. I was so careless; so confident that I knew what I was doing. I should never have come to you,” she said as she burst into the air and prepared to storm out of the ceiling.

“Wait!” Jadzia called out. “I don’t want you to leave.”

Genesis stopped at the hatch in the roof and covered her face in shame. “I don’t know what to do.”

“Just stay with me,” she said. “I know you didn’t do this on purpose to hurt me. I pushed you. I’m the one who wanted to save my parents; to prevent the war; to learn all there is to know.”

“And now because of my conceitedness, you - an innocent woman from a death camp - are going to die by my hand. I can’t stand to be here when that happens.”

“What will you do?” Jadzia asked. “Will you leave me here to die alone without my best friend - my sister - to be here with me?”

Genesis shielded her face with her hands and cried. “I’m sorry,” she said, the tears streaming down her face. She floated back to Jadzia’s side. “I can’t do that. I need to find a way to save you.”

“And what if you can’t?”

“Let me try at least? I need to leave, but I won’t be gone long. I promise you.”

Jadzia smiled at her friend and reached out to lift her into her hands. “No matter what happens to me, even if I died tonight, I am grateful you came into my life. I wouldn’t trade the time we’ve shared for anything.” Genesis forced a smile and hovered away from Jadzia. She turned and looked back, etching the memory of her helpless and dying friend’s kind and beautiful face, and disappeared in a flash of light.

Genesis returned almost immediately to find Jadzia asleep. The rain descended in sheets outside the shelter so Genesis rested atop the branch above Jadzia’s bed. As the storm intensified, crashes of thunder became more frequent and soon Jadzia awoke. She looked about the room and saw Genesis staring into the distance as though the walls of the shelter were of glass.

“What did you find?” Jadzia said.

Genesis snapped out of her daydream and said: “I have to remove all the information I put into you. The war, the history I shared during our years together, everything.”

“Is it safe?”

Genesis shook her head. “I should never have been so arrogant.”

“Don’t talk like that,” she said. “You did what I wanted you to do.”
“I shouldn’t have listened. And now, look at you - no matter what I do, you might die. How can I live with myself?”

“Do your best,” Jadzia said. “That’s all I can ask. If I die from attempting to prevent the war, then I’ll have done better than all those people who served Hitler and did nothing to stop him.”

Genesis smiled, convinced that the altruism she long felt she possessed was insignificant compared to Jadzia. “Let’s get this over with then.”

The women disappeared into the stream.

Jadzia watched the stream of time flow past her the same as before. Genesis was close by and prepared a massive strand of threads to connect to Jadzia. Jadzia remained perfectly still and tried to keep her mind blank. Genesis maneuvered her way across the pathways in Jadzia’s mind and began the arduous process of removing the memories that no longer belonged.

Within hours, no traces remained of the information Genesis forced into her fragile mind all those years ago. Jadzia still remembered the years they shared together and their long talks, but many of their conversations were now just gaps in her mind. When the procedure was finished, Genesis pulled Jadzia from the stream and placed her mind back in her body.

Genesis emerged from the stream and expected to see Jadzia milling about the shelter. Instead, Jadzia was collapsed on the floor.

“Jadzia!” she shouted.

She didn’t respond. Genesis lifted her from the floor and placed her on the bed. Her pulse was normal as was her breathing but there was no sign of consciousness. Genesis panicked and leaped back into the stream. Jadzia was in the same place she was just moments ago. She reached out to talk and Jadzia said: “I can’t move my body.”

“I know. Something went wrong.”

“I don’t think the reversal worked,” Jadzia stated. “At least not all of it.”

“Why do you say that?”

“I still have one memory, but this one is different. I don’t just remember what was in the history books. I feel it like I was there.”

“What is it?”

“Did you ever link my mind to Hitler?”

“No, it was too dangerous. What memory do you have?”

“I have one of his memories, from when his mother died. I remember it like happened to me.”

“I swear I didn’t link you to him,” Genesis said. “I swear!”

“I’m not mad at you,” Jadzia answered. “This is a good thing. It will give me one last chance.”

“Last chance? Have you gone mad?”

“I can’t move my body anymore,” she said. “And I don’t think I’ll ever be able to. What if I die?”
“That won’t happen!”

“I’m afraid it’s already happening, Genesis. You need to do one last thing for me.”

Genesis blocked her mind from her so that none of her emotions or thoughts could transmit across the thread to Jadzia. She was terrified to let her sister die. Fear, in its most potent form, engulfed every shred of her; no method of reasoning it away seemed to work. If these were to be Jadzia’s final hours, then Genesis felt that she needed to redeem herself, if only for Jadzia’s own comfort. “Anything,” she said.

“Put me in the mind of Hitler’s mother just before she died. I have to try one last time to save my parents. What happens to me is no longer important.”

Genesis said nothing.

“I’m not taking ‘no’ for an answer. Do this, please,” she said. “For me.”

“Okay,” Genesis replied. “I owe you as much for taking so much from you.”

“You’ve taken nothing. All I have now comes from you - the life we’ve shared together all these years; I wouldn’t trade any of it.”

Genesis released the block between their minds and sensed the happiness and contentment within her friend; she was speaking sincerely. It now seemed that Jadzia’s death may be inevitable and that Genesis would be the cause of it. She needed to pay Jadzia back for cutting her life short. She searched through the stream and found Hitler’s mother still alive. “I found his mother. Are you ready?”

“Yes,” Jadzia said. “And thank you.”

Genesis said nothing more as no words could make anything right. In an instant, she disconnected from Jadzia and transferred her to a point in the stream. She emerged from the stream in the tree shelter alongside Jadzia’s lifeless body. “I’m so sorry,” she said.
Chapter 9

In the apartment of Adolf Hitler on the evening of December 20th, 1907, Klara Hitler lied dying of breast cancer. Edward Bloch, a Jewish doctor that earlier that year removed one of her breasts, had come by to apply another iodoform treatment on the cancerous ulcers. For Jadzia, the Polish girl now operating within Klara’s body, the pain was beyond excruciating. The pungent smell of the iodoform filled every nook of the apartment. Adolf never left her alone. He would sometimes clean the floor or prepare meals, but he knew her death approached and the depression had weakened his spirits.

“Adolf,” Jadzia forced out, her breath drawing the foul smell into her lungs.

Hitler stopped his chores and sat beside his mother’s cot in the kitchen. “What is it, mother?”

“I won’t make it through the night,” she said. “And there’s something I need to tell you.”

“Don’t speak that way,” he said.

“Why have you been so sad?”

Adolf began to cry, but quickly brushed the tears away and straightened his posture.

“Don’t worry about your father anymore, Adolf. Cry if you need to.”

The tears started again but as before, he dried his eyes and changed his countenance. The long years of harsh discipline meted out by his father had left their mark and Adolf could not resist the inward pressure to conform - even if his father was dead.

“Tell me,” Jadzia said, “why have you been so depressed of late? It isn’t just me, is it?”

“No,” he said. “I didn’t leave Vienna because you took ill, but...” He stammered for right words. “I failed the academy’s examination.”

“After you worked so hard,” she said. “I’m sorry, Adolf.” Jadzia found it difficult to remain supportive of the man who would later take her parents’ lives, but she knew that the future may not yet be written in indelible ink, and perhaps this tragic event in his life could somehow alter what would otherwise be inevitable. Sadly, Jadzia feared she might not live long enough to see the results.

“I tried so hard,” he said. “I brought all I had to Vienna to train, and I failed.”

Jadzia reached out and took Adolf’s hand tenderly. “You’ve never disappointed me, son.” She said, realizing that Adolf was no less human than she was. Whatever drove him to take his own fate, perhaps this night – in the company of his mother – would provide the weight to change the stream’s momentum.

“Father would have been.”

“Your father was wrong about a great many thing,” she said. “His love for Austria blinded him. And you can learn from that.”

“I’ll never be so misled,” he assured her.

“I believe you,” Jadzia said, now desperately trying to be a source of comfort to him. “And yet, many men before your father swore they would not let their love of God and country change them. It usually did. Promise me you won’t let that happen.”
“I promise,” Hitler said without hesitation.

Jadzia smiled and changed the subject. “What will do when I am gone?”

Adolf tried to rebuke her but he stopped when he saw her seriousness. “I’m not sure,” he said.

“You won’t continue pursuing art?”

“Why should I? Maybe the academy’s rejection is an omen - a sign that I should choose something else. Maybe I should become an architect like Father wanted.”

“But that won’t make you happy, Adolf. Your father was a difficult man, I know. But he loved you and he only wanted what he thought was best.” Jadzia dug deep into Klara’s mind for memories to make her ruse more believable. It took all her strength to draw those images from her subconscious; she had buried them away someplace deep, as though hoping to forget forever. “What’s best, though, is for you to find something to make you happy. If you truly believe you can become a great artist, then don’t let the ghost of your father stop you.”

“I’m scared of losing you,” he said.

“I know, son. I know.” She looked away from Adolf and strained to see the clock. “What time is it?”

“Just after midnight,” he answered.

“You need to rest.”

“I’m not leaving you.”

She could tell by his demeanor that he meant his words and was there as long as she breathed. She said nothing more, and for the next hour and a half, mother and son sat in peace and quiet together, neither of them uttered a word.

“Why did it come to this?” he finally whispered.

“We all come to this point,” she said.

“But when I need you the most?”

“Life and death are rarely convenient, Adolf. You cannot let what happens to me decide who you become. You are still in control of your own destiny. Your father didn’t do this to me; nor did any man.”

“The doctor was careless!” he said in a raised voice.

“That isn’t true. He’s done all anyone can.”

“Maybe Father was right: perhaps we should have an Austrian examine you instead of a Jew!”

Jadzia’s self-control waned. “Adolf Hitler! You won’t speak that way again. Your father was never right about that. Even if Doctor Bloch erred, it had nothing to do with being a Jew!”

“I’m sorry, Mother,” he said. “I’m just so angry.”

“That sort of anger will not bring you joy in life. You need to accept my passing, and not be so quick to find someone to blame.”
“Yes, you’re right.”

Jadzia turned away and closed her eyes. Hitler reached for his mother’s hand and began to weep. She didn’t say anything else. She didn’t need to. For the next hour, she lied still and breathed shallow. Jadzia remained in Klara’s body and never called out for Genesis. She had nothing else to say. Moments later, she breathed her final breath - and in the body of Adolf Hitler’s mother. Their deaths would be ones Genesis and Hitler would carry for the rest of their lives.

Deep in the Canadian wilderness, in the tree shelter that Genesis and Jadzia shared together for a decade, she sat beside the body of her best friend and waited for Jadzia to call out to her from the stream. She never did.

She wondered how long she would be alone until Jadzia returned, but moments after that thought passed through her mind, she received her answer. Jadzia’s body gasped for air one last time and expired.

She stroked Jadzia’s cheek and kissed her forehead. She uttered no words as she lifted Jadzia’s body into her arms and brought her outside the shelter into the clearing. She placed her body on Jadzia’s favorite spot of grass where she would often sunbathe and listen to the creek trickle past.

The thought of turning away from Jadzia and disappearing far into the stream and never returning to the clearing entered her mind. But before she could, she turned her attention to the body and fell to the ground weeping. Rage and disappointment with herself built until it eventually released. She shot into the air screaming and turned toward the shelter. In a fit of anger, her fire shot from her hands and set the shelter ablaze. Birds in the tree scattered in all directions. Rage consumed her: fire destroyed the entire clearing as she created a bubble that surrounded the home she and Jadzia shared. Inside the bubble, she forced as much energy as she could gather from the sun into the bubble until she could sustain it no longer. In the smallest fraction of a second, the energy in the bubble vaporized everything within its walls - the grass, the brook, even the body of her friend. Nothing but dust remained.

Genesis turned from the clearing and vowed to never return. She soared high into the atmosphere and approached the borders of space and imagined if she should leave the confines of humanity altogether, never to set foot on Earth again. She was, of course, able to sustain herself on foreign worlds by gathering available elements from her surroundings. The knot in her stomach grew stronger the farther she travelled from her home world. Even now, as the sky turned black and the stars shone in their glory, the knot returned. If she were to leave, how long would she be able to endure the pain of denying herself what she most needed - to help people! So she opted for the only other alternative: returning to humankind and finding someone else to help. And maybe learn from the terrible mistakes she made with Jadzia.

No sooner had she descended to earth that she realized she had another choice before her: she could go back and save Jadzia’s life. But she dismissed the very idea as selfish. Jadzia was free to make the choices she did, even if it cost her life. For Jadzia, death would always be honorable if she died for the right reason. Only one problem remained: Genesis knew that Jadzia’s mission to alter the course of history had ultimately failed. There appeared to be no way to stop Hitler or World War II. But Jadzia would never accept that, not as long as she had air to breathe. If Genesis prevented Jadzia’s death, they would end up with impossible odds staring them in the face, and no doubt Jadzia would again choose death. Stubborn or courageous, Genesis knew where Jadzia would always stand when it came to saving her parents.

And yet, Genesis couldn’t shake the feeling that Jadzia’s life might still be savable. There was only one thing that Jadzia wanted and that was her family. To rescue her from the Nazis and return her to a life alone would be cruel to a girl so hopelessly dependent on her parents for survival. Jadzia’s choices needed to be respected. The only way Genesis could ever see herself violating the wishes of her friend was if she could ever restore a family to her. She would always need something more than friendship.
For the next few decades, Genesis returned to her original home, the stately tree where she had her first memory. Initially, she tried to avoid all contact with people. It didn’t last long. At night, she would often disappear into the stream and watch humanity from afar, ever hopeful that one day she would have the strength to appear before someone again and fulfill the noble quality of heartfelt altruism that guided her intentions - even if her methods needed work.

To prepare herself for helping anyone among humankind that needed her unique brand of assistance, she took it upon herself to learn all the languages on earth. The endeavor ate up years more, but she didn’t care; she couldn’t help anyone if she couldn’t communicate.

As the 21st century began, she set her eyes on a young man she knew she could help. The love of his life had just abandoned him. Filled with despair and afraid of a lonely life, he let his broken heart inform his future choices. For three years, he numbed himself to the world around him and allowed his grief to overwhelm his thinking. A single mistake, if fixed, might alter the course of his life.

Little did the diminutive time-traveller know, but James Grant would change the lives of everyone on earth. And as before with Jadzia, it would be all Genesis’s fault.
Part 2
Chapter 1

The young woman curled her body inside the metal cage that held her prisoner. Cold, stainless steel pressed against her pale, naked body as she shivered in fear. Masked men and women surrounded her, walked to and fro around the room, and shone bright lights from all directions at the girl. She tried to bury her head in her hands, but the metal floor reflecting the light made her efforts futile. Each day she tried to block out her senses, but the prodding and poking from the masked people never stopped. Worst of all, the incessant jostling and clattering against the cage had covered most of her body in bruises and sores.

Any memories she had of her early years were shadowy; she had no recollection of her parents. In fact, only the government that kept her confined knew where she came from; all evidence of the girl's existence was destroyed after her conception. She had no knowledge of it, but the scientists who hovered over her with needles of every shape and size were the same people who governed her creation. A barrage of injections replaced the pain caused by the bruises as needles pierced every region of her body.

The woman, who appeared to be about twenty-five years-old, often thought the injections would be easier to endure if she was the same size as her assailants. Her stature was that of a large flower; the cage she called home was too small to receive any privacy. She endured the same series of injections daily, but the pain paled in comparison to the abuse she suffered by night at the hands of the unscrupulous guards who had no shame in their unspeakable molestations. Her cries for help did nothing.

Once the masked people finished their tests, she collapsed and fell asleep.

When she awoke a few hours later, the girl was disoriented and still groggy. A group of scientists gathered around the cage. One of them tried to measure her height by poking her to straighten her legs.

“Nine inches and shrinking still,” the one said to the group in German.

“Impossible! We isolated the growth gene weeks ago,” another replied.

“Still,” yet another said, “she’s getting stronger.”

“How strong?”

“We need to upgrade the cage.”

The scientist ripped his mask off and pounded his fist against the cage. The girl toppled against the bars from the shock and cried. “Again?” the scientist reacted. “Why can’t you control her strength?”

“Isn’t that what we wanted, sir?” the other replied.

“Yes, but not so strong we can’t control her!”

The first scientist interrupted. “We need to fix the shrinking: a nine-inch girl isn’t what the Fuhrer had in mind. We need to get this right – especially if we mean to breed her. One almighty soldier is not what we need.”

“Yes, sir,” the other scientists said in unison.

The group turned to leave but one of the scientists lingered behind. After the door closed, he knelt to the girl’s level and smiled as kindly as he could manage. He almost lost control of his emotions at the sight of her condition. The girl stopped crying immediately but did nothing to wipe away her tears. The man beckoned the girl towards him, but she backed up against the cage instead.

The man whispered. “I’m a friend, my dear.”
She remained silent.

“I know these men have been vicious and I don’t expect you to trust me,” he said. “Can you speak?”

She nodded cautiously.

“I know. That is but one of my many gifts to you. See that no one knows of it! To most, the perfect soldier doesn’t need to speak, only to listen.”

The girl looked back at him with wide green eyes the color of rich grass after a rain.

“If you were meant to only be a soldier,” the doctor said, “they’d be right. But you are meant for so much more than that. You don’t know it yet, but you will do great things in your life.”

“Why are you doing this to me?” the girl asked softly. There was no way to be sure she would receive an honest answer.

“I can’t tell you that now. I promise, child, when you are finally freed from this awful place, you will not wonder ‘why’ anymore.”

“Why not?” she said.

The man smiled kindly once again. “Because you won’t remember any of this – or me.”

The girl cocked her head to one side curiously.

“Just as I’ve given you a voice, I’ve given you freedom; and yet, these are just the beginning of my gifts to you. You will have great strength, both in body and mind. You will possess a love for others and a compelling desire to help those in trouble. But you will have more than just the will – you will also have the way, a means of helping those in need.”

“I don’t understand,” the girl said, finally pushing her long, red hair out of her face.

“I know,” he said, extending a small finger between the bars of her cage for consolation. “They want you to create chaos and war, but I won’t allow that. They don’t know this, but you will soon be incapable of revenge. Whatever time and place you escape to will be far grander than this miserable place. Moreover, you will never need to return. You will only remember enough to remove the fear you feel now.”

“Who are you?” she finally asked.

He only smiled. “You might say I’m your father. And yet, I cannot give you a name as the Fuhrer has already chosen one for someone of your…uniqueness. Your name will be Genesis.”

“But won’t I forget that too?”

He chuckled. “Very clever girl.” He removed a tiny syringe from his pocket. “Do you see this?”

She nodded.

“When I inject you with this, a powerful drug will permanently imprint on your mind only what you need to know about yourself. Whatever treasures lurk beneath, you will need to discover on your own.”

She approached the door to the cage and remained still as the man gently injected the syringe into her arm, but nothing happened.
“You’ll feel its effects soon enough.” He looked behind him as a loud noise came from outside the laboratory.

“Come,” he gestured toward her, “you need to leave now.”

He removed a key from his belt and opened the door. The man gently lifted her up, placed her in his shirt pocket, and held his coat together.

“Please be quiet, my dear,” he said.

The man carried her to the door of the laboratory and into the hallway. It was silent. A moment later, alarms sounded.

“Oh, no,” he muttered. He looked down at Genesis. “They’re tracking us, or more to the point: you. No matter – where you’re going, they cannot follow. I may have given them my people’s technology to the wrong people, but that’s my problem. Besides, I’ve kept the best parts for you.”

“I’m scared,” she said.

“That’s good,” he replied dryly. “Don’t hold back your emotions. Or else you’ll never make it out of here.”

Down the hall, a stream of German guards stormed toward the scientist. They stopped as they neared him and drew their weapons.

“On the ground, Doctor,” one of them barked.

“Heil Hitler!” the scientist said plainly, but insincerely.

“Hand over the woman!” they shouted.

“I’m afraid I can’t do that,” he said.

“All we want is the girl,” another guard demanded.

“You won’t get her back now. It’s too late.”

One of the soldiers approached the scientist cautiously, when emerging from his pocket was the small girl surrounded by an intense blue light.

The soldier stopped, but it was indeed too late. The small ball of light encompassing Genesis exploded in all directions and all of the soldiers fell to the ground. She hovered in mid-air and appeared confused, but the scientist egged her on, whispering: “Don’t hold back!”

She nodded and let all of her anger surface. The scientist smiled with delight. Bright azure light emanated from within (and around) her once more.

The soldiers looked up and saw the ball of light grow bigger and getting closer. Most of them covered their heads. While the once mighty group of soldiers now lay defeated on the ground, one fearless soul among them looked up and reached for his gun. The blue light blinded him as it continued to grow more brilliant. He raised his sidearm and tried to focus on the source of light above them. Shaking, he pulled the trigger. The blast struck the scientist in the back.

“No!” the scientist cried.

The last thing Genesis saw was the kind expression on the dying man’s face, a look that assured her
everything would be all right.

In an instant, she was alone in a deserted and quiet oasis with not a sound to be heard other than her own breathing. A moment later, the abundant sounds of nature surrounded her, but true to the man’s word, she remembered nothing of her past, just enough of the present to calm her pulse, and an overwhelming hope for the future. As promised, she feared no more.

The home of the Grant family appeared serene from the outside and nothing seemed able to disrupt its stillness. Tangled strands of ivy clung comfortably to the window shutters like too many cobwebs in a deserted attic. The sun shone down on the bed of daisies in the neighbor’s yard, but shone on nothing in the Grant yard.

Finally, the sound of a rumbling diesel engine shattered the silence. Glass on the windows began to rattle. A truck slowed down in front of the Grant home and made an abrupt stop as though something behind it were nudging it. The truck's engine was still running as a scruffy-looking man exited the driver's side of the vehicle and walked to the back of the flatbed. He tinkered with a couple levers and the bed lowered a small, crippled Honda hatchback to the ground. From around the back of the truck, a young man approached the driver.

“Anywhere but here, please?” he asked as he held out a twenty dollar bill.

The man smirked and shook his head. “I'm afraid I can't help, kid.”

“But my father will kill me if he sees I wrecked the car!”

The driver shrugged his shoulders and within a few seconds, the Honda was on the ground and the man worked quickly to untie the car from the hitch. The man hurried back in the truck and drove off. The stillness returned eventually, but the young man felt no calm as he stared at the totaled vehicle stranded in front of his parent's home.

What am I going to do now? he thought. He covered his face with his hands and rubbed his eyes, as though foolishly thinking it was all a dream. His bright, blue eyes focused on the damaged fender, the flat tire, and the smashed headlights. Frantically, he ran his fingers through his brown hair and nervously scratched his scalp. I'm so dead.

He hurried inside the house and ran upstairs to his room to change his clothes. Minutes later, he heard another car stop in front of the house. He ran to the bathroom window and saw his father get out of the car. His father shook his head as he looked at the ruined Honda and climbed the stairs to the house as fast as he could.

“James!” his father yelled as he walked through the front door and slammed the door behind him.

The young man sprinted downstairs to meet his father. “I know what you’re going to ask, but there's nothing I can say to make this better,” he said.

“I just want to know what happened this time.”

“The same thing as ever, Dad. The same thing that got me fired, the same reason you and Mom hate me.”

“Your mother and I don’t hate you and don’t change the subject again. And if you're telling the truth about the car, then this problem of yours has gotten out of control.”

“It's not a problem, Dad. You and Mom just won't accept it!”

“Accept what, James? That a girl who broke your heart three years ago has ruined your life? You're right about one thing: The girl isn't the problem. She never has been. The problem is you!”
James shrugged off his father's words and began to walk away.

“James!” his father shouted, standing taller on his toes in a weak bid to project authority. “Don’t walk away when I’m talking to you.”

James ignored him and ran up the stairs. “I don't have a problem, Dad. I just want her back.”

His father slammed the front door cursing as he stormed out of the house and drove off a moment later, leaving James alone in the house.

The girl his father referred to was Katherine. James met her on the Internet and fell for her immediately. They agreed to meet face to face and the meeting went beautifully as James recalled. She broke his heart when she went home and never made contact with James again. She never answered his phone calls, his letters, and e-mails. He actually wondered if she had died, which would have explained her sudden disappearance. Unknown to him, Katherine was alive and well and moving on with her life.

James had not. Three long years went by, but James refused to give up hope for their relationship. The photographs, drawings, and paintings of her that decorated his room were a testament to that.

His life spiraled out of control not long after she left. He lost several jobs, two different cars (due to accidents brought on by daydreaming), and the respect of his family. His parents suggested he receive professional help since his obsession with Katherine had crossed over into what they perceived was “dangerous territory.” They feared his depression would lead to more paranoid, even psychotic, behavior. James disregarded all their concerns as rubbish. He felt no hatred for Katherine. He only wanted an explanation from her why she left. A reason was all he needed. “Why couldn’t she have given me that at least?” he often asked them. The therapy his parents encouraged, which James reluctantly agreed to, did little to curb the daydreaming. He felt no need to move on; he firmly rejected any assertion that she had dominated his life.

Above the bed in his room was an enlarged picture of Katherine attached to the ceiling. The picture was taken in a forest with a blanket of autumn-colored trees surrounding the petite girl of twenty years. She leaned against the only evergreen in the photograph and faced the camera with her beaming smile while her long, auburn hair flowed past her shoulders. Her arms were folded loosely beneath her breasts.

My God, she is beautiful, he thought. Although the image taken during their day together should have brought a smile to James's face as it usually did, Katherine was not the only source of James's depression these days. On the contrary, her smile was his only source of comfort.

James’s parents were fighting again. He never noticed it much in the past: Katherine distracted him adequately enough. The arguments were now too frequent and combative to ignore. His sister was growing up; his parents had grown apart. They all spent less time at home. Their jobs and friendships kept them safely away from each other. Whether the arguments erupted between his sister and his parents, it seemed as though everyone in his family felt it necessary to leave home when problems overwhelmed them. To James, home was his only refuge. His room served as the only shelter in a storm and it served its purpose well since childhood. Times were much happier then and laughter was more common. The silence outside his room was normal now. James hated it.

Katherine’s smile from above his bed was the only constant in his life, despite what went on outside these four walls. While it provided him some relief as he dozed off to sleep, he also knew the time was rapidly approaching when Katherine would not be enough.

Genesis sat up and climbed out of the tree that for the three months after her arrival served as her home. The field below was lush with all sorts of animal life, but there was no one like her in all her travels. She discovered her ability to fly a few hours after she left her maker's laboratory. Yet, even though it took her just days to circumnavigate the planet, all she found were endless varieties of plants and animals; she found no towns or cities.

Although she didn't know why, she never felt scared about being alone. She felt fear of other things –
for example, the creatures that were bigger than she was and made frequent attacks. On dark nights, when clouds covered the stars, she never slept; she spent all her time fending off mosquitoes and spiders.

*Why am I here?* was her most persistent thought. True to her maker’s words, she remembered nothing of her past except her name. She felt an overwhelming urge to help people like her, but no one else appeared to exist.

As time passed, the woman began to sleep more easily. Her insomnia was cured permanently upon a remarkable discovery late one night. In a fight with several wasps, she was briefly overwhelmed and stung. Nothing happened. There was no mark on her skin; the stinger never punctured her. More than that, she felt no pain. The wasp, on the other hand, fell to its death within seconds and shivered. After another wasp made a similar attempt – and with the same results – the swarm eventually moved away from her tree. Curious of the incident, the she provoked an attack on a menacing horde of spiders. This group of arachnids always sought the woman out at night and she usually ended up leaving for another tree. Here, she broke a twig from a branch and furnished it into a weapon. The spiders attacked fearlessly. After holding her ground for a few minutes, she allowed them to bite her. Again, as the fangs of the spider clamped down, her skin was never damaged. The spider, however, reeled in agony as the bite drove its fangs back into its head. The rest of the group ignored their fallen comrade and attacked Genesis from all sides. Overwhelmed and on her back as dozens of the spiders attempted to break through her skin, she suddenly lost her breath. Panicked and frightened, the girl tried to free herself. Less than a second later, she was free – and every spider was dead. She looked down at her hands and realized their deaths had not come from her super strength (an ability she discovered shortly after her first flight). Her hands glowed with a deep and pulsing red, as did her feet. She looked back at the spiders and saw nothing but a dozen tiny puddles of burning spider remains.

“What have I done?” she whispered aloud.

She stood still and tried to duplicate this new power, but nothing happened. “What's different?” she asked herself.

Another group of spiders approached but when they saw the remains of the first bunch, they quickly retreated.

“Come on!” she taunted. “Fight me!”

The spiders scurried out of the tree as quickly as their eight legs would carry them. Within minutes, no other insects remained in the tree – all of them had run for their lives.

That night, Genesis lied on her back in peace and came to realize the downside to her nudity. The seasons were changing and the night air caused an uncomfortable shiver. As she grabbed several leaves and fashioned a blanket, she pondered the events of the day. *Why can't I get hurt? How did I kill those spiders?* None of her other powers seem to require any effort to occur. But now, when she discovered what might be her most useful power, a means to generate warmth, she could not repeat it. As she drifted off to sleep, she imagined what it would be like to find someone else like her.

Come morning, a new creature – one that she never saw before – awakened her. This one was much larger than the insects she’d seen previously, but it was much smaller than any of the beasts she saw on the ground. The animal, covered in hair and shouting in short, halting screams, poked Genesis until she stirred. Immediately, she jumped up and pressed her back against the trunk. The creature inched closer to her and flashed its teeth. Suddenly, the young girl, yesterday so proud of herself for driving her enemies from her home, now felt frightened of this new predator. It stomped its foot on the branch and charged, when suddenly it happened. Genesis closed her eyes and heard a terrifying explosion. She peeked at her hands and saw them glowing again. Nothing could have prepared her for the sight before her. The creature, so intimidating and aggressive a moment ago, no longer existed in discernible form. She watched as the shock wave of whatever she produced wash over the animal, tearing its skin and flesh from its bones. When the tree settled to normal moments later, not a drop of blood remained on the bones of the creature. Its skeleton was dry and brittle to touch. Genesis stood in amazement as she witnessed what she was capable of doing. Joy returned to the young girl when she realized just what gave her this new power. Fear.
James arose from bed about an hour later and went to the store to buy the family groceries. His father would be back eventually and, whether he and James’s mother stayed home or not, dinner would need to be prepared – if only for himself. He figured he should help out around the house since he was unemployed. At the very least, it would keep his father at bay; he hated that his son couldn't keep a job.

Grocery shopping was more about doing the work everyone else neglected than being charitable. His mother, Becky, was seldom home. Chores always took a back seat to James's father who believed that laundry and dirty dishes were 'woman's work'. His sister, Melissa, was too busy with her boyfriend to be reliable.

As he arrived home from the store and approached the front door of the house, his hands full carrying the shopping bags, he heard a man from inside the house scream. He knew it was his father, although he never heard such a sound come out of the man. He left the groceries piled on the porch as he ran inside to see what was wrong. His mother was at the kitchen table crying, but it was James's father unleashing a torrent of profanity from upstairs. Between the sobs of his mother and his father's screams that echoed down the stairwell, James heard only gibberish, except for the foul names for womankind his father articulated clearly for his wife to hear. One word in particular propelled his mother's sobbing into full-blown wailing.

"What happened?" James asked his mother as calmly as he could.

She waved him away without a word as she blew her nose in a tissue and wiped her eyes with her hands. "Nothing," she said.

The swearing ceased suddenly, and then a crashing sound as though someone fell down the stairs shattered the silence. The sound was of James’s father kicking the suitcases of luggage he had just thrown from the top level. James ran to the foot of the stairs, only to see cases of luggage falling to the ground.

"Here!" his father shouted. "Now get out of my house!"

James’s mother stood up and threw her dirty tissue at the feet of her husband just as he ran down the stairs. "Fine!" she yelled as she snatched the luggage from in front of him and dragged it out the front door.

"Would someone please tell me what's going on?" James asked. His mother dragged the luggage down the front steps to the house and began to load the bags into the trunk of a car James had never seen before. A man got out of the car and helped her. A few seconds later, they both jumped in the car and sped away as if a crime had just been committed.

"This is all a joke, right?" he asked his father.

"No, it's not," his father said, "and she's gone for good!"

"But why?"

"It's not important anymore," said his father. "He can have her for all I care."

James stood motionless as his father strode past him and out the door. As if to make a statement of their estrangement to any onlookers in the neighborhood, James's father drove his car in the opposite direction than his mother.

I wonder if Melissa knew of this, he thought. It was common, after all, for his sister to know things about their parents that James was either too preoccupied or distracted to figure out on his own. He liked it that way, for it kept him clear of the arguing that filled the Grant home when everyone was at home. James had plenty of his
own problems to deal with than be involved in such debates over who said what to whom.

The afternoon was late and the affairs of the day exhausting, so James gathered the groceries from the front porch and then went to his room to take another nap. He realized long before Katherine that sleep was a good remedy for his ills. Many times when his mind gave out, sleep calmed his racing thoughts. The one solace he found today was that for the first time in three years, his last thoughts before drifting to sleep were not of Katherine. Instead, fear of his family’s future dominated every corner of his mind.

Genesis never felt troubled at night again. Although she harnessed her power to warm her body against the elements, she eventually left her home tree and found warmer territories for shelter as winter arrived. Her ability to warm things used a lot of her energy and never lasted through the night.

No member of the animal kingdom threatened her again. After destroying the poor creature that attacked her, Genesis honed this new ability but made a solemn promise to herself never to use such a destructive power again – unless a life-or-death situation demanded its use.

As time went by, her incredible strength increased. She never wanted for food or shelter as her reputation spread quickly among the other creatures living nearby. They soon learned to make way for her when unfortunate members of their species made an aggressive stance. The young girl tolerated no more abuse, but vowed never to provoke any breathing thing. After all, she thought, it wouldn’t be a fair fight.

Less than a year after her arrival, Genesis was comfortable in a new tree. Soon, though, her insomnia returned. Something inside her ached. While her peaceful life brought joy, she still wanted to find people like her. After scouring the planet several times and finding no one, she spent most of her time perfecting her unique abilities. She learned she was impervious to every sharp object; she could breathe underwater; fly as high as she wanted (although the freezing temperatures high in the upper atmosphere were uncomfortable); and could not be consumed by fire. This last power she discovered by accident. One night, a cold wind swept through her tree. Although too tired to fly to another tree, she instead took shelter upon a nearby mountain that was unusually warm. She soon discovered why when the volcano forced molten rock down its slope. Only a drop of lava caught her as she escaped, Genesis nonetheless was amazed that her skin remained unblemished. Can anything kill me? she wondered.

Months later, Genesis set out to determine the limits of her strength. She tried lifting heavy objects on occasion – wood, boulders, even animal – and never felt tired while doing so. She wondered if anything existed that she couldn't lift it. She soon learned there was, but not because it was too massive or dense. Rather, she found she didn't need to lift anything.

One morning, she awoke early to try a new experiment. She approached an ancient cliff with rocks so old they appeared unmovable. She stood at the base of it and applied pressure on one stone in particular. Only this time, the rock never budged: she did. The tiny girl fell upon the rocks below where the ancient rock stood. She tried repeatedly to lift the stone, each time trying to refrain from moving, when something extraordinary happened. The rock eventually did move, but not forward or even up. Instead, the boulder transported atop the cliff suddenly, leaving Genesis below it, confused. How did I do that? she thought.

She flew to the top of the cliff and tried again. Instead of moving the rock, she saw a crack in the stone that grew bigger each time she strained to lift it. Eventually, she realized that the rock had not torn in half, but rather the space between her and the rock. She tried again and saw a tremendous flash of azure light reflect off the rock in front of her. This time, the tear doubled in size and pulled the little girl inside; all the while she desperately tried to escape.

Genesis saw a dizzying display of light inside the tear. Just as she started to orient herself, she saw another flash and closed her eyes. When she opened them, the sounds alone astounded her. But it is what she saw that made her weep for joy. Finally, after so much time, she found people like her. Only these people were far different: they were tall, dressed, and hustled beneath hundreds of large stone and metal towers. Thousands of men
and women walked in every direction. Hundreds of metal beasts with wheels beneath, rolling along the smooth, rocky ground made ferocious noises as they sped along. Genesis stood mortified at her surroundings, when suddenly one of the beasts charged toward her, its wheel poised to crush her. She closed her eyes again, and after another flash of blue light, she was back atop the cliff – the stone standing before her, unchanged.

She fell back against the ground and stared up at the rock, wondering what just happened and if it was all real. Her hands glowed soft blue. *I need to try that again!*

James awoke a few hours later by a tremendous clap of thunder. He wasn’t sure if it was dusk or dawn. It was dark outside and the rain had not let up. There were no noises outside his room, which usually meant no one was home.

He stumbled out of bed and went downstairs to make himself a cup of tea. As the tea kettle shrieked, there was a loud knock at the front door. James’s mother surely hadn't returned home to work things out with his father just yet, but that didn't stop James from hoping it was so.

On opening the door, however, James saw no one there.

"Hello?" James shouted over the thunder.

There was no answer. He closed the door and went back to preparing his tea. From the dining room came a crash. He went to inspect; it was one of his mother’s figurines. Then the lights went out.

"Great," he muttered. He took a candle from the family’s hutch and lit it. A stiff breeze blew it out almost immediately. He looked at the window but it was sealed shut. Curiously, he checked to see if there were any doors or windows open but they were all closed. He tried to light another match but it wouldn’t light.

"Keep it dark, please," he heard someone whisper. It was a woman’s voice. Instinctively, he thought it was his sister.

"Melissa?" he asked. "Is that you?"

"No," the voice replied. "I’m not your sister."

"Then who are you? How did you get in here?"

"My name is Genesis. And I’m here to help you." The voice moved around the room as though its source was moving, but James couldn’t see anything. The room was pitch-black. Mysteriously, no light from outside was getting in, ambient or otherwise.

"Why can’t I see you?"

"No one can see me unless I choose to be seen. And I haven’t chosen you...yet."

James strained to see through the blackness and find the source of the voice but it was useless - he couldn’t see anything. "Help me? What do you mean?"

"With Katherine. I’m going to help you win her back."

"How do you know about her?" he demanded. "Did my sister put you up to this?"

"No, James," she continued. "I’m going to help you find out what happened to her. And I know far more about you than you realize."
“How will you help me?”

“That’s where things get interesting. You will have a hard time accepting what I am about to tell you, but I can travel through time. And that is how we are going to get Katherine back.”

“We?”

“Yes, I am going to help you.”

James reached for a chair at the dining table and sat down. “And you think I’m supposed to just believe all this?”

Out of the darkness, a soft, blue light shined. The dining room soon basked in the glow as James struggled to see the faint glimpse of something standing behind the light. Then the figure emerged, a shadowy silhouette of a small, naked woman. Before long, the light’s intensity became too much for James’s eyes to handle so he covered his face. The light subsided and when James removed his hands from his eyes, the room’s lamps aglow, bathing its new occupant in soft light. Standing on the table stood Genesis, still no bigger than a dandelion.

James said nothing at first. He blinked over and over to assure what he saw was real. The girl said nothing either, she only smiled and met his stare. He soon realized his mouth was agape and his heartbeat increased. He closed his mouth and took a deep breath.

“Sorry for all the theatrics,” she said as she walked across the table, her bare hips swaying. “I needed to prepare you for something you’d never seen before.”

“What is this?” he said as he started to panic, leaping from the chair and pushing his back against the wall. “Who are you?”

“I told you already. I’m Genesis. I’m here to help you.”

“No, this isn’t possible. You can’t be real.”

She hovered into the air to which James pushed back further against the wall. With nowhere to go, he reached for the doorway, but she floated in its direction, preventing his escape and forcing him to inch in the other direction. “I’m very real,” she said. “You can touch me if you want.” She extended a hand.

He reached out his forefinger tentatively until it just touched the tip of her hand. He recoiled when he felt her skin and inched away from her.

“Don’t be scared,” she said. “I’m not going to hurt you.”

James shook his head and backed along the wall until he reached the corner and caught his foot on a potted plant. He tumbled back and fell into the recliner, knocking the plant over. Genesis dove toward him but it was too late: his head smacked the ottoman and he fell to the ground unconscious.

“I’ve got to find a better way to reveal myself,” she said. Laughing, she carried him to his room.

When James awoke, he wondered if he just came out of a dream. He appeared to be in his room; the pictures of Katherine covered the walls. His head ached as he sat up. When he felt the back of his head and the pronounced lump, he remembered where he got his headache: he hit his head on the floor downstairs. But was it real? And the girl? Did she really exist?

Outside his bedroom window, the sun shined bright. The shades weren’t drawn and his eyes took longer
to adjust to the morning light than usual.

On the windowsill, James saw an image that laid all his doubts about the prior night's events to rest. Just inches away, the small woman slept. He climbed out of bed carefully so as not to disturb her, but it was too late. Her eyes opened slowly but wide and she looked up at James warmly, giving him an assuring smile that all was well.

"Good morning, James," she said as she sat up, stretched her back, and yawned.

"So I wasn't dreaming?"

"No you weren't," she said. "What made you think that?"

He chuckled to himself. "Oh, I don't know. I've never woke up to find a woman sleeping on my windowsill."

"Sorry if I made you uncomfortable. I should have known better," she said.

"No. You’re fine." He covered his mouth as he realized the Freudian slip. To James, she was beyond fine — she was one of the most beautiful creatures he had ever laid eyes upon. She may have stood no taller than a flower but her beauty suffered no diminishment. Her hair was a rich red and was just the way he pictured it on his dream girl — long, wavy, and flowing past the shoulders. Her eyes were a deep, haunting green and her skin was silky like porcelain.

"So are you ready to go?" she asked.

"Go? Go where?"

"You don’t remember anything, do you? Remember? I’m going to help you win Katherine back."

"Right." James, for the first time in three years, forgot all about Katherine as he studied Genesis's perfect form.

"Don’t tell me you still don’t believe me," she said.

He tried to remember the events of the previous night. "Did I black out last night?"

"Yes. When you hit your head, I decided to carry you to your room so your family wouldn't worry when they returned home."

"What happened last night? I saw a bright, blue light."

"That was me," she said. "When I use my powers, my body gives off this bright light. It has to do with the energy I manipulate."

"So is that another one of your powers? Lifting heavy objects?"

"Yes it is, although you weren't that heavy. I've lifted way heavier things than people over the years."

"So you've done this sort of thing before, I take it," James asked as he sat on the foot of his bed and massaged the lump on his head.

"Yes, I have." She instantly thought of the young Polish girl who, she believed, died by her hands. Jadzia was only thirty years-old when Genesis carried her body from their shelter and into the clearing in the Canadian wilderness, a place Genesis never visited again.

"Oh," he said. His mind was still foggy from the lump on his head, but slowly more questions
demanded answers. "Do you mind if I ask you something?"

"Go right ahead," she said as she jumped down to the pillow and folded her arms conspicuously beneath her breasts.

James took note of her stance and that she hadn't covered herself once since they met. He was curious as to why she was naked, but he thought she might be embarrassed if he asked her directly. "How do you know about me?"

"Ah," she said as she sat beside him, "that's not an easy question to answer. It has to do with the stream of time. Since I somehow have the ability to manipulate all forms of energy, I can interact with everything connected to time and space. This allows me to watch everything that goes on – without being seen."

"How did you get your powers."

"You mean the time traveling and super-strength?"

He nodded. "Yeah, did you fall into toxic waste or get bit by a spider or something?"

She let out a deep belly laugh. "No, nothing like that," she said. "I think you've read too many comic books. This is the real world!"

"That's actually why I'm asking. I can't say I've ever heard of anyone having the powers you say you do – other than in comic books."

"Well, rest assured that you're not dreaming. And I'm not a fairy or superhero. As for how I got my powers, I really can't answer that."

"You mean you don't know, or can't tell me?" he wondered aloud.

She looked back at James and smirked. "I don't know." She flew to the nightstand and sat down, dangling her legs from the edge. "I just know that I can do what I do. I've tried to remember where I came from but it's hard to know what memories are real and what is just wishful thinking."

"What do you remember?"

"I awoke in a massive tree with no knowledge of anything other than my name, like it was imprinted in my mind. Everything I can do I learned the hard way."

"So you don't remember anything else?"

She shook her head. "To be frank, I'm not sure I want to. Maybe it's just a good thing that I'm here and that I can help people. Don't get me wrong. I wish I was tall like everyone else, and I wish I could wear clothing like everyone else..."

"Why can't you?" he interrupted.

She wasn't foolish enough to believe he hadn't been waiting for the right moment to ask her why she was naked. "Whenever I go through time, I always come out the way you see me now. In fact, nothing non-living can travel with me. Besides, I just got used to it and quit worrying. You are one of only two people who have ever seen me anyway."

"Who else has seen you?"

"I don't talk about her," Genesis said as she backed away, her demeanor suddenly closed off.
“Okay,” he said. They sat in silence while he thought of something else to say. Then he remembered what she said about travelling through time. "Wait! So is that going to happen to me when you send me through time?" he asked.

She laughed. "I’m afraid so. But don’t worry, I won’t be sending you through time anyway."

"Then how will I be able to do anything?"

"I’ll be sending your mind into a younger version of yourself."

"And that’s safe?"

She bristled at the question. "Yes," she said. "I’ve worked out all the kinks, but not without a lot of sacrifice." She lifted into the air and clapped her hands. "So are you ready to get started?"

He nodded.

"Have you thought about where you would like to start?"

"I don’t need time to think," he said. "I want to go back three years, to April 13th."

"So precise!" she marveled. "The day you met Katherine, I presume?"

The sound of her name brought back to his mind all the reasons he wanted to win her back. "I’ll never forget that date."

"Shall we leave now?"

"Now is as good a time as any," he said.

She extended her arms and the room began to shake as the blue light bathed the room. A brief moment later, they disappeared.
James stood in the same spot in his room as when they supposedly left. He didn't think they traveled anywhere at first. It was only after he looked around that he became convinced they had: the pictures of Katherine did not exist yet. Something else felt strange, but it wasn't until James caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror did he realize why: he now appeared as he did three years ago.

"I was wondering about this part of it," he said as he touched his face.

"What part?" Genesis asked as she sat on the windowsill, looking out at the clouds.

"How I would look."

"Oh, that you look three years younger?" she said, turning to face him.

"Um-hm," he answered, still examining his skinnier body in front of the mirror. Have I really gained that much weight? he thought.

"Well, that part of the time traveling is under my control. I could have brought you back as you were when we left, but that wouldn't work, would it? I'm sure you don't want to scare your family by suddenly appearing naked – and three years older!"

"Do you know how it all works? What happened when I left?"

"I just sent your consciousness through time into a younger version of yourself. When we left, your 'self' disappeared there and reappeared here. When we go home, I can send you back to the exact moment we left. That way, no one will ever know you were gone."

"So are there two of me here in this time?"

"No, I made sure you ended up in the younger version's body. That way, when we leave, he'll still remember anything that you do. Your consciousness will go back and not the whole person."

"I'm glad you know what you're doing," he said.

"I know it can be a little confusing, not to mention very dangerous. But don't worry. I promise I won't harm you." She thought back to those same words she uttered to Jadzia and how her promise turned out false. But this time there would be no mistake. Genesis was in complete control of her abilities and knew just how far she could push things - if she pushed them at all.

"That's good to know," he answered.

"So we're here to win your girl back. Do you know where we should start?"

"I hoped you might know."

Genesis thought long and hard. "You might just want to relive this day once and observe what happens. This way, we can make notes about what you'd like to change. Try to act as you did the first time. Do you remember a lot about what you two did?"

"Everything," he said.

"Really? That's good. We'll let this be the control part of our experiment. And after she leaves, we'll
change anything you want. Sound good?"

"Sure."

"Now, do you remember what time she was supposed to arrive?"

"Three o'clock," he said, looking at his watch, which read 2:45. "Great! Maybe I should have told you that before we left, huh?"

"We'll be fine. Let's just hurry up and get you ready to see her."

And so began James's efforts to win back the love of his life. After dressing himself, James was ready for Katherine's arrival. He wanted to wear different clothes from the first time they met, but Genesis reminded him to keep as much as he could the same. The one thing Genesis did help with was his hair. She figured it unlikely that Katherine would have bailed out of a relationship because of poor style alone, and so she allowed this one change. By the time three o'clock rolled around, James was nearly ready.

"I can't believe I looked this sloppy. What was I thinking?"

Genesis looked him over and saw what he meant. His shirt was untucked and a stain covered the front of his pants. "Did you really wear these pants the first time you met her? It looks like you worked outside in these!"

"I used to. These were my work pants."

"And you didn't think to change them?"

"Not really. I just got home from work when she came over."

"You mean you didn't shower first?" Genesis said, rolling her eyes at James and giggling.

"Hey, you said to dress the same. If this were me today, I would have worn something nice."

"I believe you," she said incredulously.

James sighed in defeat. "Let's get this over with. And where will you be when she gets here?"

She smiled. "Right by your side, if that's okay."

"Won't you be seen?"

"Of course not," she said. "I'll just hide inside your coat pocket."

He looked at the coat she pointed at on the doorknob. "Are you sure you'll be comfortable in that?"

"I'll manage," she said.

A moment later, there was a knock on the door downstairs.

"She's here!" James said.

Genesis flew off the windowsill, climbed inside the coat pocket, and made herself as comfortable as she could.

“Grab me something to eat, if you can,” she whispered.

James nodded and carried the coat with him as he went downstairs to answer the door. He placed the
coat on the back of one of the dining room chairs so Genesis would be able to hear all that he and Katherine said. He was nervous and needed someone else to tell him what might go wrong.

Katherine looked just as beautiful as James remembered. When she lifted her head to see him open the door, her smile immediately reminded James why he chose to fix this day. He had thought of a few other mistakes he would like to have fixed when Genesis first made him the offer, but this one made the most sense. All the other days he wanted to repair had happened during the last three years. For there to be any real change in his life, he would have to go to the source of his troubles. If this day was changed, the other mistakes might never happen. Moreover, if he was successful in winning her over, then maybe his parents might stay together. James could only hope the two events were somehow connected.

For the rest of the day in Katherine's company, James behaved as closely to the first time he lived it. Genesis stayed out of sight and never made a sound until dinner when Katherine stepped away to use the restroom.

"James," she whispered.

He looked down at the inside of his coat in the most inconspicuous way possible. She stood up inside the pocket and poked her head out. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing. I just want to tell you that you can relive this as many times as you want. I forgot to mention that before."

"Good to know. How am I doing, by the way?"

"You're doing fine. We'll talk more later." With that said, she disappeared back into his pocket right as Katherine returned and sat down. James wondered if Genesis had noticed anything strange about the way he was behaving around Katherine. He wasn't really being himself and Genesis probably noticed the same thing.

Over the course of the evening, his behavior reminded him just how much he had changed (and grown) since meeting Katherine. As he relived the evening, he was trying to be someone he no longer was. Words came tripping out of his mouth that he would never utter now! *This guy was a real jerk*, James concluded. *No wonder she left me!*

When Katherine went home that night, James sat down on the steps to his parent's house and went over in his mind the events of the day. Genesis climbed out of his pocket and sat down on his shoulder, nuzzling against his neck to stay warm from the cold air.

"How do you think it went?" she asked.

"I'm not sure yet."

"Honestly, I'm glad you were just acting like the younger version of yourself."

James chuckled even though he thought the same thing. "Why do you say that?"

"You were so rude!"

"I was, huh?" he said.

"Well, first, you really need to stop talking with your mouth full."

"Funny you mention that because it wasn't part of the act."

"Yeah, that's something you might want to work on then." She smiled.

"Anything else?" he said.
"The clothes are a big deal, but don't worry. We're going to change all that next time. In general, I'd say that in the next run-through, if you just act the complete opposite of what you did today," Genesis paused to be tactful. She needed to word this in a way that wouldn't hurt his feelings.

"Go on," he said.

"Well, she might not leave next time."

James knew right away what she meant. She wasn't trying to be malicious. She was just being honest with him, which he needed. Although his pride was slightly hurt, he was happy she cared enough to tell him the truth. "Then it's a good thing I can try again, huh?"

She smiled. "Good thinking."

"I did notice another thing about today."

"What was that?"

"Well, when I was here the first time, I wasn't being very honest with her. I think I was trying too hard to impress her, and I probably didn't need to. Maybe she sensed that and didn't have the heart to tell me."

"Wow! You realized all that after just one day reliving?"

"To be truthful, I probably knew that all along. Maybe I just need to start being honest with myself." He sighed with relief, as though someone lifted a heavy weight from off him.

She floated down and sat on her knees in the well of his hand. "Well, next time you should just be yourself then," she suggested.

"Whenever you're ready."

She looked around nervously. "Maybe we should go somewhere more private."

"Huh?"

"I just don't want someone to see anything when we leave. It gets kind of loud."

"You're right," he said. "We'll go to my room. My family is still up, so would you, " he stammered, "like me to hold you in my hand, or would you like to get in my pocket?"

She laughed. "Actually, how 'bout I just meet you around back?"

"Oh, right. Of course."

She flew off and around the house as he went inside the front door. By the time he arrived in his room, she was already tapping frantically on the windowpane. He let her in and shut it quickly.

"Ready?" she whispered as she tried to warm herself.

He nodded. They disappeared a moment later.

At half-past two in the afternoon, James and Genesis appeared in his room. James was not accustomed to time travel as Genesis was, for as she was soaking in the sunlight through the window, he had a terrible headache
worse than the lump on his head, a pain like that of being stabbed through the temples.

"You okay?" she asked as she watched him rub his head.

"Yeah, I'll get used to this, right?"

She nodded. "I get them too. Every time."

He looked over at the clock as the pain in his head subsided. "Two-thirty, huh?"

She smirked at him. "I wanted to give a little more time than last, if that's okay. Although, since you're trying to be more honest here, maybe you should just go as you are."

He looked down at what he was wearing to find he wasn't wearing anything at all. "I don't think I'm ready to be that honest with her!"

"Of course not," she agreed. "I brought you back like this to remind you to take a shower before you see her this time."

"So you did this to me?"

"This was a more fun way to remind you!" she said as she crossed her arms.

"Give me a few minutes to take a shower." He walked out of the room and headed for the bathroom, trying not to cover himself up from Genesis.

When he returned, he found Genesis sorting through his closet and throwing his clothes into piles on the floor. "What are you doing?" he asked.

"You really don't have anything nice to wear, do you?" she said as she poked her head out of the closet.

"That's what I have. Maybe you can make me better clothes if these are so terrible!"

She flew out of the closet and threw him the best outfit she could find. "I'm afraid my powers do not include producing clothing out of thin air. And on second thought, this outfit isn't really going to work after all."

"Like I said, that's what I have." He was beginning to feel a bit insulted, though he knew Genesis wasn't trying to hurt him.

"Do you fit in your father's clothes?" she asked.

"Maybe. I haven't tried in years."

"Well, we're going to have to look in his room. I'm sorry if I'm coming across cold. I'm just trying to help."

James knew that her honesty included telling him the plain and ugly truth. He was grateful the worse she said so far was that he was a bad dresser. She could have noticed plenty of other ugly things, but maybe this was the worst she saw in him. "No problem," he said. "Why don't we go see what my father has?"

A few moments later, James was dressed in a pressed pair of slacks and a polo shirt Genesis found in his father's closet. "I think you look much better," she said, nodding with approval.

"I didn't even know my father had anything this nice."
"Well, it's the best I could do, but I think you've got a good chance of keeping her around if you stick with the plan."

"Thanks." Suddenly, a knock at the door got their attention.

"Okay," Genesis said. "Don't panic. Where's your coat from yesterday?"

"It's in my room on the doorknob."

"I'll get it. You just get downstairs and I'll meet you down there."

James hurried down the stairs and answered the door before there was a second knock. Right before he opened the door, Genesis threw his coat on the back of the dining room chair and buried herself in the pocket.

Katherine's arrival turned out to be the only thing that this day and the last had in common. James was a different person around Katherine on this attempt: he was himself. It seemed to be paying off since Katherine seemed more interested in him this time. Genesis appeared proud of James's efforts too. When Katherine stepped away to use the restroom, James asked Genesis for advice, but all she would do was quietly clap her hands in muted applause, a clear sign to James that she approved of all she heard.

Later that night, Katherine left as she did the night before, but this time, she gave a reason. And to make it clear that she wasn't lying to him, she kissed James. He knew right away that something big had changed.

Once she left, James sat on the porch as he did the night before.

"That seemed to go a lot better," Genesis whispered.

He nodded, but didn't say a word.

"Is something wrong?"

"Not at all, actually," he said. "I'm sure you're right. It did go much better than I expected. I did get a kiss after all."

"So that's a good thing, right?" She climbed from his pocked and sat in the well of his hand.

"I'm just second-guessing my reasons for doing this."

Her eyes widened. "You want her back, don't you?"

"I'm not sure. I mean, am I really in love with Katherine, or was I in love with her – three years ago?"

Genesis was confused by his answer, especially after witnessing the evening's affairs. It seemed to her that the day turned out exactly as James wanted. "Why the sudden change?"

"Something happened tonight between us. The connection wasn't right. Maybe I'm here because I wanted it so bad."

"And you don't want her now?"

"I'm not sure what I want. I think I need to relive this day one more time and make sure. And if I still feel the same way tomorrow, I'll have my answer."

"Are you sure about this? I mean, not that it hurts me in the least, but I want to make sure you're happy with this decision."
"Trust me. I won't go home until I'm sure I'm happy too."

He ran upstairs to his room to meet her at his bedroom window. After letting her in, they disappeared.

The following attempt was the most cavalier of the three, as James did little in the way of trying to impress Katherine. As Genesis remarked later, it appeared that James was behaving more like an interviewer with Katherine than a date. She wasn't far from the mark, since James was determined to find out, not whether he was right for her, but whether he should bother winning her back at all. He began to see why she left him in the first place: her gut told her they weren't right for each other. She didn't feel a connection, the same thing James felt now.

When Katherine drove off that night, and without a goodbye kiss, James let out a deep sigh as she disappeared from view. Years more of his life could be spent reliving this day a hundred ways to make this night perfect, and he would undoubtedly come to the same conclusion she did: they weren't meant to be together. She just didn't have the heart to break his.

"How do you feel?" Genesis asked, peeking out of her nook in his pocket.

"Never better," he said.

"Seriously?"

He nodded. "She did the right thing. Leaving me the first time, I mean."

"Are you sure about this? If you want to try again, we can. I'm in no rush to bring you home."

"I know," he said. "I know. But I wouldn't be honest with myself if I kept trying to make this work. I just wish it didn't have to take reliving all this to realize what took her a few hours to see." He walked up the stairs to the front door and sat down on the porch steps.

He looked down at her out of the corner of his eye and felt her shivering. "I'm so sorry you had to endure all this three nights in a row. Why did I pick the coldest night in April, right?"

She giggled. "It's okay. I've been in far worse places."

James sat still and thought long about his decision. The more time went by, the more certain he was of his choice. It wasn't long before Genesis fell asleep. She must be tired, he thought. He picked her up gently and carried her upstairs to his room. Once there, he laid her down on his pillow. She never stirred as he moved her around.

As James lay on the floor and looked out the window at the moon, he pondered all that had happened to him over the past few days. Far removed from his mind were the troubles revolving his parents who he suddenly realized he had not seen at all while he was here. Thoughts of his past, present, and future raced through his mind as he fell asleep. With one notable exception: Katherine.
Chapter 4

The following morning, James awoke on the floor and sat up slowly, immediately looking around the room for Genesis. She sat comfortably on the windowsill and watched him with a smile.

"Good morning," she said.

"Where am I?"

"In your bedroom."

"What day is it?"

"April 14th."

"Oh," he thought aloud. "You didn't send me home?"

She looked at him curiously. "No. Was I supposed to?"

He looked around the room to find it was the same as when he fell asleep the night before. "No, I'm glad you didn't actually."

"Was there something else you wanted to fix?"

"Not exactly," he said. "I have a request."

She jumped down from the sill and sat back down on his pillow. "Go ahead."

"Last night, I thought about all that's happened to me over the last few days and – firstly – I wanted to thank you for helping me realize the truth about Katherine. I still don't know why you chose me to help, but I'm very happy he did."

Her smile stretched from ear to ear. "I'm glad I'm here to help. Even if you didn't get what you wanted."

"I got what I wanted. More to the truth, I got what I needed. But there was something else I thought about last night. I was hoping you would do me one last favor before we go home."

"Sure."

"Could we stay here one more day?"

She looked at him puzzled.

"I haven't seen my family while I've been here. And back home, things are kind of fouled up, especially with my parents. I'd like to hang around a bit, and spend some time with them, if that's alright? I hope I'm not taking advantage of you."

"Of course not," she said. "We can stay here as long as you'd like."

"Thanks. I just want to spend one last day with them when things were normal."

"No problem."
James and the time-traveler spent the bulk of the day talking about nothing in particular. Chit-chat mostly. Later in the day, he heard a car pull up in front of the house and ran to the bathroom window to see who it was. It was Becky, his mother, who just arrived home from work. Genesis agreed to stay in his room while he went downstairs to see her.

She entered the front door and immediately worked on dinner. He didn't care what she made to eat. He was just happy to have a home-cooked meal, something missing in his own time for years. He was looking forward to enjoying a family meal.

"Do you need any help with dinner, Mom?"

"Yeah, if you want to set the table, that would be great," she asked.

He set the table the way he remembered it was set when it was common for them to eat together. Now that he thought of it, he couldn't remember the last time they ate at the same table. Once Melissa began driving and found a job she was never home. The rest of the family followed suit. They all began eating their meals separately, and James couldn't help but wonder if never spending time together somehow led to the future he knew.

When it came time for dinner, everyone filed to his or her semi-assigned place at the table. James's father was late from work and sat at the head of the table where he began serving himself without saying a word. Becky and Melissa served themselves as well and everyone ate in silence.

James sat at the seat to his father's left as he normally had and heaped mountains of food on his plate. He ate quickly, shoveling unseemly portions into his mouth like he was facing his execution at midnight.

"Slow down, James," his mother said. "You're in no rush."

He relished her concern; it was a feature of her personality he seldom saw in his own time when problems overwhelmed her. He nodded and chewed a little slower, but not much. He happily watched everyone else eat dinner in silence. They seemed content, and the thought occurred to James that perhaps their future collapse was not set in stone. Perhaps things didn't have to turn out the way they did.

"So what happened with that girl you were supposed to meet?" his father asked, spaghetti hanging out the side of his mouth. "The one from the Internet," he added with plenty of sarcasm.

"Yeah, that isn't going to work out," James said.

His casual tone surprised them. They stopped eating for a moment and looked at James for an explanation.

His mother was the first to speak. "What happened?" she asked with a tinge of genuine concern in her voice.

"Nothing happened. She came, we hung out, she left," he answered as he swallowed, trying to work on what Genesis told him about not talking with his mouth full.

"But why?" his sister wondered aloud. "I thought you were in love with her."

"We just weren't a good match," James said. "It's fine. I promise."

No one in the family knew what to think. On the one hand, if James was being honest, then they were witnessing a real change in him since little he did was sensible. The James they knew would have ignored clear signs of incompatibility and continued dating her. Their assumption wasn't far from the truth as James had done that very thing the first time Katherine left him. Nevertheless, James had already learned a valuable lesson on his journey: what he believed and reality needed to align. His family had begun to see a change in him, one that James
hoped would leave its mark on the younger version of himself after he returned home. He may not have been successful in winning Katherine back, but maybe he could take the first step in fixing another mistake: winning the respect of his family instead of constantly losing it.

"Then I must say, I'm proud of you," his father stated, finally having swallowed his food. "It's important you find yourself someone who complements you. I was afraid watching you these past few weeks that this girl was going to consume your life."

"Nah," James said, though he was ashamed of how close his father's fear was to becoming real.

"Remember, James," his father said, setting down his fork and pushing his plate away to make room for his elbows, "Don't just find the girl you can live with; find the girl you can't live without."

He had grown accustomed to his father doling out nuggets of wisdom like that. Although never especially profound, his father still believed he had a knack for clever sayings. His mother and sister usually dismissed his proverbs without notice. This time, however, he witnessed a subtle exchange of glances between his parents he had never seen before, a look to his mother that said, 'you're not the one.' Even his sister gave his mother a supportive look. Everyone at the table understood some hidden subtext – except James.

The family finished the dinner without much conversation besides the usual "pass-the-salt" fare. What James noticed clearly were the looks of disgust and frustration that his parents and sister passed between them. It dawned on him – there was plenty of conversation going on at dinner, but in a language he couldn't understand. He had become so preoccupied with the course of his own life that he was completely unaware of the truth: the groundwork had already been laid for his family's destruction. The problems his parents later had in his own time were already in progress for years. I wonder if Genesis will let me fix my parent's mistake, he wondered.

When James entered the room later that night, Genesis stirred from her slumber but soon drifted back to sleep and began to snore. She obviously trusted him a great deal since she was out in the open and wasn't worried about being exposed.

He lifted her and placed her further to one side of the bed and lied beside her. His mind drifted back to the scene at dinner and the mysterious comment his father made. Then he wondered if Genesis would even consider helping him save his family. After all, she came to help him with a mistake. Perhaps she would see the request as him taking advantage of their new friendship. Hopefully, she would remain asleep while he sorted his thoughts.

"Did you have a good time?" she said suddenly, causing him to jump a little.

He nodded. She looked drowsy still and he hoped that she would be satisfied by his response and go back to sleep. She was not.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"Why do you think something's wrong?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Just a hunch. Do you want to talk?"

"Not really. Why don't we get some sleep and we'll talk in the morning," he said.

"Talk about what?"

"Nothing. I'm tired. Let's just get some sleep right now."

"I don't need to sleep," she protested with a smile. "I want to know what's on in your mind."

He just shook his head 'no' and closed his eyes.
She climbed atop his chest and lied on her belly facing him. "So, tell me: did something happen at dinner?"

He didn't respond. He knew what she was doing. She was hoping that if she sat there long enough he would break. A few more minutes went by and the only sound in the room was of James’s breathing and of Genesis slowly rising and falling with the ebb and flow of his breaths.

"Come on, James. Don't ignore me," she begged. "Tell me what happened."

James lay silent for a moment. She didn't say anything else; she didn't need to. He had her complete attention.

"I saw something odd at dinner tonight," he said finally.

"With your family?"

"Yes. They kept giving each other these strange looks."

"Like what?"

"Like they were keeping a secret from me or something."

"Weird."

"It was so strange. My father made this comment about me ending things with Katherine and..."

"Wait! You told them?"

He turned his gaze from the ceiling and looked at her. "Yeah. Why?"

"No reason," she said. "I'm actually impressed that you did. You know it might change their perception of you, right?"

He crossed his fingers and smiled. "Here’s hoping. And just because I didn't fix one mistake didn't mean I couldn't fix another."

"Good thinking," she said. "So what did your father say?"

“He said that I needed to find the girl I couldn't live without. Then suddenly my mother gave him this stern look, as if he offended her or something. Then my sister glared at my Mom and it started off this flood of looks going back and forth around the table."

"That is strange."

"It was like they all knew something I didn't."

"What do you think it is?"

He shook his head. "I don't know. That's what I was thinking actually. I was wondering if you could do me another favor. Would you mind sneaking into my parent's room and listening in on them? I want to know what they were trying to hide from me."

"Why?"

"Because I think it might give me an idea of what sort of problems my parents are having. Shoot, even
my sister seems to know what it is."

"Then why don't you ask them?"

"Because they would never tell me anything like this. They think I'm off in my own little world."

She smiled. "And are you?"

"I was. And it kept me locked away in my room dreaming about some girl."

"And you think knowing about your parents will make things different somehow?"

"No, but maybe it will prove that I can still save my family."

"What do you plan on doing when you go home? In your time, your parent's marriage is already collapsing."

"Then I have another favor to ask you. I know you came here to change a mistake in my life, but could you help me save my family?"

She stood and flew onto the windowsill. She looked out the window at the ground below and shook her head in doubt. "It's too dangerous. I've been through this before. Fixing your own mistake can affect the people around you, and not always for the better. But trying to fix someone else's problems, no matter your intent, can ruin your entire life."

"What do you mean?"

"The things you do here in the past will filter down to your present. You already figured that out or else you wouldn't have told your family about Katherine. You knew it would change the way they thought about you."

"I know," he said.

"This isn't why I'm here." She looked up and saw James staring at her. "What would you do if you found out that something you did in the past led to the death of someone you loved?"

"That happened to you?" he said.

"I'm asking you, what would you do if that happened? Would you ever forgive yourself?"

He shook his head. "No, I don't think I could."

"There's too much at stake. It's too big a risk for you."

"What could go wrong?"

"You don't even have a plan. What if the foundation of your parent's collapse was built before you were born? In order to save their marriage, you would need to change events before your conception."

"I haven't thought that far ahead."

"What would you do? Is their happiness greater than your own right to live?"

James sat up and nodded. "Yes, it is."

"Why do I keep finding these do-gooders?" she said to herself. Fortunately, James didn't hear her.
"I need you to do this for me," he said.

"But why?"

"My whole life I've been acting as though the world revolves around me. I've never done a truly selfless act for anyone."

"There are better ways of doing good things for others than risking your own life."

"I know. But here," he said, lifting her up, "I have in my hands a way to make-up for a selfish life; by doing whatever it takes to keep my family together."

"But I don't want you to get hurt," she pleaded.

"Me neither. But you'll be there to help me, won't you?"

Once again, Genesis was faced with a decision that could cost her another friend. Her initial reaction was to discard his suggestion, but maybe this is what altruism really is: a devotion to others that knew no boundaries. Maybe it even included a willingness to sacrifice everything important. If Genesis was going to make up for her mistake with Jadzia, she would need to be more careful this time and not give in when pressured. After all, she didn’t think it was wrong to be a little selfish, at least when it depended on preserving her friend alive. She cleared her throat and spoke: "Yes. I will."
The following morning, Genesis and James started a new journey. No longer was he attempting to change events during his own life, but he was engaged in a nobler objective: saving his parent's marriage. Genesis agreed to listen in on his parent's conversation the previous night. She ended up not hearing much except a few expressions of regret his mother had of marrying his father and his father's accusation that she was crazy. James never heard such things before from either parent; his previous indifference in family affairs disgusted him even further. Their conversation did reveal that there was an enormous amount of resentment in their relationship – probably for most of James's life. Finding out exactly when it all began would be a tremendous challenge for James and Genesis. It was something that they could both handle, though each had their own personal reasons for working together: he for the love of his family, she to redeem herself.

Their first stop took them another three years into the past. Nothing new was gathered, as James's parents were still having the same troubles. The fighting never lessened, the resentment never subsided, and the conduct never less combative between them.

Subsequent trips through the stream of time, each three years before the previous, turned up the same results. There was never a clear marker where things appeared better than before. By observing their conduct and speech toward one another, James saw now just how much they were living in two different worlds.

When he and his sister were toddlers – which James vaguely remembered being a joyful time – the atmosphere was marked with abuse and squabbling. The family was in constant discord. Instead of a haven from the harsh world outside, the Grant home was a battlefield with new wounds inflicted daily. By the time James and his sister were adults, the wounds were too great to heal; the pain too intense to reduce.

"I must go back even earlier," he whispered to Genesis.

She looked down at the boy of three years lying in his tiny bed, surrounded by stuffed animals. "Where to?" she asked.

"I'm not sure. This is a lot harder than I imagined."

"Look on the bright side: you haven't done anything yet to get yourself killed in the future."

"That's a comfort, I suppose."

"Well, you've only been observing. You haven't gotten involved much."

"Although I doubt there is much I could do as an infant."

She nodded. "Yeah, I thought we might reach this point. What would you like to do now?"

He looked up at her and smiled. "I was hoping you could tell me."

"It's almost like your parents are getting worse the farther we go back!"

James lied back in his bed and stared up at the ceiling. "I want to know if these problems existed before or after I was born?"

"You can't see that already? They've only been married seven years and they act like mortal enemies. I'd say you and your Melissa are not part of the problem. If anything, you're keeping them together."

"What's left to do then?" he mused aloud.
She sat on one of his toys and put her head in her hands as she thought aloud. "Have you considered the possibility that your parents were never meant to be together in the first place?"

"I may be unhappy with my life at present, but that's not something I want to undo."

"What I meant to say is that you gave this your best shot, and I've done far more than I should have. There just doesn't seem to be a way to help here."

"It certainly seems that way, doesn't it?" James confided with reluctance.

"So maybe it's something that no one can fix. You certainly can't fix things looking like this."

He climbed out of bed and began pacing around the room. He sighed heavily, not to express his anger with Genesis for her negative assessment. Rather, he knew she was right. "I know what you're saying. I just don't want to give up this easily."

"Well, do you want to know what I think?"

He nodded.

"I think that you've done far more than most would have."

"That's only because I have a power no one else does."

"You're wrong," she said. "I have a power no one else does. And the only reason I did any of this is because your intentions are noble and I respect that."

"You do?"

"There aren't many people who would take the risks you have. You remind me of someone close to me, who took a lot of the same risks."

"What happened?"

She hesitated answering, then said: "For my part, the risk wasn’t worth what I lost."

"I'm sorry if I put you in harm's way by asking you to bring me here."

"Not to sound selfish, but if I was worried about my own safety I would never have given in. You remember, I told you I've done this before. Just know that I'm here for you and I'll do whatever I can to help."

"Even if I'm a three year-old?" he asked.

"Especially if you're a three year-old." She leaned forward and softly kissed the tip of his nose.

He smiled. "I just need to figure what to do about my parents." He climbed back into his crib and threw his head against a teddy bear.

"You could just let it go," she suggested.

"What if we went back to before I was born?"

"No way! It's far too dangerous. I can't do it!"

"You can't or you won't?" he asked.
"I can do it, James. I shouldn't."

The three years-old boy turned away with his back towards Genesis. "I don't understand. We've been careful already and nothing bad has happened, right?"

She flew down to rest on his shoulder. "I know," she said. "We have been. But it's only because you remained an observer. Now, you're talking about getting involved – and when you don't exist yet!"

"But I won't get involved. I promise!"

"Why are you being so stubborn about this?" she insisted. "Your parent's marriage is in trouble, I understand that. But why are you so willing to risk your own life to save them?"

He buried his head in his hands. "I already told you why."

She got closer to him, as she could sense he was pulling away. "Yes, but this is no longer a selfless deed. This is suicide. If you interrupt the flow of events in your parents' lives too much, you may never be conceived. You being here in the first place is a million-to-one miracle."

"I don't care."

"I'm asking you as a friend."

He pulled his head out of his hands and glanced at her. "Don't do that."

"Do what? Try to stop you from creating a paradox?"

He said nothing.

She shook her head in frustration; she didn't understand why she couldn't convince him to leave his parents' marriage alone. "Listen, if you somehow do something that prevents your parents from ever getting married, then you will never be able to return home. You will exist only as part of a paradox."

"But we wouldn't be doing anything as drastic as you're describing! We're just going to find out as much as we can about why it failed."

"What's the point of going back and watching things happen if you're not going to stop it?"

"I just want to know what went wrong. If nothing else, I'll be able to learn from their mistakes. We won't change anything. I promise."

"I'm not buying that for a second, James!" she shouted. Genesis sat and shook her head in defiance of his wishes. She knew James well enough that he wouldn't be able to see something terrible happen and do nothing about it. He would insist on getting involved. She already allowed a friend to die on her watch and she wasn't ready to do it again - especially with James, with whom she had already grown to love. Her feelings, the first romantic feelings she’d ever felt, were already difficult to contain. If she followed her heart and agreed to help him, there would be no going back; she knew herself well enough. And if they made a mistake, he would be trapped in the stream forever. She couldn't go back and prevent his mistake. "If we do this, you have to promise me that you will only say and do what we discuss together first."

"I promise."

"Okay then," she said. "Let's get you into an adult body already."

He laughed. "I do have one question. If I don't exist yet, into whose body will I be transferred?"
She jumped to her feet, forced a smile, and gave him a subtle wink. "Leave that to me."

For the first time since Genesis began using her powers on James to send him back in time, he suddenly awoke to find himself in a strange place. Upon looking in the mirror, he saw that he was in the body of his father's Uncle David. He hardly recognized himself since he had only seen the man once as a child (he died when James was only a boy).

"I can't believe you can control it this precisely," he marveled.

"It's a lot harder than it looks actually," she said exhausted and out of breath.

"Are you okay?"

She was doubled over and breathing as though she just sprinted a mile. She nodded and flew up to rest on his shoulder while he studied himself in the mirror. "Using my powers like this just takes a lot out of me."

"How does this work by the way?"

"It's pretty complicated. That's another reason this is dangerous. You could have woken up on the far side of the earth if I wasn't careful."

"Why didn't you warn me?"

She glanced down at him as though he should know better. "Because you weren't listening. I tried to warn you that you could die and you didn't seem to care about that. What difference would it make if you woke up in China? At least then I'd be able to find you."

"So you can put me in the body of anyone?"

"I could. This is hard to believe, but I'm actually able to detect a signature in your genes. All I have to do is sense someone with a similar signature in the stream. You then wake up wherever that person currently is."

"What happens to them while I'm in them?"

"They're like a phone call that's been put on hold. They see all you do and hear all you say but they don't know it's you talking and not them."

"Why are you so tired though?"

"I know for you it seems like we are only in the stream of time a few seconds, but I had to find someone suitable for you to enter. I can't just sense your younger self anymore. I have to find someone new - but close enough in relation to you as well. This time, it took me a few hours."

"I thought you said you didn't know how your powers work?"

"No, I know how they work. I just don't know where they come from."

"This is amazing," he said. "Kind of weird too. This body is uncomfortable."

"It will take a while to get used to. This guy's a lot shorter than you are. Take your time and walk around a bit."

James pranced around his Uncle's house and tried to orient himself. It took a few tries, and James fell a few times to Genesis's delight. Within moments, he was ready to begin the next phase of his adventure.
Unfortunately, James's parents changed little. They still fought like cats and dogs. James spent a few days in the bodies of nearly every relative that was alive at the time, and his parent's relationship was constantly fraught with tension. James spent several months of his life waking up in relative after relative trying to find where problems first developed at the newlywed Grant home. As early as a few weeks after their wedding, there was no sign that arguments were anything new. But if they fought like this before they got married, why did they go through with it? he wondered.

The events of his parent's wedding day did much to explain his parent's tenuous behavior in James's future. Remarkably, there was a heated dispute between his parents during the reception! Genesis was the one with the idea to sneak around and listen in on the argument. The subject of their dispute turned out to be trivial, but what James learned from this journey was that there was already a mountain of tension building, even on what should have been a happy day.

"I'd like to go back a few weeks earlier," James whispered to Genesis, who crouched inside his tuxedo pocket. It was a few hours after the reception and the staff had begun to clean up. Genesis poked her head out carefully and tried to stretch without being seen.

"Quite a day, huh?" she remarked.

"Yes, quite." He sat there a few moments longer and soaked in the sights and sounds of the day. "I can't believe I'm even here. And as my Uncle Joe no less," he said as he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror.

"Whenever you're ready to leave."

"Yeah, give me a minute to go outside so no one sees," he answered and finished off his glass of wine.

A few moments later, James was no longer a guest at his parent's wedding.

Three weeks before the wedding, James was in the body of his father's cousin, Greg. He sat with his father at a bar and shared a beer, though the visit was hardly nostalgic. He hoped to learn more about his parent's relationship during their engagement.

Genesis was not happy with this stage of their journey because the stakes were much higher. His parents hadn't even married yet; if James wasn't careful, they might never. James promised her that he would keep the conversation light. He knew his father's cousin well enough to carry on a conversation with his own father. He promised there was little she needed to worry about. Genesis wasn't happy to do it, but she agreed once he also promised to let her hide in his coat pocket again. As tense and anxious as James felt, it was Genesis's tiny heart he felt beating against his chest.

"Congratulations," James said to his father, still amazed at how much he and his future father looked alike.

"Thanks," his father said. "And in a few more weeks, it'll all be over."

"Over?" James asked curiously.

"All this wedding crap."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean it will be nice not having to work at this goofy relationship anymore. We'll be married and together and life will take care of itself."

"You're kidding, right?" James blurted out. He couldn't believe his father was being so naive. Genesis
forced James back into character the only way she knew how: she kicked him square in his chest. “Ow,” he whispered as he rubbed his chest. “What do you mean about life taking care of itself? I always heard marriage was hard work.”

"Maybe for women it is. But a man’s life is easy,” his father chuckled.

James turned his head away in disgust. He hated men who talked with such a chauvinistic attitude. He hated even more that he was the son of such a man. "I can’t speak to any of that; all I know is what someone once told me about women,” James began. "Don’t just marry someone you can live with, but marry the woman you can’t live without.”

"I don’t get."

How can my father be this dense? James thought. "The point is: is this the woman you can’t live without?” Genesis kicked James again; this time she used the heel of her foot so the pain was sharp. Funny, James thought, how one day he’d end up giving me the same piece of advice about Katherine!

"Maybe,” his father said. “I didn’t tell you about last night, did I?” His father chugged the last of his beer.

James turned to face his father, but his father was just staring down at his emptied beer glass. "No. What happened?”

"She hit me,” his father said plainly.

"But why?”

"I asked her the same thing, but she wouldn't tell me."

He watched his father’s eyes fill with tears and just as quickly dry them off so no one else in the bar would notice. “That doesn’t make any sense,” James said.

"And when I tried to tell her that I loved her, she stormed out of the car. I'm starting to think there's something wrong with this woman.”

James nodded for support but hardly believed his father's words without reservation. It wasn't fair for him to take his father's side just yet. Who knows what details of their conversation James's father was leaving out, particularly the stuff he said! Nevertheless, James began to understand why there was so little respect in their relationship, especially if what his father said was true. "What do you think is wrong?”

"It just feels like she hates men. She hates her father, she doesn't respect me - the only man she ever says anything good about is her stepfather!”

My mother has a stepfather? James thought. "Then what are you marrying her for?” he blurted again, followed by another swift kick to his chest from the woman in his pocket.

"I have to go through with it,” his father said. "If I bail out now, I'll let everyone down."

"How would you let people down by not getting married?” Another kick.

"They’d say I'm being irresponsible and immature. I just want people to think of me as a grown man already.”

"Do you really think people would think you're being immature if you go through with marrying the wrong woman?” Another hard kick. James could tell that Genesis was using her unusual strength to make her point.
“She’s not the wrong woman, Greg,” his father said as he pushed his beer glass away from him. “She’s just got some problems.”

“It’s your decision.”

James’s father nodded and looked at his watch. "I gotta run," he said. "Look, thanks for your concern and all, but who knows? Maybe after we're married and all the stress of the wedding is over, things will work themselves out."

“I hope so.”

His father stood up and left his future son alone at the bar. James finished off his beer and set it down on the table. A moment later, he felt a strong pinch on his breast and looked down at the scowling woman peeking out of his coat.

"Can I speak with you in private?" she demanded.

James got up from the bar and went to the restrooms. As he walked through the bathroom door, he took a deep breath and got prepared for the onslaught of scolding about to hit.

Once certain the room was empty and the door closed, Genesis stormed out of his pocket as if it was filled with poison. "Are you crazy?" she shouted.

"Calm down. He didn't fall for it. It'll be okay."

“What do you mean, he didn't fall for it? Were you trying to ruin everything?"

"Of course not."

“You're getting too close to causing a paradox! I never should have gone along with this."

"I'm sorry. I got carried away."

“Carried away?” she yelled. She turned from James and shook her head back and forth out of frustration. “I knew you couldn’t be trusted with this,” she whispered to herself. She thought she had learned from losing Jadzia, but she clearly hadn’t. She thought she could stand against his begging. But he wasn’t the problem; her heart – the part that was falling in love with him – was the problem.

“That’s unfair!” he said, unaware she wasn’t referring to him.

She turned around and flew within inches of his face. He felt scared and took a step back as she approached. “No, let me tell you what’s unfair, James. You promised me we would discuss what to say together. Before you say it!”

She backed down and flew over to the window. She stared at the moon and noticed the storm clouds gather as she attempted to calm herself down. Finally, she turned around, wiped a tear from her eye, and placed her hands on her hips. "What I gave you before, James, was to help you fix your own mistake. I gave that to you out of a sacred duty. But what I give you now is not just a chance to save your family. I’m giving you my complete trust. Remember that the next time you feel like getting yourself killed. My powers are at your disposal, but I am selfish about one thing."

“What?” he asked.

She hesitated. “You. These past few months, James, I…” she turned away for a moment and wiped another tear from her eye. “I’ve come to see you as more than my friend. I know because of my size, we can never be together, but I want to be with you as long as I can.”
James extended his hand and let her swoop down and rest in his palm. He gently stroked her cheek. “And I you. I've felt that way for some time now.”

“Good,” she said. “Then you'll understand if I'm scared of losing you.”

“Of course. I'll do better.”

“I know watching all this is hard for you. But you can’t be so reckless.”

He nodded. “I really hope what my father said isn't true.”

“I’m sure there’s more to what happened. There always is.” She drifted closer to him and rested on his shoulder. She watched his hands shake as the impact of his journey took its toll on his nerves. She knew he was sincere when he wanted to learn more of his parent's past, but he was learning too much at once - he wasn't ready to face all the secrets his family had spent years burying away.

“This is none of my business,” he said clutching his head.

“Maybe.” She knew there was no convincing him to stop now though. "I did think it was weird what he said about your mother and her stepfather. I wonder why she only speaks well of him?"

"I'd like to find out why that is."

"Right now?" she asked, preparing herself to leave.

"No. I want to know what my father meant about letting everyone down if he bailed out of the marriage. He always told me not to care what people think!" James didn't want to believe his father's best pieces of wisdom were culled from his own mistakes. Deep down, he hoped his father was the sort of man that learned without walking through every door on his own. All his life, James was convinced that the perception his father created of being strong and wise was true. As he saw more and more of his parents, he saw just how human they both were. He just wished it didn't take finding out the terrible skeletons from their past for him to get it. “I would like to know where he learned to care more about what other people think than his happiness.”

"Where did you learn not to care?"

"From him."

"Then maybe we should start with his father."

"On one condition," he began. "Make sure I'm not my grandmother."

She laughed. "Naturally."

They disappeared a moment later.
Chapter 6

James came out of the stream and saw a strange-looking but still familiar room. It looked like his sister's room but with older decor. He soon realized on looking in the mirror that he was indeed in his sister's room – only thirty years earlier. He was living in the body of his father's sister, his Aunt Mary.

"You've gone too far this time," James said to Genesis in a teenage girl's voice. "Although I figured this would have to happen eventually. I only have so many male relatives."

"Isn't this every guy's dream: to live as a woman for a day?"

"Normally I wouldn't mind," he said as he looked at his breasts, "but isn't this a little creepy to you?"

"Very," she said, laughing.

"I'm going to get you back for this," he said. "Let's just do what we came to do and get out of here. I don't want to be here any longer than I have to."

Downstairs at the kitchen table sat James's grandfather, Curtis, who James had never met before. The man was stoic and cold, an icy grin stretched across his face as he read the newspaper. He appeared mean, his temperament caustic, and when his eyes darted around the room, he appeared sinister.

James's father eventually came home from work and joined the family for dinner. Curtis responded with only a shake of the head and resumed his newspaper reading. A moment later, he said: "How was your day, son?" He hardly lifted his gaze from the newspaper.

"Same as always."

Curtis looked up from the paper and glanced over his son's appearance as he ate. "Why is your tie loose?"

James's father straightened his tie and tightened the knot. "Sorry," he mumbled.

"You didn't wear your tie like that at work, did you?"

He let out a sigh. "It was hurting me."

Curtis stood up suddenly and smacked his son across the face, sending him to the floor. "Don't you ever answer me in that tone again!"

James sat frightened at the display of violence. His father cowered on the floor as Curtis stood over him with a raised fist. "I don't care what people think!" his father screamed.

"But you must!" Curtis said. "How many times have I told you? You have to dress with respect for yourself!"

James's grandmother, Betty, did nothing. She stopped eating naturally, but she did nothing to defend her son. James sat in his chair and was already prepared to jump in if his father was struck again. When his muscles twitched, Genesis – who was hiding in James's blouse pocket – gave him a gentle nudge to stay put. James relaxed and watched as his father began to cry.

"I didn't mean it! I'm sorry!" he yelled.

"You need to care what people think about you," Curtis, trying to calm down as he approached his son.
and stooped down on one knee.

"But why?" James's father said as he sat up on the floor.

"Because no one respects anything anymore. Why should anyone take you seriously if you don't care what people think? That's something you're going to have to learn eventually, whether you like it or not."

His father dried his eyes and wiped his nose on his sleeve. "Okay," his father answered obediently.

Curtis stood up over his son with a menacing pose, like a bear hovering over a defeated prey. "Good."

His son nodded and hung his head.

"Now go upstairs and clean up."

James's father hurried to his room and closed the door behind him as softly as he could. He didn't want to give any impression he slammed it.

James sat silently and tried to finish his dinner. He wanted to tell his grandfather that he was wrong. He wanted to explain how that kind of thinking would affect his father's life. He knew Genesis would never forgive him if he intervened without her permission.

After dinner, James went upstairs to his aunt's room and let Genesis climb out of the pocket. She immediately climbed to the windowsill.

"Thank you for controlling your temper down there. I know that must have been hard to watch," she said.

"Hard to watch? I had no idea my father was beat like that! And did you see my grandmother? She just sat there and watched like this happens every day."

"Maybe it does," she said.

"Why can't I just have a normal family?" James wondered.

She sat down and shook her head from side to side, not knowing exactly what to say. "I don't think anyone does," she said finally.

"At least now I can see why my father went through with marrying my mother. I'd be scared to break it off too! My father probably thought he'd be killed."

James sat down on his aunt's bed and lay back on her pillow. He stared up at the ceiling which was covered with tiny fluorescent stars that glowed as the sun set. "I don't suppose you could just brainwash him or something, could you?"

"Which one?" she asked.

"How about everyone?"

"No," she giggled. "I have no such powers."

He looked over to the window and watched Genesis look at the rising moon. "I really don't know what to do anymore," he said. "It feels like the deeper I probe, the more messed up my family gets."

She nodded sympathetically. "Perhaps some secrets should be kept."
"Maybe you're right," he said, feeling defeated.

"So what now?" she asked as she landed on the pillow and lied down next to him.

"I'd like to see my mother actually."

"Back home?"

"No. Right here. She should be fourteen now. I want to see her before we leave."

"Why?"

"Because I want to go home having one last pleasant memory of my parents."

"I understand," she said. "Do you want to go now?"

Just then, his grandmother, Betty, called from downstairs. "Mary!" she cried. "It's time to take a shower."

It occurred to James that there were indeed some secrets that needed to be kept: his aunt's body being one of them. "Sure thing," he said to his grandmother. Then to Genesis, he whispered: "Right now, please."

"No problem."

A few seconds later, James was no longer in a woman's body.

When James's consciousness came to, he was in another strange place he had never seen before. Genesis was sound asleep on a pillow (using her powers to find someone in James's extended family always seemed to drain her). Across the room from her was a full-length mirror, which James examined carefully. He couldn't recognize the man he saw, although James was decidedly glad to be back in the body of a man even if it was one he didn't know.

Genesis woke up and after stretching, she flew over to James and sat on his shoulder as he stared into the mirror puzzled.

"I'm assuming you don't recognize yourself?" she asked.

"Not exactly. Who am I?"

"I'm not sure. I tried to find a relative that lived close to your mother. Whoever you are lived very close to her. At least from what I could gather from the stream."

"Well, it must be someone I never met because I've never even seen a picture of this guy."

The phone rang a moment later.

"Should I answer it?" he asked.

"Just be careful what you say."

James nodded to her as he picked up the phone. "Hello?" he said in yet another unfamiliar voice.

"Hi, Robert, this is Liz," said the voice of a middle-aged woman.
Liz, James thought, remembering a moment later that his grandmother's name was Elizabeth. "Oh, hi Liz."

"Are you still going to look after Becky today?"

"Um, sure," he agreed.

"Good. She's just leaving now. I'll pick her up this afternoon if that's okay?"

"Okay," he said as his grandmother hung up the phone. "What is my mother coming over here for?" he said to Genesis.

"You never had a babysitter?"

"Yeah, but my mother's the oldest of three. What does she need a sitter for?"

Genesis shrugged her shoulders.

"Now what?"

"Get ready to meet her, I guess."

James was scared. He was in the body of someone he never knew. He didn't know how to behave, and worse, he was worried of doing or saying something that might change the future. He had not had such an active role in the lives of his parents since the incident in the bar, which could have ended in disaster if his father was any less obtuse. "Well I never met this person. How am I supposed to act?"

"Just follow your mother's lead," she advised. "But be careful. Something here feels weird."

"What do you mean?"

Genesis never got to answer his question. A second later, there was a knock at the door. He got up to answer it while Genesis found a place to hide and ducked out of sight. He was anxious to see his mother again. And not because he didn't know what to say when he met her but because there were few pictures of her at this age - he didn't even know what she looked like.

He opened the door to reveal a stunning blond-haired girl. "Hi," was all he could say to her.

"Hi," she replied back, her voice revealing her true age. She kissed him on the cheek and walked through the door. "Do you mind if I use the bathroom?" she asked. James nodded. He watched his mother walk to the bathroom and close the door behind her.

"So how is school?" James shouted through the bathroom door, trying to find something to say.

His mother sighed loudly to signal her displeasure. "You're not going to ask me about that again, are you?"

"Oh, I'm sorry," he tried to cover. "I didn't know it was such a sore spot."

"I just wish you'd stop thinking of me as a little kid!" she shouted back.

Well you are only fourteen, James thought. The bathroom door cracked opened behind him.

The time for the last of his family's secrets to be revealed had arrived. As James turned around to face his mother, she was standing in the doorway of the bathroom – wearing nothing but a seductive smile.
"Oh my God," James said beneath his breath.

James's mother walked toward him and threw her arms around his neck, pulling him close and pressing her body against his.

"What do you think you're doing?" he demanded.

"The same thing we always do," she answered. "Are you just going to stand there or get undressed?"

James looked over his mother's bare shoulders at Genesis and gave her a look demanding what he should do. He certainly wasn't going to listen to Genesis's advice to follow his mother's lead. Genesis understood immediately and signaled to him to get his mother out of the room so they could leave.

James had another idea. Hopefully, Genesis would understand after they were gone. He looked at his mother and pushed her away from him. "I'm going to stand here while you go back inside that bathroom and put some clothes on!" he commanded her.

"Oh, are you still mad about last time?" she asked.

"Last time? What do you mean, last time? How many times have we done this?"

"You forgot?" she yelled.

James looked at his mother in disbelief. Even worse, she showed no sign of shame over her state of undress. "Would you at least put some clothes on, Rebecca? Please?" he begged.

"No!" she said defiantly. "You know what I'm here for, and I'm not going anywhere until I get it!"

James was at a loss for words. If he couldn't find a way to get her out of the room so he could leave, James was going to have to do one of two things: go through with her demand or change the future. He had no idea if these events might be related to his own birth, but if they were, and his parents never married because of what he was about to change, then his life would have to be sacrificed to keep this from happening anymore. His only wish was that Genesis would understand why he was doing it. *I love you,* he thought. "Listen to me carefully, Becky: You are not getting what you want, not now, or ever again."

His mother approached him and looked him in the eyes cold. "Now you listen to me," she said softly but forcibly. "If I don't get what I'm here for, I'm telling my mother about our first time."

Oh no! James thought. "What about the first time?" he asked. He looked her straight in the eye and desperately avoided the sight of his mother's naked body.

"Oh, I know you remember that," his mother whispered devilishly. "It was a year ago. You were watching my sisters and me while my parents were out-of-town. You remember that night you came to my room, don't you? And I know you remember the first time you touched me."

James froze in fear over what he heard.

"On your freedom should you be glad I liked it," his mother continued, "because it's just one word from me that separates you from prison and my real father's gun!"

"Oh God," James exclaimed to himself. "I can't do this anymore!"

"Fine!" his mother screamed. "Have it your way!" She turned and left the room, slamming the bathroom door behind her.

When the door closed, Genesis flew out from her hiding place.
"Genesis," he whispered, "I don't care where we go or who I become, please get me out of here right now!"

"What did you say?" his mother shouted from inside the bathroom.

Genesis looked at the bathroom door, shook her head disapprovingly, and turned back to James. "Hold on to something."

They disappeared a minute later, leaving only a confused man alone in his apartment with a young girl cursing him.
"Am I still alive?" James said.

"Yes, you are," she said, sounding relieved.

"When are we?"

"Back home."

"Oh." He looked around his room for the first time in what felt like weeks. It took him a moment to readjust to the sight of his bedroom walls, as they were now clear of all the pictures of Katherine. "You're not mad at me, are you?" he asked Genesis, who was floating above him with her arms folded over her breasts. She did not look pleased with their situation.

"No, I'm not mad."

"Then what's that look for?"

She shook her head. "You just don't realize what you're putting me through, James. What you did back there was so..." She hesitated, fearful of telling James what she felt right now. "It scared me. I shouldn't have put you in this position."

"I put myself in this position, Genesis. You just got me here."

"Look, I'm not mad that you didn't tell me what you were going to do. In a way, I understand why you did it."

"Then what's wrong?"

"I'm just mad at myself for going through with this again. I know you love your parents, and you've shown that. But maybe it's time to call it quits before you really get hurt."

It wasn't difficult for James to see the wisdom of her advice. He did want to stay home. He wanted to stay with Genesis and he loved her dearly for her sacrifice. He also received a wealth of knowledge about his family, not to mention the chance to go back and learn from his mistake with Katherine. But for James, all this wasn't enough. He now knew something about his family that he could not sit idly by and watch. Maybe preventing his mother from being molested would change the outcome of her future marriage. Or maybe it would change whom she later married. And maybe it would change everything, even whether James was born or not. Undoubtedly, changing something as emotionally deep as child abuse would change the direction of her entire future. His very existence depended on her life course continuing down the path it began. He saw now why Genesis had discouraged him from doing this to begin with: it was too hard to make the right decision once you knew all the facts. It was even harder once you knew that your own life was in the way of making things right. The only way to make his mother's life better was to sacrifice his own. But James knew that option was hardly the way to repay Genesis, the woman he loved. "You're right," he said.

"I know this isn't easy for you."

"How would you know how hard this is, Genesis? I know you're trying to be empathetic with me but somehow I doubt you know how much this is hurting to have to give up on my parents."

"Why do you think I'm so against this? To deny you happiness? I do know how you feel. I had to give up someone very precious."
"Tell me what happened."

Genesis at first said nothing, but only shook her head. Soon, she spun around and landed on the nightstand beside James’s bed. “Jadzia was nineteen and just freed from a concentration camp when I met her. She was pure, kind-hearted, and completely self-sacrificing in a way I couldn’t understand. All she wanted to do was see her parents again. But then she made a choice: to prevent World War II. I let her. I used my powers to fill her head with knowledge of the war and it killed her. I lost the only family I had because I was too careless with my powers. I gave into her because she was important to me, and she died anyway.

“I loved Jadzia like a sister, but James - I love you so much more. I’ve never felt this way before. Call me selfish, but I cannot risk losing you. I can’t go through that again.”

“So what do I do now?” he asked. “Go back to my life here, where my family has crumbled and I’m all alone?” He looked away and stared out the window to the yard below and imagined what the future would be like if his parents divorced. Behind him, a tear fell down Genesis’s cheek and she disappeared in an instant. He turned around, but she had already reappeared.

“Come with me,” she said. “There’s something I need you to hear.”

“What are we going to do?” he said.

“You are going to listen.”

Moments later, James awoke in a room that was the strangest yet. Judging from the wallpaper and carpet, he concluded it was from a time long before his own. The room looked strangely familiar though: it looked a lot like a room in his grandparent’s house.

"I'm almost afraid to ask, but who and where am I?" he asked Genesis, who was sitting on a nearby windowsill watching the clouds collect. His voice sounded young when he spoke. After a quick glance at his reflection in the window, he could see he was a very small boy.

"We're in your Uncle Thomas's room. You're three years old," she replied, never taking her gaze off the clouds.

"Why am I here?"

"You need to listen to something," she said, turning from the window and flying over to him.

"I don't know want to learn anymore, Genesis. I've seen enough. I want to go home."

She touched his face gently and looked consolingly into his eyes. "We will go home. I promise. This is the last thing you need to hear."

"I'm afraid to ask but where is my mother this time? I guess she'd be around five years old."

"Yes," Genesis said. "In fact, she's next door talking to your grandmother."

"How do you know that?"

She said nothing more.

James crept slowly into the closet and pressed his ear up to the wall adjoining his mother's bedroom:
"...but why does he do that to you?" James heard his five-year-old mother ask his grandmother.

"Because I didn't do what he told me to do," she answered her daughter.

"I don't like when Daddy gets mean!" she cried.

"I know you don't, Becky. And if we never got married, he wouldn't hurt me like this."

"But don't you love Daddy?" the little girl asked.

James's grandmother took a deep breath and let out a disquieting sigh. "No, I don't," she said plainly.

"Then why did you get married?"

James heard nothing through the wall for a brief moment as his grandmother seemed to be thinking of a way to answer.

"Because, Becky," his grandmother began, "I was pregnant with you." The young girl gasped. "So, you see, if I didn't have you, then Daddy wouldn't hit me like he does. And we wouldn't be married, and I would be happy."

Through the wall in his uncle's room, James cried. When his grandmother left the room a moment later, James heard his mother's gentle whimper echo through the closet alongside his own.

He stumbled out of the closet and threw a toy against the wall, shattering it. "I hate my family!" he yelled in his three-year-old voice.

Genesis could only look at the young boy and offer what little comfort she could. She sat on his shoulder and nestled herself against his neck as he collapsed to the ground and cried.

"Why did you bring me here?" he cried to Genesis. "To show me how messed up my family is? I get it now! I don't want to see anymore!"

She flew off his shoulder and landed directly in front of him, looking deep into his eyes. "You know why we're both here," she said calmly. "You wanted to know why your parents divorced and now you know everything! The plain and ugly truth of it."

"I take it back! I don't want to know!" he shouted.

"It kills me to see you hurt like this. But can you see now where your parents' problems began? The demanding grandfather, your father's insistence to put his own desires last; the predator stepfather; not to mention the grandmother that tells her five year-old daughter that she is the source of her husband's abuse. No wonder your mother hated every man in her life! They were all jerks!"

He took a deep breath and calmed himself. He realized what he should have all along: that his parent's divorce was a lifetime in the making. "Is there anything you think I can do to save them?"

"That really depends, doesn't it?" she said while shaking her head.

"On what?"

"Do you really think it's worth saving?" she asked.

He had seen more of his family's history than anyone in history before him had. The things behind
closed doors that no one saw; the things only God knew. He was now privy to every dark secret his family had done so well keeping hid. It was all out in the open now and the future of his family was in his hands to determine. "I still do," he said. "I know that sounds crazy."

"There's nothing crazy about that. But maybe it's time to go home."

He sat in silence as Genesis flew to the windowsill and resumed staring at the clouds. She couldn't say much else to him at this point. He needed to decide on his own the next course of action: let his parent's marriage die on its own or do what he needed to save it.

As he stared at the floor, she slipped into the stream and emerged a split-second later. He never noticed.

"I suppose there's nothing left I can do," he mused aloud.

"You need to do something positive in her life. Come with me. I have a present for you."

A moment later, James stood in what appeared to be a lounge. He was alone, except for the ever-present Genesis, who tried to catch drops of coffee as it dripped from a machine. He was dressed in a sweater-vest and dress slacks, and when he felt his head he could tell he was middle-aged and balding.

"You've truly outdone yourself," he remarked to Genesis. "But I thought you could only put me in the body of a relative?"

"Oh, if only I could tell you all the things I can do," she said.

"So how am I supposed to make a difference here? Where am I?"

"You're in your old grade school, the one your mother went to as well."

"You mean she's here? How old is she?"

"She's nine, and her next class is about to start."

"I'm her teacher, aren't I?"

Genesis nodded.

"But what do I say to her?"

"That's entirely up to you. Nothing you say will change anyone's future but hers. You have nothing to fear."

"Are you sure?"

She hovered away from the coffee machine and kissed him as passionately as their mismatched lips could allow. He knew right away he had nothing to worry about.

"Then let's go," he said as he motioned to his briefcase.

"You want me to hide in there?"

He nodded back at her with a smile.

"Ugh, okay!" she moaned.
She climbed inside the briefcase and tried to settle herself between all the papers. "You owe me one for this," she said.

"Actually, this makes us even for even for putting me in my aunt."

"Very funny," she said. "Do you know where you're supposed to be going?"

"No, I was hoping you could tell me," he said as he pointed to the class schedule next to her.

She held up the class schedule into the light and read it. "Room 202." She ducked down as he closed the briefcase and wedged a folded piece of paper between the lid and case to allow some air in and then quickly headed off to teach class.

When he got to Room 202, he allowed Genesis to slip into one of the drawers in the desk before the students arrived. Once they did, he told them to go over their homework from the day before. As the class went over their assignments, he spent his time observing his nine-year-old mother sitting in the rear of the class and writing in her journal. She seemed distressed and was not very sociable, even to the point of ignoring students when they talked to her.

It wasn't long before the class period ended and the students began to leave. As Becky stood up, she bumped her arm on a neighboring desk, grabbed it in pain, and massaged it.

"Are you alright, Rebecca?" James asked.

"Yeah, I just hit my funny bone," she answered.

"Well, your funny bone is on your elbow and you grabbed your arm. Are you sure you're okay?"

She nodded.

"Do you mind if I check your arm anyway?" he offered.

She obliged reluctantly and exposed her arm - there was a large bruise across her bicep.

"Oh, what happened here?" he asked. "It looks like you got in a bit of a fight."

"No," she denied. "I've just been a little clumsy. I tripped on the stairs at home yesterday."

"I see," James said to his mother, who hung her head and tried not to make eye contact. "Are you sure no one hit you?"

She shook her head as tears began to well up.

"Becky?" said James, trying to get her to look up, which after a moment she did. "It's okay to tell me. You don't need to be scared."

This time she nodded and rolled down her sleeve to cover the mark on her arm.

"Did someone at home hit you?"

"My father," she managed to confess, the tears beginning to build up.

"Hmm," James mumbled. "Does he hit you a lot?"

"Only when I don't do what I'm told."
"I see. And do you think you deserve to be hit for that?"

She shook her head. "No."

"You're right. You try to be a good girl, don't you?"

She nodded. "Yeah."

"Then it's not your fault that he hit you. You didn't do anything to deserve being hit."

"Then why does he do it if I'm not a bad girl?"

James pondered the question and tried to think of a way to answer it so her young mind could understand. "There are a lot of reasons he might feel like he needs to hit you, but none of those reasons are good reasons," he assured the child. "A lot of people will try to make you feel bad about yourself, but you shouldn't listen to them. Even if you were being bad, no one has the right to hurt you like this."

The little girl began to cry. James took his mother into his arms and embraced her, wanting so much to see only the best for her. He knew his efforts today were too small to matter, but he was glad he was finally getting a chance to make a difference. "I'll need to thank Genesis every day for the rest of my life for giving me this moment!" he thought.

"You need to promise yourself something, Becky," he said as he pulled his mother away and looked her in the eyes.

"What?" said the little girl as she wiped away her tears.

"You need to promise yourself that you will never let anyone hurt you. No one, no matter who it is, even your father, should ever make you feel bad about yourself. You are a beautiful girl and someday you will be a beautiful woman. Don't ever let anyone touch you like this again. And if someone does, you need to tell someone: me, the principal, the nurse, or even a policeman. Do you understand?"

His mother nodded softly, still feeling somewhat ashamed.

"Do you promise?" he asked again, this time softly.

"I promise," she said.

James smiled at his mother and let her go to her next class. As his mother left the classroom and walked down the hall, James closed the door and motioned for Genesis to come out of the drawer.

"I would say that went pretty well!" she approved.

"Thank you so much for this."

"It was all my pleasure, James."

"I love you," he said.

“And I, you," she replied as she kissed his lips with hers.

"So is it time to go home now?"

"It is. It's time to let nature run its course."
A moment later, they were gone.

James opened his eyes and saw the bare ceiling of his bedroom. The joy of home was overwhelming.

"Welcome home," Genesis said.

He looked around the room as though it were unfamiliar. "How long were we gone? In my time?"

"Only a few seconds. But a lot changed in that time."

"It certainly has," he said. The changes of the past had filtered into the present. The walls were no longer plastered and caked with drawings and photo enlargements of Katherine. What else has changed? he thought.

"I imagine you're anxious to see your family."

"I am," he said. "Are my parents still married?"

"Go and see," she said as she climbed into his shirt pocket.

James walked downstairs to a quiet living room. This usually wasn't a good sign, but suddenly he noticed all the family pictures on the wall that he never saw before. "So are they still together?"

"Let me show you something."

She grabbed a photo album from the bookshelf and thumbed through it, looking at the pictures go by as James looked on. Suddenly, the pages stopped turning and she pointed at one of the photographs. "There!" she said.

James looked down at the picture. The photograph was of his mother's family: all of them – including her stepfather.

"There he is! He's in the picture now. He wasn't there before." As he turned through the rest of the album, he spotted more pictures of his mother's stepfather. "It worked! She never let anything happen because he's here. He isn't a secret anymore."

"It looks like you got to her."

"But I'm still here. How is that possible?"

"What happened with your mother and her stepfather didn't change who she married. It just changed how she viewed him and all the other men in her life."

"How could their affair not affect me?"

She winked. "Has it occurred to you that I could have known all of this before we ever met?"

"Have you?"

"No," she said. "But if changing the past would have harmed a single hair on your head, I would never have let you speak to your parents."

"So they're still married. I did it! I saved them," he said proudly. "But how long will it last?" he wondered aloud.

"That's going to be up to them."
“Can’t we go into the future and see what happens?”

“Not anymore,” she said. “The future is too muddy and clouded to predict. To find out what happens to your family, I’m afraid you’re going to have to find out the old-fashioned way: wait.”

“I wonder what my own life would have been if you hadn’t come along and showed me the truth about Katherine and how we weren’t right for each other.”

“You discovered that on your own. And as for your future, when I first found you in the stream I tried to see what might become of you. You were alone and unhappy. It seemed to me that if that one mistake was fixed, you would finally be able to move forward and not be so focused on the past - yours or your parents’.”

“How much did you know?”

“Just enough to know I could help. And even that depended so much on you.”

“And what about you?” he asked. “Where will you go now?”

“I want to stay here, but that isn’t possible,” she answered.

“Why not?”

“Because we can’t be together.” She turned away from him and cried. When she first met Jadzia, she was all alone. And then she discovered her first sense of family with the girl who became like a sister. But Jadzia was dead. The same fate would befall James. Her travels across time and space revealed an important detail of her nature: she never aged, nor might she ever. Whatever family she established with the people she helped would be fraught with sorrow, as all of them would face their mortality, leaving her behind to watch. She thought, too, of the prospect of James ever finding a wife and building a family. The feelings she felt for him would never be realized as they could never have a normal relationship. If she stayed with him, he would be condemned to a life devoid of affection and normalcy. There was something different about James: as she contemplated staying with him, the knot in her stomach, the compulsion to continue her journey and help people, did not return. It was gone. “You deserve more than I can give you.”

He watched her sob as she came to the inevitable conclusion he had already accepted when his heart first attached to the tiny girl he loved. “I want you to stay. This is my life to decide,” he said.

She spun around and approached within inches of his face. “All my hard work will be negated if I stay! My purpose in coming to you was to help you fix a mistake so it wouldn’t hinder your future, not start a new mistake.”

“How is asking the woman I love to stay with me a mistake?”

“Because we can’t have a normal life together.” She backed away, her face expressionless as she raised her arms. “I love you.”

James knew what she was about to do, but before he could utter a word, she was gone. He fell to his knees and wept. Genesis had left him.

No sooner than she had disappeared, a firm knock came from the front door. James charged downstairs to open it and when he did, he saw Genesis standing in the doorway - the same size as any other woman, only now she was clothes in a beautiful summer dress.

“So what do you think?” she said.

“I think I’m in love with you,” he said.
“I love you too.”

He marveled over her appearance. She was just as gorgeous as she was when she was no taller than a flower. “How did this happen?” he asked. The thought of why she left him had faded from memory. It didn’t matter any longer. She was here.

She stepped inside the kitchen door and wrapped her arms around James. She pulled him tight against her chest and kissed him hard and deep.

He took her in his arms and embraced her tight. “It feels good to hold you like this,” he said.

“And it feels good to be held by you.”

“So what happened?”

“You mean, how did I become normal finally?” she said as she kissed him again. “Sorry, I can’t help myself.”

James smiled and kissed her back. “Yes, how did you get here like this?”

“It’s kind of a long story.”
Chapter 8

Genesis spent years honing the gifts of her proverbial father, the Nazi scientist who gave her all of her powers. After spending years traveling through time and searching for people in need of help, she eventually came across the man who she was about to leave forever. As she thought back to her life with Jadzia in the Canadian clearing, the first time and place she called home, the realization that a life with James could only end similarly told her that leaving him was the best thing to do. As she readied herself to jump into the stream and return to the ancient tree in her first memory, she etched the face of the man she loved into her mind and said: “I love you.”

Somewhere deep in the forest where Genesis first awoke upon her release by her creator, a ball of blue light emerged among the branches. The tree creatures, great and small, scattered as Genesis appeared amidst the orb and the light dissipated.

She fell to the ground; the knot in her stomach had returned with a vengeance and the tears she shed in James’s room, while still fresh, were replaced by new ones that streamed down her cheek as her knees hit the branch. She curled in a ball to relieve the pain but it only worsened with each passing second. She knew immediately her decision to leave James was the wrong one. Terrified, she rolled onto her back and tried to take a deep breath but she rolled off the branch and fell to the forest floor instead.

In a panic, she stumbled to her feet and gathered what strength she could muster. Instantly, she leaped into the stream and then emerged a fraction of a second later.

The pain in her stomach was gone, but she had no idea where she was. She lied face down on the floor of a large house, the floor made of wood and the house decorated in a manner unfamiliar to her. As she climbed to her feet, she imagined where - and when - she was. Just then, she heard a voice.

“I always wondered when you’d make it here,” an old man with a German accent said. He hobbled on a cane to where she stood and stared out a large window overlooking a beautiful lake.

She turned to face him. “Should I know you?” she asked nervously.

“No,” he said, smiling, “you wouldn’t remember me. And not through any fault of your own. You weren’t meant to remember me. My name is Wolfgang.”

“Are you meant to help me, then?”

“Indeed,” he answered. “Please.” He gestured for her to come closer to him.

She flew over to the desk where the man slowly sat in his chair and set his cane aside.

“You’ve truly grown into a remarkable woman; so much confidence since we parted ways.”

Wolfgang heard the crash of toys falling down the stairs. He looked around the corner and spotted his son down the hallway examining the broken toy. “Go to your room, Roger,” he said. The child obeyed and ran upstairs to his room. The door closed a moment later.

“How do you know me?” she interrupted. “Where am I?”

He chuckled at the question. “I made you, Genesis. And you don’t remember me because I programmed you not to.”

“So,” she hesitated, “I’m a…machine?”
“Not at all,” he assured her with a laugh. “You’re very human, but in a non-traditional way. You had no childbirth or parents like most people have. You were the culmination of years of experiments into making the world’s perfect soldier. The project failed, partly under the weight of its own absurdity, and partly because of sabotage…by me.”

“Who were my real parents then?”

“Your biological parents – and by that I mean the sperm and egg donors,” he said coarsely, “are unknown to everyone but those at the top of the project. Even Hitler didn’t know.”

“Hitler?” she asked.

“Everyone involved in the project is dead and any records left over were destroyed after you escaped. Few people alive know anything about you. I only know because I was presumed dead and, by the grace of God, managed to escape here - to South America.”

“Why don’t I remember any of it?”

“That’s complicated. The project was charged with producing the following: a human being comprised of only the core genetic material necessary for human function, but it was then modified to increase strength, reduce independence, and remove morality. Originally, you were not given a voice.

“The human genome had not been discovered yet, but when we stumbled upon time-travel just before the war, Hitler wanted to know how to engineer his soldiers since breeding the perfect race wasn’t working. And so he commissioned doctors to find anything from the future that might help him toward that goal. In the course of our experiments, I learned a great deal about DNA that I never shared with my superiors. I am the one who saw to it to add the genes that made you who you are today: you are compelled to be selfless, loving, thoughtful, and kind. I even designed a mechanism that would cause you great abdominal pain if you resisted your true nature.

“Your abilities, by the way, were a little concoction of my own doing. Your size, which I’m sure you’ve come to resent, was not meant to handicap you. I had to stall the other researchers for time so I could perfect the material that would make you virtually indestructible. Instead of making you a killing machine, I wanted to see someone who only wanted to help others. Call it my way of making amends for trusting a man like Hitler with my people’s most precious technology.”

“Wait!” she exclaimed. “Where are you from?”

“That isn’t important, my dear. I saw all the terrible things the Nazis did and it reminded me of my people in our infancy. The last thing they needed was another instrument of death. I imagine you’ve been wisely trying to help others since you left.”

“I’m not sure how successful I was. I did try to prevent the war from ever happening at least.”

“Well,” he said, “that would have been impossible, my dear. Preventing the war would have prevented your own creation.”

She gasped. “So the reason so many people died was because of me?”

“You mustn’t torture yourself with that idea. Besides, I’m sure you’ve done enough good in the time since. That has to count for something.”

Genesis was suddenly plagued with regrets. “I could have done more.”

“I’m sure we all could have. The last thirty-five years since the war have been intolerable as I look back on what I could have done. You’re different. You had no choice in the matter and have no reason to feel remorse.
The abilities you have were meant to teach you an important lesson: that there is little use living in the past."

"Then I must not have learned much because all I’ve done was try to fix people’s mistakes from the past."

"If I could undo our experiments, I would," he confessed. “But enough damage has been brought about by time-travel. Besides, the technology was lost when the war ended. As for you, I wanted to reverse what we did to you eventually, but there wasn’t time. The end of the war was approaching and I needed to protect you.”

"Do you still know how to reverse it?"

He smiled once again and said: “Yes.”

She smiled back and waited patiently for his reply to her implied petition.

“I assume you wish to return to some point in time and lead a normal life?"

“Yes,” she said. “But how did I get here?"

“Easily,” he said. “You had no other choice. When you left, I chose a time that was safe in Earth’s history for you upon your release. Your body was programmed to go to that point in time when triggered – in the first case it was triggered by anger and fear. Conversely, you finding me was a programmed affair too. I estimated a place I would likely be found if not captured or killed. I’ve been waiting on this lake house for you to return – and now you have.”

“But what triggered me to come here?”

A wide grin crossed his face. “What else, Genesis? You fell in love, didn’t you?”

She nodded excitedly.

“Good,” he said. He stood up from the desk and walked to a bookshelf overflowing with papers. Beneath a pile of loose pages, he removed from the top shelf a small metal box with an antique lock on its outside hinge. “In here, you will find what you want.”

He opened the box and removed a tiny syringe. “The drug in this needle will restore your entire DNA to normal and allow you the life you so much deserve.”

He set it down on the desk in front of her. She approached the needle with apprehension. “Will it hurt?” she asked

“Only the needle part. The transformation will be instantaneous. When you return to your new home, you will be restored to your normal self. Unlike your first trip through time, you will now remember everything you know now. This is my final gift to you. Are you ready?”

“Will I ever see you again?” she asked.

“No, my dear. I’ve served my part in your life.”

“Thank you,” she said, “for everything.” She approached by flight, smiled, and kissed him on the cheek.

A moment later, she felt a slight pinch on her arm, thought of returning home to James, and disappeared as a flying time-traveler for the last time.

The department store was cold, dark, and empty at 7:00 in the morning. To Genesis’s everlasting relief,
there were no guards on patrol and no security cameras present when she arrived. As with every other jump through
time, only Genesis (in her perfect skin) appeared out of nowhere. It took her a moment to adjust to her new body;
her steps were unusually light and her gait more than a little clumsy. She looked down at her naked body with her
normal carefree manner as she walked down the aisle of the store when she realized that modesty would be essential
now. I’m going to need something to wear, she thought. As she strode through the racks of clothing, she grabbed the
first sundress off a rack that might look good on her and got dressed. After a quick trip to the lingerie department
and the quick addition of bra and panties to her wardrobe, she ran to the front door. She grabbed some comfortable
shoes on her way out the door and was off to meet the man she loved.

Despite being in excellent shape, Genesis wasn’t used to losing so much energy. She reasoned it was
because she had never run on her legs before. She had always flown. Ten minutes after leaving the department store,
she was exhausted and decided she wasn’t in any rush: James’s house was only a few minutes away and she
remembered that the other, much smaller Genesis, hadn’t even brought him home from their first adventure yet.

The walk to his house served her well; she was able to take time and appreciate all the small things she
previously took for granted. Flowers no longer seemed as frightening; nor did bees and other insects, creatures that
always avoided her.

Outside the Grant home, Genesis stood along the street and looked up at the window to James’s
bedroom, where she often stationed herself and stood guard over him as he recovered from their frequent trips
through time. Now, she saw the man she loved weeping at the sight of her departure.

Whatever pain she may have felt in her legs from the run home meant nothing to her now. She bolted up
the stairs to the front porch and took a moment to catch her breath before pressing the doorbell, desperate to
apologize for leaving him and to explain all she had learned. This is it! she thought. My new life. The few seconds it
took James to rush down the stairs and answer the door felt like years to the woman he would finally be able to hold
in his arms. The door opened, and all their dreams came true.
Part 3
Chapter 1

John Archer sat at his desk going over the latest test results. He adjusted his glasses and ran his fingers through his salt-and-pepper hair as he read. His assistant, Ryan, sat beside him waiting anxiously for a sign of emotion on Archer's face. Fifteen more minutes passed before Ryan got a chance to relax.

“Now, this is interesting,” Archer mumbled.

“What? Did I do something wrong?” Ryan asked, his voice quivering a little.

Archer chuckled. “Not at all.” He stood up and took some printed pages with him. Archer looked like a man about to give a speech. “The thing is this: I've spent the last twelve years working for the government, working on things I'll never be able to tell you about, my young friend.” A smirk crept across Ryan's face, as the two were only three years apart in age - and Ryan was the eldest. “But this,” Archer continued, holding the pages up. “This is going to set us apart. Not apart from the Russians or the Chinese, no. A line now exists between humanity that will not exist again for many generations. This line now divides humanity of the past – the one that brought us cell phones and the Internet – and the humanity of the future.”

Ryan sat up straight in his chair. “All this from one test?”

“Not exactly,” Archer said, sitting back down. “I still need others to verify my work. But if I'm right – which I always am or else I wouldn't be paid so handsomely – then we have truly reached a turning point in our history!”

Ryan pulled his chair closer to Archer and leaned to whisper. “But Dr. Archer,” he always said out of respect, “are you seriously suggesting it may soon be possible to travel through time?”

“Probable, not possible,” he answered without lifting his head from his notes. “The math is all there. Now all we need is some idiot with lots of money who is foolish enough to build the silly thing.”

Across the room, a door opened and a man in military uniform decorated with medals walked through.

“Ah, General,” Archer said, “we were just talking about you!” Ryan chuckled.

“Dr. Archer,” the General said plainly. “I assume our ridiculously high paychecks are getting results.”

Archer stood up out of mock respect. He didn't care for military types but wasn't foolish enough to fake a salute. He merely put out his hand, which the General – as usual – ignored. “I wouldn't cash them if I wasn't, sir.”

The General, a tall, imposing man, was stoic. “Good. I was sent to escort you to Henderson's office.”

Archer set down his notes and clapped his hands together. “Then lead the way.”

The office of John Archer's boss – Frank Henderson – was completely bare. There were no pictures. There was no comfortable furniture; only an empty desk with a minimalist's computer on top, the chair Henderson himself was sitting in, and two empty chairs that looked like he stole them from an elementary school's cafeteria fifty years ago.

The General and Archer entered the office and, knowing Henderson's business-only nature, tried to squeeze into the small, plastic chairs. Henderson leaned forward, folded his lanky hands neatly on the desk, and squinted through his half-inch thick glasses to examine his subjects.

“I'm assuming the General did not tell you why you were escorted here?” Henderson asked.
“No,” Archer said. “I mean, it’s rare I’m escorted anywhere these days. I just figured the General was in one of his moods.” Archer laughed. The General did not. “Would you lighten up, already? We’ve known each other ten years!”

Henderson interrupted. “John, we’ve decided to stop funding your program.”

Archer looked shocked. “May I ask why?”

“We’re simply not getting the results we need.”

“Well, of course you’re not, Frank. You’ve taken away my entire team. I’m down to one assistant, and while Ryan’s a great kid, I can’t get my research done with only his help.” Archer noticed his voice had risen.

Henderson sat motionless. “We’re not cutting your project completely, John. Only the part that involves you.”

“Oh, I see how it is. I’d bet the fillings in my teeth that you wouldn’t be firing me if I was a heartless, warmongering crony like you!”

“That’s enough!” Henderson said as he towered over Archer. He realized he too had raised his voice and immediately cleared his throat and sat down. “We’ve made our decision, John.”

Archer prepared to stand up and wait for the General to escort him to his office and then out of the building to security. Instead, he remained seated. Henderson looked up at the General and motioned him to lead Archer away. “Not yet,” Archer declared. “I want to know what’s going to be done with my research.”

“That doesn’t concern you any longer,” He motioned to the General again. As Archer stood up and moved to the door, the General following closely behind, Henderson cleared his throat again. Archer stopped. “John, while I can’t make any assurances, we will do our best to find the appropriate idiot foolish enough to continue your work.” He smirked.

Archer nodded. It was never a secret that they monitored his laboratory. He just didn’t care what anyone heard. “Then perhaps you should work on it yourself!”

John Archer returned to his house to find all of his work confiscated. His office appeared disheveled and his mail was open. Only one piece of mail remained sealed: it was from his former boss – and the postmark was from yesterday. He opened it even though he had a good idea what it said. Indeed, Archer was right; they fired him, which he already knew. Just like the government, he thought, always sticking a knife in your back before you’re aware of it. One piece of information in the letter got Archer’s attention though. Besides the boilerplate notice of termination, there was a copy of his original contract. Archer vaguely remembered reading the contract when he signed it, but the agency highlighted the important part in yellow marker anyway just in case he forgot. It read:

All research and experiments conducted in this department remains the exclusive property of the Agency and upon your termination, you are hereby forbidden to continue similar research with any other entity, both foreign and domestic.

The threat was in vain, as Archer had no intention of continuing his research. His only concern as he burned the letter over his stove-top and went upstairs to bed was where his next paycheck would come from.
James couldn’t let go of the gorgeous woman he held tight in his arms. He said nothing for a few moments as he contemplated whether he really wanted to know how she had gone from a powerful, time-traveling, miniature, naked woman, to the strong and beautifully adorned woman that stood confidently in his presence.

Genesis remained in his embrace with her eyes closed, half convinced that what she felt was little more than a dream she didn’t want to wake up from. The adventure of her life had yielded a reward she never imagined possible for her: she now had a time and place to call home. *If only Jadzia could see me now,* she thought.

“You know what?” James finally said. She opened her eyes and looked up at him. “I don’t care how you got here.”

“I don’t mind telling you what happened.”

“I know. And maybe someday you will. But right now, I want to savor this moment with you.”

She smiled and kissed him again. “I hope you won’t get tired of this,” she said.

“Of this,” he paused to kiss her long and deep, “never!”

He took her by the hand and walked down the street, away from his parent’s home. As James’s father arrived home from work and saw the new smile on his son’s face, he had a hard time recognizing James at all. James only gave his father a cursory glance as he and the woman he loved walked by, leaving his family and the past where it belonged.

James and Genesis returned from dinner a few hours later. His father was napping in his room, while his sister and mother were fighting over shoes or some other clothing-related issue. James’s mother, Becky, who was still living at home in the improved time line, was the first to meet Genesis. James introduced her as his girlfriend and invented some wild tale about how they met at work.

“It’s nice to meet you,” Becky said with a smile as Melissa stormed to her room, the battle with her mother lost.

“Likewise,” Genesis answered.

“Mom,” James said, “Genesis is going to sleep in the den if that’s alright. I’d prefer her not to drive alone this late.”

Becky smiled with approval. “That’s fine, James. Just get her whatever she needs from the pantry. Did you need a shower?” she asked Genesis.

“Sure, that would be great!” Genesis replied.

“Okay, there are towels in the closet in the bathroom,” Becky said as she finished the last of the dishes. “Well, I’m off to bed to read. Your father should be getting up from his nap in a bit.” She turned to Genesis: “He’s usually up pretty late watching television. I’ll let him know you’re here. Let me know if it gets too loud.” Becky dried her hands and disappeared.

“Wow,” James exclaimed, “she seems downright happy! I haven’t seen that in a while.”

“Well, remember all we changed,” Genesis said. “Hopefully, it will stay this way.”

James nodded and led Genesis to the den in the basement. There was a pull-out bed along the far wall, a small refrigerator just next to the family computer, and a TV with several of James’s video games hooked up to it.
Although just a den designed for getting nothing done, Genesis felt warm and at home. James was rummaging through an old hope chest – probably his mother’s – filled to the brim with loose-leaf pages and magazines. Underneath a stack of books James’s father had buried years ago was a fat envelope that James ripped open and emptied on the floor. Paper money floated to the carpet, along with a few stock certificates.

“This is all I have,” James said. “It’s a little cash and some stocks my grandparents gave me on the day I was born. I have no idea what it’s worth, but we’ll find out tomorrow.”

Genesis appeared confused.

“It’s for us,” he explained. “For our new life.”

She beamed.

“Gen, I know in my parent’s eyes, we’ve only just met. We’ll have to explain something to them, but I won’t spend another night away from you. I know I love you, and I won’t let my family or anyone else tell me that it’s too soon. Making you wait for us to get married would be unfair to you and…”

“Wait,” she interrupted, “you want to marry me?”

“Of course,” he answered without hesitating. “That’s what this money’s for. Tomorrow, you’re picking out a dress. And as soon as you’re ready, I’m going to marry you.”

She couldn’t contain her happiness any longer. She threw her arms around his neck, kissed him as hard as she could, and cried tears of joy she never knew possible. “I’m ready now,” she whispered in his ear. “I’ve been ready since I first saw you!” Her tears gave way to laughter as he held her tight, kissed her goodnight, and went upstairs to his room. It was the last night either of them would sleep alone.
Chapter 2

Archer awoke from a deep and refreshing slumber and couldn’t remember the last time he slept so well. He went downstairs to make himself a breakfast, but soon realized that his regular meal of a lightly buttered English muffin and weak coffee from the day before were no longer necessary. He wasn’t in a rush to be at work on time, so he decided to prepare a feast that no man could finish. Of course, finishing the meal was hardly the point in Archer’s mind. The purpose here was to savor each bite of a protracted and casual spread of pancakes, biscuits and gravy, and mounds of bacon cooked just right. For a man who had spent much of his adult life eating prepared food or take-out, he realized he had no idea how to prepare a bowl of hot cereal, let alone the meal he imagined here. No matter, he thought. I will simply learn. I figured out how to travel through time, I’m sure bacon and eggs aren’t much harder!

Within a couple of hours, the breakfast was prepared and eaten. Archer lay sprawled out on his living room floor looking up at the ceiling fan and imagining if now was the right time to think about redecorating. A flood of other thoughts began rushing into his mind as the anxiety of his unemployment began to mount. What am I going to do? he thought. Just before Archer’s mind approached a meditative state that removed all cares from the conscious mind, a soft knocking sound came from the front door. It was still hard for Archer to move since the digesting food had begun weighing him down, but after a moment of righting himself, he took a deep sigh and answered the door.

On his doorstep stood a man in a pressed shirt and a suit that appeared to have no wrinkles, almost as though no one had ever sat down in it. His hair was black and perfectly parted down one side and not a strand seemed to be out-of-place. It looked like the man had just come from a factory that manufactured elegant executives. Archer smiled at the man, who merely put out his hand to shake. Archer obliged but not before the man began stepping into his house. For a reason Archer couldn’t explain, he sensed immediately that the man who was already setting his briefcase down was someone he couldn’t ignore. The man was probably accustomed to that perception and forgot to ask permission, Archer thought. Either that or he’s going to kill me.

The man turned to face Archer, but only after first taking a long look around at the house during which Archer lingered on what to say. “I’m sure you’re already expecting me or else I wouldn’t be standing in your living room,” the man said with a strong, indefinable accent.

“Actually,” Archer answered, “I’m not. Should I be?”

The man paused and hummed to himself as though he was processing all he saw and heard. “I’m having doubts about you already.”

“I’m sorry, but who are you exactly?” Archer finally asked.

“I find it unusual that you shook my hand, allowed me enter your home and put my briefcase down, and then make small chat without wondering who I am. I could be here to kill you,” the man said with all seriousness.

“I figured if you were here to kill me, there’s no use being rude and giving you further incentive is there?”

“Good point, Doctor Archer. Well, I am not here to kill you. On the contrary, I’m here for help.”

“Help?” Archer asked. “You don’t seem like a man who needs help from a recently fired government worker.”

The man smiled warmly, the first sign that he was indeed human. “Come now, Doctor. You’re being far too modest. You are much more than a fired government worker. Your work in the field of physics alone may easily provide the greatest leap in our understanding and technology in a century.”

“I appreciate that. Believe me when I say that I would like to take that leap with the rest of the world,
but you’ve got the wrong guy if you need help. I’ve lost all my grant money and as I’m sure you’ve noticed by looking around, most of my prior work has been confiscated.”

“Doctor Archer, I can assure you that if your concern is sponsorship, you need not worry. I, along with the agency I work for, would like to see you continue your work.”

Archer collapsed into his recliner. “I’d love to, pal, but I can’t. The government owns all my work and if I got caught going anywhere near it I’d be strung up for treason.”

The man sat on the couch across from Archer. “No one wants to see that, Doctor. I’m sure you can appreciate the dangerous times we live in.”

“I do understand the times, sir,” Archer said. “More than anyone else, I would love to help. But I believe I’ve already told you my predicament.”

“I respect your loyalty, Doctor, I do,” the man replied. “What would you say, Doctor Archer, if I told you that I could provide you the means to continue your work without your government’s approval?”

Archer chuckled to himself. “I would say no. I’m rather fond of being alive.”

The man smiled again. “Come now, Doctor. I know I don’t have to tell you how important your work is. Think of how many would benefit. You must understand that there are many things the rest of us would rather your government not know about.”

“The rest of us, huh?” Archer said, intrigued.

“Why, the rest of the world, Doctor.” The man finally relaxed his shoulders and sunk back a little into the couch. “I know on your television and movies, the United States is always the first to know everything and the first to save the world. However, I can assure you that the real world functions on another level entirely. Indeed, you will soon find that most of us are more than willing to solve our problems without the help of your government.”

“If I agreed,” Archer said, “what are the conditions?”

“Only one, Doctor Archer. You must never set foot on American soil again. That and you’ll never need to worry about money again. But I know you to be a man who cares not for material wealth, am I right?”

Archer nodded. “What exactly do you need my work for? How will it be used?”

“There are more important ideals in this world than just lines on a map. You will not need to betray your values, or else I would not have chosen you. Believe me when I tell you that you have been observed long before I arrived.” The man suddenly stood up. “And I’m afraid that is all I can share with you at present. We must leave immediately.”

“Now?” Archer asked.

“Why, yes, Doctor. Do not be alarmed. Everything you require will be provided.”

There were many doubts lingering in Archer’s mind, but none that prevented him from making the choice the unusual man expected. Archer stood up slowly and followed the man out the door. It would be the last time he ever saw his home.

The following morning, Genesis awoke and dressed herself before going upstairs to wake her future husband. She was too late, as James was already hard at work preparing a breakfast for the entire family.
“Good morning,” he said as he removed bacon from the skillet.

“Where did you learn to cook?” she said with a smile.

“Oh Genesis,” he replied, “there’s so much you don’t know about me!”

“Hmm,” she sighed as she kissed him. “Then maybe we should postpone our wedding,” she teased.

“Not on your life,” he said. “Are you ready to meet the rest of the family?”

She straightened her hair and dress in the full body mirror on the basement door. “I feel like I already know them.”

“Yes, of course,” he said, remembering all she had already seen. “Still, they don’t know you. So behave, and for God’s sake, keep your clothes on.”

“Very clever,” she answered with a smirk.

A moment later, they heard footsteps rush down the stairs. It was James’s sister, Melissa. She was still dressing when she sat down at the table without even realizing the stranger in the dining room. “Did you cook all this, Ja…” she began to ask when she noticed Genesis standing beside James. “Oh, hi! You must be the new girlfriend.” She said with a laugh as she chided her brother.

Genesis was not amused. “Fiancée, actually,” she corrected. “My name is Genesis.”

Melissa nearly choked on her milk and looked up at James in shock. “Do Mom and Dad know?”

James served Melissa her food and answered: “Not yet.”

“I can’t say this isn’t typical of you,” she said, eating her food without expressing any thanks to her brother.

Genesis was about to respond when she heard the sound of more footsteps coming down the stairs. It was James’s mother.

“Sleep well?” she said to Genesis.

Genesis nodded.

“Did you hear?” Melissa whispered to their mother, while making sure she was loud enough to be heard by everyone. “James is marrying this girl.”

“Hey!” James shouted. “Mind your own business!” Genesis approached his side and put her hand on his shoulder as though to encourage him not to stoop to her level.

“But James,” Melissa said, “do you even know this girl? Dad is going to kill you!”

Becky cleared her throat and said: “Are you sure you’re not rushing into things again? Your father…”

James returned from the kitchen with a stack of blueberry pancakes. “Yeah, well there are more important things in this life than Dad’s opinion,” he said plainly. His sister looked at him in shock, since she never knew him to speak so boldly about their father. In fact, the James she knew lived in almost total fear of losing their father’s approval. “Just eat up before it gets cold,” he said.

Genesis took a seat next to James and began to eat alongside him. His sister finished her meal a few moments later without saying a word. She was out the door and on to her job long before James’s father came down
to breakfast.

“Are you sure, James?” his mother asked again.

“I’m sure,” he said. “Genesis and I will be very happy together.”

Genesis wrapped her arm around his and smiled at Becky in agreement. She returned a smile and said: “Good. Well, I’m happy for you both. So have you decided a date then?”

Genesis winked at James in an effort to let him know she stood by him. “Actually,” James said, “we have. In fact, would you mind giving us a ride to city hall today?”

His mother sat shocked as she lifted a cup of coffee to her lips. “You know how bad that sounds, don’t you?”

“It does, doesn’t it?” he said with all seriousness. “But I love Genesis, and I know I’m going to marry her someday anyway. So why not today?”

Becky nodded her head as though she was trying to study the two lovers. Genesis’s smile was beaming while James was waiting anxiously for a response. “Indeed,” she said. “Why not today?” His mother arose and embraced her new daughter-in-law-to-be and her son. “I’m off to get dressed. Your father should be down in a few minutes. Good luck!” She left the table and hurried upstairs.

“My Dad saw you yesterday,” James whispered, “and I have no idea what he’s going to think. I’m sure my sister has already filled him in. In fact, I’m sure of it since he usually doesn’t get up for another hour.”

She smiled. “Well, if there’s enough money in that envelope, we won’t have to worry what he thinks, will we?”

"Even if those stocks are as worthless as a Cracker Jack prize, I don't care what he thinks anymore."

Just then, James’s father came to the table, prepared a plate of the food, and reheated it in the microwave. Genesis sat bewildered that not a single member of James’s family had thanked him for all his hard work. He’s going to know how much I appreciate him every day! she thought. His father returned a moment later and ate while also making a concerted effort to avoid eye contact with Genesis.

Genesis’s eyes watered as James’s father said nothing. He obviously wanted nothing to do with her, but she was more concerned with the way the family treated James so disrespectfully. James saw the tears stream down her cheek but she said nothing. For a moment, he thought about telling his father all the things he wanted to say but something inside him told him to bite his tongue. Genesis wiped her eyes and regained her composure, suddenly indifferent to his father’s treatment. As James prepared to stand, her hand reached out to his and restrained him.

His father finished his breakfast, tossed the plate in the kitchen sink, and walked out the door. James let out a sigh, a deep breath, and then cried.

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

“That is the last time I’ll ever see him.”

"Are you sure you won’t regret saying that?” she asked.

He shook his head. “Not anymore. I don’t need negative people in my life.”

She nodded, trying again to understand. “What about your mother?”

Just then, Becky skipped down the stairs with a joyful smile on her face. “You two ready to disappoint
“Five minutes ago,” James replied as he swallowed his last bite.

James and Genesis left his childhood home for the last time a few minutes later. By afternoon, they were married by a city official.

John Archer sat aboard a small jet with the man who had whisked him away from his old home. The man, who identified himself in the limousine as simply Roger, sat across from Archer and continued studying him. The plane began to taxi and a minute later was airborne.

“May I ask where we are going?” Archer asked.

“You are free to ask anything,” Roger replied with a smirk that left no doubt in Archer’s mind that the location would remain a secret.

“Well, then, while we’re here, why not tell me more about yourself?” Archer suggested.

“I am but one of many individuals who wishes better things for mankind.”

A very young girl, possibly under eighteen, approached Archer from behind and served him a drink. “That’s very cryptic of you,” he said to Roger. He nodded to the girl, who after bowing slightly to Roger, walked away.

“Please understand, Doctor Archer,” Roger said, “that for the time being we need to keep a certain level of confidentiality about our purposes.”

“But surely that doesn’t include who you are, does it?”

Roger smirked again. “Very well. What would you like to know?”

“You already seem to know so much about me,” Archer continued. “I just fail to see how my work on time-travel is going to affect mankind in such grandiose ways you imagine.”

“Ah, so you do want to know about the mission, then?”

“No,” Archer backpedaled, “Well, yes, of course. But that’s not my point. My work was largely theoretical. It will take years before anything can be built that would put my work into practice.”

“And as I said at your home, Doctor, you will not want for resources. Even time is relative.”

“Of course,” he said as he looked out the window and saw a vast ocean beneath them. “And since time seems to be all we have a lot of right now, how about you tell me more about your work and how it so desperately needs mine?”

Roger kept his eyes focused on Archer without blinking. A moment later, he sat back and unbuttoned his shirt’s top collar. “Very well.”

Val Ferguson stood quietly over the grave of her husband. What a stupid war, she thought. One month. One month was all the time she had with him.

Although greatly saddened by her loss, as she stood over his grave, she didn’t shed a tear. The funeral ended an hour earlier and the graveyard was now empty, with only a crisp November chill lingering. A tall man
approached Val slowly, and in an indefinable accent, said: “I’m truly sorry for your loss, young lady.”

She turned around and scowled at the man. Her expression softened when she saw his smile-less face. “This shouldn’t have happened,” she said.

He stepped forward. “Nor ever happen again,” he said in agreement.

“How,” she mumbled, as though acknowledging his sentiment, but doubtfully.

“This is such an inconvenient time, but I beg for a few moments of your time, Ms. Ferguson.”

Without a hint of wonder about how he knew her name, she said: “On the contrary, with my husband gone and an empty house waiting, I can’t think of a better time for a drink.” Val and the man she would soon come to know as Roger left the cemetery without uttering a word to each other.

Twenty minutes later, Val was half-drunk, having numbed herself with the drinks she just chugged at the pub down the street from the cemetery. Roger examined her patiently, determined to let her break the silence.

She rewarded his patience seconds later. “Have you ever wondered what the world would truly be like without war?” she mused.

Roger smiled. “What do you think it would be like?”

“A lot like this beer,” she explained. “It makes me feel good, but it always leaves me wanting something…more. Do you know what I mean?” He nodded. “I think a measure of conflict is a good thing once in a while.”

“I see,” he said.

“Not that I like war,” she said in defense. “I just can’t imagine a perfect society where everyone gets along forever. Eventually, people will fight. And if bad people surface, then people should.”

“Do you think that will ever happen?”

“Not without a lot of death and destruction first.”

“How much would be necessary in your view?”

“Total,” she answered, without hesitating.

“So,” he began, “you believe that to truly achieve a utopia, we must completely start over.”

She sat still with her head bowed, taking the time to answer clearly. “I used to see a world that made sense. Good triumphed over evil; martyrs rewarded. But it’s not enough anymore. Fighting evil without attacking its source only leaves the problem for a future generation.”

“And what do you believe to be the source of all evil?”

“This whole society. We’ll never have peace as long as we’re so divided.”

Roger leaned forward to engage her in the debate deeper. “So, are nations the problem? Race? Money?”

“All of it. Not that there should only be one race, but one nation definitely! And no money either.”

“Oh,” he said, “I see now what you mean. There can be no lines on a map for true peace to exist.”
She shook her head. “This civilization has failed us all. I can only hope we get it right next time.”

“Then I am indeed glad we’ve met,” Roger said. “I’m actually the head of an organization devoted to doing just that: getting it right.”

She began to laugh, but then realized she didn’t need to. For a reason she didn’t understand, she knew he wasn’t joking. “You’re serious, aren’t you?” she asked, just to confirm.

The man sat back and folded his hands. “We’ve recently acquired the work of a brilliant physicist who has made an incredible discovery during his employ for the United States government. Further questioning has revealed he is uncommitted to our ultimate goal, but we need his work to achieve it. Doctor Archer is heading an expedition that will allow us to meet our ends, despite not knowing our true aims. I am impressed with Doctor Archer’s altruism, but he fails to see the larger picture. But you are not so short-sighted, so you can see why I am happy to meet you.”

She chugged the rest of her beer. “Before we sit here a minute longer, I want facts: what are your ultimate goals?”

He waited a moment and studied her. “What I am about to share is so sensitive, I normally do not speak of it on American soil. Doctor Archer’s work relates to traveling through time. He is under the impression that the expedition will gather medicine and cures from the future to bring back and solve all of our greatest ills. Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth. Without his knowledge, we have performed several reconnaissance missions using his technology. We have isolated a weapon designed as the ultimate deterrent to nuclear war, which not surprisingly, is still a threat in the future. When activated from the atmosphere, it finds the genetic markers common to all humans and eliminates those life forms. So as not to be mistaken, within seconds, seven billion lives will come to an abrupt – but necessary – end.”

Val nodded. “What do you need me for?”

“I don’t wish to sugar-coat this,” Roger said. “The civilian participants have a very specific role to play. Put simply: it’s to repopulate the earth.”

“Ah,” she said, “so you need me to function as some sort of brood mare, huh?”

“Not quite,” Roger went on. “Many of the participants are long-time associates of my organization, but a few of them are suddenly having second thoughts. The search is underway to fill our group, but we need someone committed to ensure our plan succeeds. I believe that someone to be you.”

“But I’ll still be needed for breeding purposes, right?”

“Not exactly. Archer is a brilliant man, and I would like him to be a part of the new society…”

“I see,” she interrupted. “So you need me to seduce him? Tell me, is there any part of this plan where my vagina does not play a prominent role?”

“There is more,” he interrupted back. “The agreed participants have been carefully selected and are willing to play their part in the repopulation. Since you are so concerned with the use of your reproductive organs, however, I am willing to give you an exclusive position that includes the option to remain celibate should you choose.”

“And how is that a reward?”

“The program is structured to allow only the celibates a role in governance. The celibates are not compromised easily and are more focused in my experience. Do you see what I am offering you? You will have the power to promote great change in the future society.”
"But why me?" she asked.

Roger sat back and unbuttoned his top shirt button. "Ms. Ferguson, my organization is always on the lookout for people who are disgruntled with the current system. While this may sound predatory, most of those people, in my experience, have been spouses of the armed forces. We live in a time of great war, so there are not a few such disgruntled ones. Given your personal history and emotional stake in world affairs, I believe you possess the necessary trait I need."

"What's that?"

"Indifference. Indifference toward the current political system. Did you know that you were the only student in your college that did not side with a political faction? The current world order has failed you, Valerie. It has failed me - really, all of us. I need people desperate for change."

“Then I assume you won't be offering me promises of wealth?”

He shook his head. “There will be no money in the new order.”

“Good,” she replied.

“Then we have a deal?”

She nodded. Roger and Val left the pub without acknowledging the check on their table and, within moments, she was on a plane to the organization’s secret base. She would become its most loyal agent.
Chapter 3

A week after their wedding at city hall, James and Genesis found an apartment they could afford and moved out of the hotel where they spent their honeymoon. The joy the newlyweds shared together was heightened by the knowledge that the love they shared on their wedding night and countless occasions since then was known only to them.

Life in their new home was one of routine, but both of them relished the comfort that the order in their new lives brought. For Genesis, finding a comfortably paced schedule helped her ease into her new life. James’s life prior to Genesis was turbulent and chaotic; his life now was one of great peace and tranquility.

True to his mother’s warning on the way to city courthouse, James’s father and sister reacted with much shock and distress over the sudden news. Melissa sided with her father and rarely called or visited during those early months of their marriage. She eventually came around, but true to his own word, James never saw his father again.

As Genesis suspected and later warned James, their getting married might alter the stream of time in unforeseeable ways. Indeed, his parents remained together but his father was killed in an automobile accident a few months after their wedding. James and Genesis attended the funeral naturally, although he spent the following weeks pondering the wisdom of what turned out to be his final moments with his father. But as Genesis had taught him earlier, it was futile to live in the past.

The ease of their new life made the grief more bearable than he had anticipated. The stocks and certificates James had stored in his family’s hope chest were worth far more than expected. In addition, unknown to James and the rest of his family, his father made a sudden adjustment to his will that allocated the vast majority of his estate to James, with very little left over for Becky and Melissa. All told, he and Genesis had enough to live comfortably without the immediate need to determine the direction of their lives. Genesis was content to adore her husband and care for their home, a job she yearned for most of her life and only got to enjoy in small doses in her life with Jadzia. James had a new sense of purpose and direction and decided to use the bulk of his newfound wealth to set up a charity to care for lost children, a cause important to him given Genesis’s absent past.

Indeed, their new life was one of peace and calm. But it was not to last. Just a year after they married, James came home from work to find Genesis collapsed on the floor in the kitchen. Her pulse was slow but steady, and her breathing shallow. He grabbed the phone and dialed 911 and from that moment, he never left her side.

As Genesis lay in a coma, he sat beside her and stroked her hair. Doctors and nurses came and went, none of them with immediate answers as to the cause of her illness. After several longs hours, she finally awoke.

“Where am I?” she said.

“You’re in the hospital,” he said standing over her. “You were in a coma.”

“How long was I asleep?” she asked.

“About six hours.”

“I had the funniest dream,” she said.

“Oh yeah?” he said. “Tell me.”

She gushed. “I was replaying in my mind that time you were trapped in the body of your mother’s stepfather.”

“Don't remind me!” he answered as his face turned red. She laughed.
“I never told you this, did I?” she said. “But that was when I would be with you forever.”


“I don’t know,” she said, feeling ashamed she never admitted it sooner. “I guess it was because you were doing a better job than me. You were totally selfless.” She blushed. “I found that very attractive.” She smiled, then leaned in and kissed him.

James and the woman he loved sat together holding hands a few moments more before she fell asleep again. A doctor entered a minute later and James told him what happened.

The doctor then explained the results of her blood tests.

“We found a chemical substance in her bloodstream that we were unable to identify, but the resulting disease is something we see all too often: cancer.”

“What are you saying, Doctor? That someone poisoned my wife?”

“It looks that way.”

“What can you do?”

The doctor reexamined the chart and shook his head. “Nothing, I’m afraid.”

James turned away and touched his wife’s cheek.

“I’m sorry, sir,” the doctor said. He turned and left James to grieve.

The head of the New World Organization was born Roger Cooke. He was born in a tiny village in Brazil to a pair of German refugees. His father worked as a scientist under Adolf Hitler and after the war and found innocent of any crimes against humanity, he exiled himself to South America and changed his family name, desperate to start his life over. There, Wolfgang Cooke spent the rest of his life engaged in philanthropic efforts and promoting world peace.

Under a number of aliases, Wolfgang lobbied the nations to create equality among the world’s peoples. As the Cold War heated up, he realized that his message of unity had fallen on deaf ears in the West while the Communists agreed with the tenets of his cause in principle, but they were unwilling to apply the ideal to all people, including the leaders. In Wolfgang’s mind, the only way true unity could be achieved was if the leaders played by the same rule as the people.

As Wolfgang grew older, his resolve weakened. He still saw use in the political system, while his son wanted nothing to do with it. Educated in America and Europe, Roger Cooke realized the basic teachings of his father were correct. He saw first-hand the hypocrisy of the elite, who held up the few hard-workers who achieved tremendous wealth as a means to convince all people that they too could do the same - provided they show up to work and invest heavily in the stock market. How no one saw through this ploy was unbelievable to Roger! But his father’s methods of uniting all people were outdated, Roger thought. Wolfgang continually funneled money into the current system and donated to causes he believed in, having convinced himself that this could bring about real
change. He even set up a not-for-profit corporation in America (under an alias, of course). But as long as he did this, Roger believed his father to be part of the problem. Nothing solidified his resolve more than when his parents were murdered by the very people they were trying to help. Despite all his parents’ hard work donating millions of dollars to protect the rights of the working class, four mineworkers from South Korea tracked the Cookes to Brazil and brutally killed them. Local union leaders that the Cookes were working to undermine convinced the workers to carry out the crime, this despite their acceptance of a large donation from the Cookes.

The charity organization, which Wolfgang left to Roger upon his demise, was subsequently dissolved and later the funds absconded by Roger. His parents lived long enough to see Roger marry Jennifer, an American entrepreneur and the only woman he knew that shared his desire to live quietly and at peace - only without the bankrupting morals they attributed to the present world system.

It was a dream they would share together until he shared it alone - on her deathbed.

A few months after Archer was recruited, Roger stood silently in his office looking out across a vast ocean. Storm clouds gathered to the east, but Roger wasn’t worried about anything the weather might bring to the Agency’s command center. The engineers assured him the organization’s flagship vessel was durable and unsinkable. Just like the Titanic, he thought with a smile.

Behind Roger sat a large group of people representing every major occupation on Earth. While their work history was diverse, they were all equally attractive: the men handsome and fit, the women all buxom and pretty. After all, if these people were to be the foundations of the new society of humankind, they needed to be attracted to each another - at least to the extent that babies would result. He turned to face them and allowed a smile to escape, to which the group responded in kind.

“Before we begin,” he said, “I know that I’ve personally vetted each of you and I’m sure you are all persons of significant character or else you wouldn’t be here. Nevertheless, the import of this mission will affect every man, woman, and child on this planet, so please: Listen up!”

The group sat up straight in their chairs and almost as one, folded their hands on their individual desks like schoolchildren. A young man toward the back of the room raised his hand.

“Go ahead, Professor Williams?”

The man nodded. “Will we be paid for this?”

Archer’s smirk disappeared as he nodded to a guard by the door. The guard walked straight back to where the man was sitting. “I’ll need you to come with me, Professor,” the guard said sternly. The man stood up and walked out of the room with the guard in tow. The rest of the room grew silent.

“I can assure the rest of you,” Roger went on, “that if money is all you seek, then please, excuse yourself. You can await our return in a prison cell with Professor Williams.” No one moved an inch. “Good. You see, we took great care to make sure that all of you were chosen for a certain selflessness you possess. Apparently, Professor Williams managed to see beyond our little ruse and slip through the cracks. It was bound to happen. He is a psychologist so we should have seen that coming.”

The group laughed.

“I understand that all of this has been a bit hard to swallow. You’ve all been vetted, interviewed, dragged out of bed, forced to say goodbye to your family, flown out to a remote location, and given no information. Oh yes,” he added, “for no money either.” They laughed cautiously. “What I can tell you now is that all our lives are about to get better. Soon, class distinction, racism, and poverty will be a thing of the past - because we will create a world without it.

“As you enjoy your time aboard and our mission gets underway, please keep our true intentions from
Doctor Archer. He is an idealist like the rest of us but he lacks the commitment we need. As far as he knows, we are going to bring medicine and knowledge from the future.

"You will all be going into the future with our security team so you can see that our plan is a necessary step toward achieving world peace. You will see firsthand the chaos that will result if the current civilization matures. While you wait, feel free to begin the work for which you’ve been hired for.” He smiled broadly as he watch the exchange of glances between the male and female participants.

A young college student in New Jersey raised Valerie Ferguson in a filthy, rat-infested trailer park. At the time of her birth, Valerie's mother, Jane, worked as an exotic dancer at a nightclub next-door to a prison where her clients were just a few gropes away from becoming inmates themselves. Valerie was brought up by, not just her birth mother, but by several of the dancers. When Valerie was three years old, enough of the women at the club had babies that one of them quit dancing and opened a day care for the children.

Valerie entered preschool with two of the other girls she played with at day care. Jane and the other mothers resented the way their children came to know each other and vowed to make sure that none of them followed their paths. All three of the mothers were recovering drug addicts and did not graduate high school. While none of them believed there was any correlation between those two facts, all of them pushed their daughters hard to excel in school. Word got out of what their mothers did for work, and the ensuing persecution came much sooner than their mothers expected.

Still, despite all the pressure they received from home, Val was the only one of the few children who managed to forge a different path than their mothers. She graduated high school valedictorian and at every college she applied, she was accepted. Her mother eventually took night classes, got her diploma, and quit the nightclub. As a result, she made far less money than she and Val were accustomed to and college was largely paid for by scholarships and grants, including several from the Cooke Family College Fund.

Val relished life on campus away from home. She loved her mother, but her friends had fallen into their mothers' familiar habits. One of them got pregnant shortly after graduating high school and Val feared if she hung around, she might feel forced to stay out of obligation to her friends.

In college, Val got involved in politics for the first time. Her friends at school all belonged to different political groups, but there was so much infighting between them that Val came to see them as gangs.

“Gangs are for stupid people!” her girlfriends would often cry.

Even if they were right, Val hated the mentality of the factions and deplored them for keeping people so divided. Her mother, so long described by her schoolmates as a welfare mom, had become so calloused toward politics over time that she wanted her daughter to stay out of it altogether.

Val just wanted to see people united in a common cause. She got her wish during spring break her junior year when a nuclear weapon set off by an international - militia destroyed the nation's capital. The government acted in a predictable way and declared war on every nation it suspected of promoting, not the actions of the militia, but the ideals of it. Suddenly, everyone at school solved their differences and united for the war effort. This isn't what I had in mind, she thought.

As the young men and women at her school joined the armed forces, Val finally saw what unity of this sort came to produce in the end – more division. As time went on and war weariness set in, everything from how the war was managed to whether it should have been started became heated debates on campus and led to several riots. The student body was divided.

As Val approached graduation, she lost more and more friends as she refused to choose sides in all of the futile debates going on. When forced to take sides, she would half-jokingly say: “We need to start civilization over!” It always drew a laugh and helped lighten the mood but Val secretly began wishing it would happen.
When she met Paul at her new job, Val finally saw a ray of hope. Unfortunately, just days after their wedding, the army drafted him. A month later, Paul's unit shipped out. It was the last time she saw him alive.

Roger Cooke met his wife, Jennifer, at his father’s not-for-profit charity headquarters. It was love at first sight. While he initially focused on his father’s work after college and tried to prove its futility, a young accountant disabled Roger's attention dramatically.

Their love grew quickly and their courtship raced faster than either of them anticipated. Within only months, they were married.

Shortly after their wedding, and just after his parents' deaths, Jennifer was hard at work on a treadmill in their home when the time had come for the secret she had kept from her new husband to be confessed.

“Roger!” she shouted.

Roger hurried downstairs to the exercise room. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah. I have something I need to tell you,” she said as she continued working out.

He sat down and gave her his full attention.

“I've read your work.”

He hung his head and prepared for the worst. His work she referred to was a journal he kept in his office outlining the flaws of his father's organization and his recommendations. “You did, huh?” he asked, trying not to sound overly worried. No good: his voice cracked.

“Yes,” she answered, panting along. “Are you mad at me?”

“Mad? No. I'd been meaning to share that with you anyway. I just didn't know what you'd think.”

“You make a lot of good points. I mean, I admire your father's work, but it's really just more of the same. Relying on the same broken system to somehow fix itself is like asking a dead guy to cure his own cancer.”

“That's clever,” he said.

“In your essay, you mentioned an ultimate solution but you never described it.”

“That's partly because I don't know what it is.”

“Are you sure, or do you not want to tell me? Afraid I'll leave you?” she asked with a wink.

“No, I really don't know. A part of me knows what needs to happen but it's too hard to say out loud.”

“I think your conclusions are right.”

“That we need to start over?”

“Yes. There's no other way. Anything else is just going to fix the symptoms of a broken world. The cure is rebuilding.”

Roger sat shocked at her nonchalant description; she sounded like she wasn't serious. “It sounds like you've been thinking about this for a while,” he said, giving her the benefit of the doubt.
“Well, honey,” she said, “it sure was a relief to read it on paper. I mean, I believe in what your father did but I could tell it’d never be enough. But reading your work was like hearing all the things I’ve wanted to say but didn't know how.”

“I’m glad I'm not alone.”

She stopped the treadmill and got off the machine. She wiped her forehead with a towel and stepped closer to Roger. After kissing him, she walked to the adjacent bathroom, started the shower, and took off her clothes. Standing in the doorway, clad only in sweat, she said: “You're not alone anymore. But there's more I need to tell you.”

Val followed Roger onto the private jet and sat across from him. She paused as her foot left the asphalt and stepped into the jet, curious whether this would be the last time she would feel the ground of her homeland beneath her feet.

“I've never flown in a private jet before,” she said.

“It's an unfortunate necessity. I use it for security only.” The door closed behind them and they took their seats and buckled their belts.

An attendant, an attractive girl of less than legal age, approached and placed a glass of champagne in front of Roger and Val. Demurely, she nodded and walked away.

“Are you really in that much danger? I mean, how many know of your organization?”

“As far as governments go, no one. We take great pains in keeping them off our track. However, other organizations around the world know of our existence. They have similar goals as we do but rely on different methods: some fund grass-root militias – like the one that destroyed the capital back in your college days, some work to install puppet leaders. Globally, they form a Cabal of organizations that exist to effect change in the world system.”

“I think I know the answer already, but why is your organization superior?”

“We are the only one with Dr. Archer's technology, for one thing. And we are the only ones who have concluded that time travel is the only way to bring ultimate change.”

“When do I get to meet Dr. Archer?”

“You won't actually. I'm trying to keep Archer busy and away from everyone aware of the mission. The one exception is the group of one hundred civilians that will bring back as much as we can to start things off right. I've let him interview many of them in order to give him a break from the technical drudgery associated with designing our vessel. He's a fine man to be sure, with more altruism than I’ve seen in most, but he presently knows nothing of the mission. I intend to keep it that way.”

“And why does that mean I can't see him?” she said with a smile.

“Well, Val,” he began, “I believe you are bound for great things. Your commitment to our collective dream is strong; I believe I can rely on you for anything. I need to keep my finest people anonymous for now. As we get closer to launch, your place with us will mean that only those privy to our goal know your identity.

“As for Dr. Archer, he is largely confined to the scientific wing of our home base. Having worked for the government, he is familiar with security protocols and hasn't tried to explore the rest of the facility.”

Val finished the last of her champagne and propped her feet on the chair beside Roger. She pulled her long, black hair into a ponytail. “What's his hold-up, exactly?”
Roger saw Val’s efforts to get comfortable and loosened his tie a little. “Dr. Archer's motivation is the advancement of science. He sees politics as a roadblock to science, but also sees it as a necessary tool for governance. I do too, but it's the sort of governance we disagree on. On numerous occasions, I've tried to put the bug in his ear, as it were, and ultimately his feelings have remained unchanged. Naturally, I've approached the matter without giving him the slightest indication that we're keeping a secret from him.

“What makes him so valuable is the motivation to see advancement in his field. Many likewise brilliant men are blinded by faith or patriotism and will drop their work if pressed by either of those forces. Archer, however, is so committed to see time travel become a reality – and the ills of the world cured – that he was willing to leave his homeland's soil for life. That kind of devotion to an ideal is rare among the clinically sane.”

“I see,” Val said. “What about the Cabal?”

Roger shifted in his seat suddenly. “The Cabal I mentioned earlier is...fortunately not a force we'll need to worry about. There are many good people working for their organizations, and I would be lying if I told you I haven't tried to recruit some of their finer members. We used to be one organization in the good old days, but split when our leader died.”

“Who was the leader?”

“My wife, Jennifer. I had no idea of her involvement when we married, but she came to me shortly after we wed and told me everything. We were small back then. I call her our leader, but there were only fifteen of us in all.”

“How did she die?”

Roger closed his eyes and shook his head. “Tragically, I'm afraid.”
Chapter 4

Genesis remained motionless on the hospital bed, dozens of monitors attached to her pale body. James sat close by, holding her hand. Nurses and doctors had been coming and going since they first arrived. No one spoke much, at least not loudly. James made it clear by his demeanor that he wasn't prepared to talk to anyone unless they had a way to reverse her condition. So far, no one did.

His mind drifted immediately to memories of their life together. As he reflected on all the joys they shared, he was proud to admit he had no regrets; no petty arguments, no bickering, never any name-calling. Their married life was truly one of peace. Before he realized what he was doing, he began whispering to her all of his thoughts. He told her of the moment he fell in love with her. It was the moment he first saw her, floating delicately in front of him in all of her naked glory. As their time together took them deep into his family's past and back again, his love for her grew deeper: first as a friend, and before he knew it, the deep love he felt for her now. And from the day she appeared on his doorstep a full-grown woman, he never took her for granted; instead he told her every day in unique ways how much she meant to him. The only thing that made him happier was how Genesis never let him forget her love in return.

He rested his head on her chest as the room grew silent. As he often liked to do late at night, he listened to her heart softly beat. She would tell him many times how her heart always beat for him.

The hour was late and Genesis’s condition had not changed. The nurses urged James to go home, but he refused. Soon, hunger overtook him and so he left his wife in the care of the nurses while he went to the cafeteria for food.

At two o’clock in the morning, a man approached James’s table.

“Good morning,” the man said.

James looked up from his meal and shook his head. “Far from it,” he said.

“I can only assume that I’ve caught you at a terrible time, Mr. Grant.”

“The love of my life is dying.”

The man pulled a chair up to the table and sat down. “I'm terribly sorry I have to disturb you at such a horrible time, Mr. Grant, but it's urgent we talk.”

“Not a chance,” he said.

“Please, James,” John Archer said. “I have something to share that might help.”

Roger held Jennifer's hand as she lay comatose in a hospital bed, her heart rate monitor beating steadily. Her body was pale and she was unresponsive since they arrived. For what felt like days now, Roger never left her side – even to get food and water for himself.

They were brought here by ambulance from their house. He had just returned home from work and saw a shattered window in their living room and his wife lying in a pool of blood on the floor. She had been stabbed.

First my parents, now this, he thought as he cupped her hand. Nurses came and went, each time taking readings, taking notes, and leaving. One by one, doctors came in the room to assess her health but left defeated, unable to offer a solution. Her internal organs were too damaged. She would never regain consciousness.
Roger then remembered the letter she gave him to read upon her death; it remained locked in a safe with her other valuables. While no comfort now, it offered him one last chance to hear her voice, if only in his mind.

Within hours of the robbery, Jennifer Cooke died.

Roger was comforted at the hospital by a friend and driven home later that night. The shock of the evening's events set in and by morning, Roger sat stone-faced and tearless in her favorite chair. The letter she wrote him remained locked away in their safe until later that evening when Roger finally managed to feed and bathe himself. The phone rang constantly and even though he hated the newfound silence, he hated even more the incessant ringing and so turned off all the phones in the house.

After ordering Chinese take-out, Roger opened the safe and then the sealed letter that sat atop a gilded jewelry box. Sitting down in his most comfortable chair, Roger took a sip of whiskey and read:

Dearest Roger,

It is my sincerest hope that you never read this letter because if you do, it means I have left you far too soon. If you find yourself alone and reading these words, please know that my love for you was the purest love I have ever known.

I leave the organization I have started in your loving care. There is no one I trust more to see our solution see the light of day.

I fear with my death, divisions within the organization will appear. No matter how much we hope human nature can change given our lofty goals, you must not forget that pride is a powerful thing. If such divisions occur, I want you to forge ahead – alone if necessary.

Take care, my dear husband, and if your mission is successful, perhaps you will bring me with you.

Your loving wife,

Jennifer

The following day, Roger left their home, withdrew their savings, and deposited them into the account with the large inheritance his parents left him, and moved to the organization's headquarters offshore - a small rented office in the Cayman Islands. While Jennifer's predictions of division came true, Roger stayed the course and within five years he acquired enough talent to become the largest of the sects.

Years later, Roger searched through a report his spy network produced and came across the name of a scientist who just made a brilliant discovery – and much sooner than he had anticipated. Time travel could now be achieved, and he and his wife's shared vision could now become a reality. We bring this change together! he thought.

Val stepped off the private jet and looked around at her new home, a floating platform that looked like a deep-sea oil-drilling rig. She followed Roger and the other crewmembers below deck and was amazed at just how few people worked on such a huge base.
“This must be the slow shift, huh?” she blurted out.

Roger turned to address her as they walked. “No, there are only about two hundred and fifty people aboard, including the civilians.”

“So where do you rank among the Cabal?” she said with a laugh.

Roger smirked. “We rank the highest in every way, my dear.”

They continued on a few decks lower to the crewmember’s quarters. Halfway down the cramped corridor, Roger suddenly stopped.

“This is your room, Val.”

She stepped inside and examined her new home. She carried no bags, as they left the bar with only the clothes on her back and spent every minute since on the jet.

“All that you require will be provided. We have quite a few styles of clothing you can choose from in the commissary below, all provided free of charge. Food is yours for the taking, as are any other items you need to be more comfortable.” He followed her into the room and gently closed the door behind him.

Val tried her best not to appear disappointed at the size of her room since it was much smaller than she imagined. As though trying to convince herself that all was wonderful, she sat on the bare mattress and jumped up and down to test it.

“Will you be okay for now?” Roger asked.

“Sure. Is there anything you need from me?”

He smiled. “Not at the moment. Please, take some time to personalize your room as much as you'd like. This is temporary until we complete our mission. Sheets for the bed are in the bathroom, which is just through that door behind you.” He pointed. “Consider yourself fortunate: most of the celibates share a shower room.”

“And if I want to share?” she asked.

“You're free to do so, of course. Although I should warn you, the governance rules are quite strict and if your goal is to remain celibate, it may be wiser to avoid a room full of naked men.”

“Of course. I was being facetious anyway.” She winked at him.

Roger cleared his throat and smiled, realizing he'd just been had. “Yes, of course you were. Well, anyway, I have a lot to attend to so...you'll be alright for a while?”

She nodded.

“Good. If you need anything, use this. I'll alert everyone who needs to know of your presence.” He sat a small, implantable ear radio on the nightstand beside the bed. “Just say my name and it will connect you to me directly. Thank you for joining us, Val.”

She smiled and said: “You're welcome. I'm here if you need anything.”

“Don't worry about having something to do. The real fun begins in the morning. For now, take a shower, enjoy your dinner, and check out the library a few levels down. Try to have some fun, as strange as it all sounds. You'll hear from me soon enough.”

Roger turned from Val and opened the door. He exited a moment later and closed the door quietly. Val
hopped off the bed and looked around her room more. She realized Roger was kidding about acquiring clothes from the commissary because as she looked in the drawers of her new dresser, she found, neatly folded, all of her clothes from home – from undergarments to formal wear. Wow! she thought. He must have known I'd say yes.

Content that not all of her old life had been abandoned, Val proceeded to the bathroom and filled the tub for a bath. Much like the dresser, the tub was arranged just as she had it decorated at home, with all of her scented candles and bath supplies where she expected to find them. After removing her clothes, Val slid under the warm water and closed her eyes. Home.

James looked down at his cup of coffee, which he had barely sipped, and said nothing. The man who just introduced himself as John Archer had taken a seat at his table and listened as James just finished telling him of the recent events. He was still rattled by the thought that someone caused this to his wife intentionally, but Archer claimed he could help with her condition.

“James, what I am about to tell you very few people know. In fact, you are one of only two Americans on United States soil who have ever heard these words. I am head of a project conducted by an organization that is about to go on a remarkable expedition. When I worked for the government, I discovered proof that travel through time was possible.”

I knew that! James thought to himself.

“Now, I know you'll have a hard time believing this but I'm going to have to cut to the chase since time is short. The group I am putting together is going to do just what I was able to prove: travel through time. A vessel is waiting in a secure location for one hundred experts from all over the world and they are ready to leave. The trouble is I only have ninety-nine people, Mr. Grant.”

James finally stirred a little and looked up.

“Do you see why I am here now, James?”

“Why?”

Archer jumped a bit in his chair, as he did not expect James to say anything until he was through. “Well, I am here to…”

“No,” James interrupted, “why are you traveling through time?”

Archer smiled. “You're a wise man for asking. But first, may I ask you with what affliction your wife suffered from?”

“Cancer,” James said plainly.

“I see,” Archer said. “I know this may not be of much comfort now, James, but millions of good people like you have been pained by the effects of this disease. The purpose of the mission is to rid the world of all such pain.

“You see, the main reason we are going on such a journey is to jump-start the world's civilizations. Isn't it interesting that there have been no major breakthroughs or cures for major diseases in over fifty years? What if you were able to go deep into the future and find the cures to all the world's plagues? And what if you could bring them back to our time? Think of the lives we could save.”

“You can't be serious,” James said, cutting Archer off. “What about potential paradoxes you could create in the stream of time?”
"We have already addressed such concerns," Archer continued. "The very first people who were brought on board were a team of ethicists to debate precisely what you speak of. Believe me, James, we wouldn’t engage in such a dangerous ambition unless the benefits outweighed the risks."

“And why are you telling me any of this? I run a charity for lost children. What's a philanthropist and soon-to-be widower going to add to your experiment?"

Archer sat back in his chair and sipped his coffee. “We are looking for people who have an emotional investment in what we are doing. The expedition is not just engineers and doctors. We have artists, writers, and poets and yes, we need philanthropists. You see, the charity industry is regulated heavily by the government, right?” He went on without waiting for a reply. “Isn’t it possible that more sensible laws may exist in the distant future? What if you could lobby for those same laws, but in our time? Couldn’t your organization then do more good things? Think of the advances your donations could contribute to if your industry were regulated more fairly.”

James nodded and finally took a drink from his cup, nearly chugging the now-cooled liquid. He knew to proceed delicately. This man, Archer, almost certainly didn’t know of his previous travels in time, and he couldn’t give any indication of reluctance or excitement. Either way, he might rouse suspicion. “So let me see if I get this straight: You want me to travel in time with you to somehow acquire medical technology that will cure the disease that is killing me wife. What happens when we get back? I get a paycheck and go back to life and watch her die? No, I don't think so. I'll only help you on one condition.”

Archer smiled widely. “Name it.”

“I’ll come with you and do whatever you ask, if you agree to return to the past - before my wife dies.”

“A little selfish, isn’t it?”

“I admit it is, but if you knew just how special she was, you’d understand why I couldn’t live without her.”

“How refreshing it is for someone to demand something other than more money! Then I guess we have an agreement.”

A few months before he ever met James Grant, John Archer sat alone at his desk late at night and looked over the report on the time machine's instrumentation. It had only been a couple of months since arriving here and Roger had recently offered him the chance to interview some of the candidates for the mission. Only hours earlier, Archer alerted Roger that his work on the machine was complete. Further, the machine could be retrofitted to the vessel for the expedition as soon as he wanted. Roger was ecstatic and had dozens of question, all of which Archer answered confidently. The only reservation Archer had was a private one, which he feared to say aloud. No matter, since Roger was off to examine another candidate – a young army widow.

In the time that he worked aboard the base, Archer overheard many late-night crewmembers discuss the future with a pessimism he was unaccustomed to hearing. Often, discussions turned philosophical, with nearly all of his assistants concluding that humankind would never put Archer's machine to good use. Curious of their fears, he decided to engage the time machine for the first time. While he often used pieces of fruit to verify the machine worked in the laboratory, tonight he wanted to use it alone and learn for himself if the crew was right – if humankind would ever make it out of its technological adolescence.

Archer activated the machine and disabled the computer from logging the machine's activity, a feature he designed to make sure it was only used with sufficient authorization first. Since he considered it still to be in the testing phase, he felt no need to report exactly where he was going. He programmed the machine's target date to one thousand years in the future, the geographical coordinates somewhere in the heart of New York City. He stepped inside and, a moment later, disappeared in a flash of blue light.
Archer stood in silence, unsure that he went anywhere at first. Until he opened his eyes and looked around. There was not a single person in sight. There were no animals. No buildings stood where he imagined they would. Instead of skyscrapers, there were mounds of grass all around, trees growing atop them. The only remnants of civilization were the occasional stainless steel objects that littered the wasteland. He dared not move as the time machine in the past was programmed to transport him back in a few moments.

With the exception of the wind, Archer did not hear a sound. The sight of his civilization in ruins shocked him. Finally, just moments before he disappeared, he found a sign of life: a lonely cockroach brushed past his foot. In a second flash of azure light, Archer returned home.

A few days after Val arrived, she was called by Roger for assistance. True to his advice, Val spent most of her time reading books from the library, eating to her heart's content, and, despite the tough exterior she presented to Roger, she came to grip with her husband's death. Although he never mentioned grieving as something to keep her occupied, she saw how wise Roger was for giving her enough time to adjust. Finally, on the third day, she was ready to participate in her new mission.

“Are you well-rested?” Roger asked as she followed his directions to the strategy room.

“Yes,” she replied into the mic on her earpiece. She descended several decks lower to reach the communication hub of the rig. Adjacent to the control room was the strategy room, where Roger stood patiently waiting.

“Is everything to your liking so far?”

“It is, actually. The room is a bit quaint, but still cozy. In fact, I’m starting to like it more than that monstrous house I had before.”

“Most of us lived outside of our true means or necessity. It’s been a welcome change for all of us coming here and living as a family. You’ll find you learn to cope with differences better when you’re a thousand miles from land.”

She laughed. “I’m not here to play den mother, am I?”

“Not at all. In fact, you’ll meet a few of the other women later today. For now, I wanted to give you the grand tour of the strategy room. This is one of the few places that are restricted to the celibates. This is where we discuss plans and iron out problems that will inevitably arise.

“This is also the room that houses many of the security items we’ll need after our mission succeeds.” Along the wall was a large cabinet that opened with the key Roger had around his neck. He reached inside and removed several large weapons. “These, for example, are some of the weapons we’ll be using when we begin our campaign to secure the device we need. We won’t have a need for them when it’s time to repopulate so they’ll be destroyed. We secured them last week while Archer was retrofitting the vessel for flight. As far as he knows, his machine has never been activated.”

“What do they do?” she asked as she reached for one of the weapons and studied it.

“The one you have there is particularly lethal. We lost a member of my security team to one of these things in the future. Fortunately, there was nothing left for anyone to identify him. That’s what it does: vaporizes human beings. I’m sure glad the future is no less barbaric than the present, aren’t you?” he asked sarcastically.

After examining the gun a moment longer, and scared to push any of its buttons, she laid it down on the table in front of them. Roger placed it inside the cabinet and locked the door.

“Roger, I hope you don’t think I’m prying, but...” she began.
“My organization is an open book to you, Val. Ask whatever you’d like.”

“Well, you’ve mentioned the hundred civilians for the repopulation and the twenty or so celibates for governing, but what’s to become of everyone else? The crew, for example.”

“I’m afraid that’s where I’ve been a little deceitful. You see, the crew is here for a paycheck. True, they believe in the mission and believe they will contribute in the new society. However, when the time comes, they won’t be coming with us. I want no one in the new world to be concerned with greed; we will all work to better each other and ourselves. Does that sound harsh to you?”

“No,” she said. “I suppose no more than the mission itself.”

“My wife and I used to lose sleep over this, Val. But there’s no other way. There’s no other solution short of divine intervention; and the present system cannot be fixed.”

“I understand. All I want is unity.”

He smiled warmly at her. “Good. Please, feel free to explore the rest of the ship. Decks labeled in blue are for Archer’s use, though, so I hope you’ll keep our arrangement for the time being.”

“Of course,” she said. “Please call me if you need anything at all.” With that, she left and returned to her room. Once there, she slipped into a bath and then to bed.

Deep in the heart of the New World Organization’s floating home base was the Conference Room. In the center of that room was a perfectly round steel table. Around that table sat the twenty-one future leaders of humanity.

Roger sat quietly among the men and women he called his brothers and sisters. Many of them were people who were with him before Jennifer died, and some more recent acquaintances, like Val Ferguson, their youngest member. She was introduced to everyone here shortly after she arrived, and was well liked already.

“Well, friends,” Roger began as he passed a stack of booklets around the table, “the time has come to prepare for the next phase of our mission. Doctor Archer tells me the time machine is finished, but it will still be a little while until our vessel is completed. Still, I thought it a good idea to finalize our new constitution for when we return and begin to govern.

“The one thing that probably jumps out when you look at page one is the extensive moral requirements for our leaders. You already know of our celibacy – which, for the record – will not be enforced until we assume our place as rulers. This isn't to say I'm encouraging any wild parties, but if there's anything anyone needs to get out of their system, now's the time.”

The group smiled at each other as not a few of them shifted their weight out of discomfort – but not Val.

“The requirements are pretty straight-forward, and with the exception of sexual relations, we will expect the civilians to adhere to the same standards. Most of the items listed should be foregone conclusions – no murder, stealing, adultery, et cetera. One item that I have kept under wraps for some time is concerning the surprisingly small number of women among us. This was not by accident. It was Jennifer's original plan, and I've always agreed with her, that the three of you ladies will have the real power among us.”

Val looked up in surprise by the announcement. Despite her assumptions, the men at the table nodded in approval of Roger's suggestion. I never thought I'd see the day, she thought.

“We still have a lot to sort out, and I'll get an itinerary of the mission together for all of you. The next
few weeks will be busy around here as I’ll be going over many of the technical issues with Doctor Archer and getting the civilians motivated. Until now, they’ve been keeping busy in the recreation room, in the gymnasium, and to be perfectly frank, a few of them have begun their assignments as reproducers in earnest. No pregnancies to speak of, but not for any lack of trying on their part.”

The group chuckled nervously and shifted uncomfortably again. No wonder some of these people were chosen for celibates, Val thought. They’re a bunch of prudes!

“Anyway,” Roger went on, “I fear our civilian friends will begin getting bored. They've already sworn to keeping Archer in the dark, and to be honest, I think they're getting tired of his optimism. I'm not sure how we can sequester him any further, but I'm sure a solution will present itself. Are there any questions?”

The group collectively shook their heads.

“Okay, well, if any part of the constitution doesn't make sense, you all know how to reach me.”

The celibates were dismissed a moment later, they all filed out, leaving Roger and Val seated alone.

“So, the women in charge, huh?” she asked.

“Surprised?”

“Yes, pleasantly.”

“I thought you would,” he said, “but there's another reason I bring it up. You see, what we're working towards is not just my own dream, but also my wife's. I wanted the group to get used to the idea of answering to a woman because our itinerary will include a bit of a selfish detour. I promised Jennifer that if we ever succeeded, I would return to bring her with me. Do you understand?”

“Of course,” Val said. “Do you need my help with anything?”

“Not at the moment. But, Val, I would like you to come with me when we go back. I believe she will be very excited to meet you.”

“Thank you, Roger. I'll try not to let her down.”

Roger stepped forward and patted Val's hand. “I'm not worried. You've not let me down.”

Val smiled and walked off to her quarters with a skip in her step. Roger watched her leave, removed a locket from inside his coat, and examined the picture of his wife inside. Just a little while longer, my dear.
Chapter 5

Archer sat quietly in his office reading over schematics for the expedition vessel under construction. Roger knocked on the door’s frame and entered, as there were no doors in the office deck. “Everything on schedule?”

Arched looked up suddenly and jumped a little. “Yes, very much so. Sorry, you scared me a bit.”

“Well, you've been working for weeks on this with little to no sleep; I figured you'd like a ten minute chat just to change up your day.”

“Oh, sure,” Archer said as he set his papers on the desk. “Anything in particular on your mind?”

“No, just usual status report stuff.”

“The retrofit is going just fine. I expect it will only be another day before we're ready for launch.”

“Really? That soon?”

“Yes, I don't know where you've found these men and women, but they are the hardest working group I've ever seen.”

Roger smiled and nodded, accepting the complement. “People tend to adjust the effort they expend based on the compensation. The people on your team are paid well enough to move faster than light if it were possible.”

“Actually, that's something I've discovered you might find interesting. As you're probably aware, time and space are interrelated. Well, a lot of what has gone into that time machine can be adjusted to make the vessel travel through space much faster than it does now – breaking the speed of light shouldn't be impossible.”

“I imagine that would take some time to do.”

“Yes, it would,” Archer said. “But seeing as you're using my current work for peaceful purposes, I see no problem in giving you my other work if you feel it may be of use.”

“I'm sure it would, and thank you.”

Archer pushed his chair back from the table and stood up. He came around to the front of the desk and pulled up a chair beside Roger. “My friend, we've gotten to know each other pretty well these last few months, right?”

“I trust you implicitly, Doctor,” he responded.

Archer smiled. “It's that trust that compels me to share a secret I have been keeping from you and I want you to know sooner than later.”

“You can tell me anything, friend.”

“The time machine contains a log that tracks how and when it is used. It tracks markers in the stream of time that make it possible to find someone who is lost or unable to return on their own. I wanted you to know this because there was a trip taken that the log never tracked.”

Roger sat expressionless as he feared he might have to explain why the time machine was used without Archer's knowledge.
“You see, Roger, I used the time machine a few weeks ago. I’ll be honest and tell you what happened but you need to know that it was only out of curiosity. I never would have betrayed your trust if it wasn't for all the negative talk from the crew.”

“What talk?” Roger asked.

“My team, when they stop talking shop, tends to complain and paint a negative view of the future they all hold – almost like they're hiding something from me. I grew scared and wanted to know what the future holds for us. What I saw frightened me. A thousand years from now, the earth is just a desolate rock; I saw no people, no animals, and no life at all save a measly cockroach! All my life I've known of man's tendency to corrupt, but there has to be a better way.”

“That's why this mission is so important, Doctor. When we bring back what the future knows and apply it here, the world will be forced to see that all of our worst nightmares don't have to come true.”

“And it was that notion that's kept me on course these past couple weeks.”

Roger sensed the amount of guilt his friend carried over his secret, so he reached out and placed his hand on Archer's shoulder. “Rest assured I'm not mad at you. As for the crew, I know they can be a little negative about humanity's current direction – it's one of the motivators for bringing about change. Some of them, scared of what you saw becoming a reality, have suggested replacing the whole system.” Roger watched Archer's reaction carefully, as this was not the first time the organization's true mission was hypothetically suggested.

Archer shook his head in disagreement. “I think the expedition to find advanced knowledge is the best course. The apathy in the world doesn't require starting over; it needs a jump start.”

“I admire your optimism, Doctor. I'm hopeful for that result or else I wouldn't have funded this operation. My only real reason for secrecy goes back to what I told you the day we met: the governments of the world would never permit us to travel through time if they knew it was possible. Most likely, the very presence of such an invention would trigger a world war. Given the war going on now, the last thing the world needs is more fuel on the proverbial fire.

“And I appreciate you telling me of your little side adventure. If nothing else, I hope it has helped spur you on to the goal.”

Archer finally smiled. “It has actually. I feel ready to begin, as long as you're happy with the experts we've got now.”

“Our success depends very much on the expedition team, and I think the fifty teams of two, each from their respective fields of expertise, are well equipped to find what the rest of us need.”

“Good. Then I'll start making preparations.”

Only a few months after John Archer was fired by his homeland's government, he stood a hundred meters beneath the surface of the ocean on a deck of a rig he now called home. In front of him stood the craft that could send him to prison for the rest of his life if his connection to it was ever revealed. The ship contained, at its heart (and its very reason for existence), the device that would soon change the course of humanity.

Roger and the ship's crew had come for the grand tour. The ship took up most of the hanger that was built for its construction. It resembled in shape a stealth fighter jet, but it was many times its size. Roger, although present for nearly every day of its assembly, still stood in awe of its completion.

As Archer presented the craft to everyone in attendance – the crew of the decks, Roger, and (unknown
to Archer) all of the celibates except Val – it was evident he took great pride in the work he had done. The vessel was cramped, as everyone had come to expect since the very platform they lived on was exceedingly cozy, but there still seemed to be plenty of room for the crew to mingle about.

The craft was two stories tall, with each floor of the vessel serving a very specific purpose. The top floor existed for the crew of the ship only, while the bottom floor was mainly for the use of the civilians. The one peculiarity of the bottom floor that surprised only Archer when the request was made was that there were no separate rooms or showers for men and women. There were exactly twenty-one rooms on the top floor for the celibates; each room had a door with a lock and its own bathroom. Not so the bottom floor, which Roger insisted be kept open. The only doors were to be on the bathroom stalls. This was clearly for the purpose of encouraging procreation, a process more likely if the men and women were given little to no personal privacy.

The command center of the ship was one of the only rooms with a view. From the bridge of the vessel, all corners of the craft could be monitored – with the exception of one room, which Roger demanded contain no surveillance equipment. He never gave Archer a reason, and Archer never asked.

Archer watched nervously as Roger sat in the captain's chair on the bridge and surveyed the vessel.

“You've truly outdone yourself, Doctor,” he finally said, to which Archer finally relaxed.

“I do have one other matter we'll need to discuss, but it's one we should probably have alone.”

“Understood,” Roger replied. To the crew: “You're all free to leave. Thank you all for your time.”

Once the ship was empty besides Archer and Roger, Archer sat down at one of the communication stations on the bridge. “We need a place to hide this thing.”

Roger nodded as though he was prepared for Archer's complaint. “Are you concerned for the ship's safety?”

“Well, an object this big can cause a pretty catastrophic temporal wake as it enters the stream of time. It would probably be better to leave this time from an isolated location.”

“What did you have in mind?”

“Well, the best place would be on the ocean floor.”

Roger shook his head. “Unless you've built a submersible as well, I don't see how that could work.”

Archer reached into his pocket and removed a small device that looked like a wristwatch. He tossed it to Roger, which made him flinch. “This is better than a sub.”

“What does it do?” Roger asked.

“In a nutshell, it's a transport device. Remember how I mentioned travel through space at great speed as well as time?”

Roger nodded as he fastened it on his wrist.

“This device, once placed on your wrist, marries itself to your DNA and allows you to transport to any location on Earth – well, it might work elsewhere, we've only tried it on Earth.”

“Hm,” Roger muttered as he played with the device without pushing any buttons. “Then the bottom of the ocean it is.”

“Good. I'll start making one of those for everybody on-board.” Archer got up and ran off the bridge of
the ship with more excitement than Roger had seen from him in weeks. Roger took the device off his wrist and put it in his pocket. Before he left the bridge, he looked at the picture of Jennifer he carried everywhere. *One step closer.*

Val stood bundled in a heavy coat and wool blanket on the deck of the organization's base. The moon was out and reflected off the ocean surface like a mirror. A moment later, she was joined by Roger, who was just as prepared for the cold night air as she was.

“Sorry for all the secrecy,” Roger said.

“Oh, it's fine,” she said. “I was just in my room, thinking: 'What a warm, luxurious bath this is! Boy, would I like to stand in the middle of the ocean instead!’” She laughed and nudged Roger in the arm.

“Val, I'm truly sorry for all this. I know since you've been here, you've been desperate to help me in some way. Well, the time has come. I have a big mission for you.”

“I'm ready, sir.”

“Good, because this is probably the most important part of the entire goal. I need you to bring back the weapon.”

“What weapon? *The* weapon?”

Roger nodded. “We've only made one trip into the future so far and it was to secure the weapons I showed you earlier. Now, I need you to take one of those guns, acquire the weapon, and come back.”

“Why right now?”

“Because Archer is busy with a side-project and I want plenty of time to erase the log before he returns in the morning.”

“How will I know where to look?”

“Well, think of where such a weapon would be kept in our time? It will probably be in the same place. Take as much time as you need there. If it takes you a year to finish your mission, take two years. Just be back here a moment after you leave.”

“How will I get back?”

“I'm giving you a remote device that Archer designed.” He handed her the wrist teleporter. “It will not only allow you to move through space but through time as well; and to return to this time. I've already had it synced to the time machine. Once you put it on, it will track your DNA and let you travel wherever – and whenever – you wish.”

She took the teleporter and fastened it to her wrist. “Any side effects I need to worry about?”

“No,” he said, “the FDA hasn't approved it yet.”

She smirked. “And limitations?”

“Not that Archer has found. Supposedly, it will work wherever you want it to. He did say anywhere on earth, but he's confident it should work elsewhere.”

“I suppose that's as comforting an answer I can expect for a prototype.”
“Quite right, my dear. Mark the date and time in your device. If you are not back within the hour – my time - I will assume you’ve been lost.” He put his hands on her shoulders and looked deep into her eyes. “Please don’t let that happen.”

She nodded. Before he could say another word, she was gone.

Roger stood on the deck of his floating fortress for only one minute before Val returned. When she did, it took Roger by surprise – not because of the brevity of her journey, which he expected to be relative, but because he was not prepared for what he now saw.

Val lay collapsed on the deck out of breath and shivering. Her hair was about six inches longer than when she left and it was now a rich, dark red. Her clothing was different, revealing how much fashion would change over the next century. When she coughed, her voice sounded huskier, like she had taken up smoking. Part of Roger knew the possibility existed for Val's mission to take more than a couple of days, but given her appearance she looked as though she may have been gone as much as a year.

“I didn't get it,” she said under her breath.

“Are you all right?” Roger drew close to her and took his coat off; he wrapped it around his proudest assistant. A moment later, she sat up and put her head in her hands. She could sense Roger was waiting for an explanation as he crouched nearby, but her head ached too much to talk. Finally, the pain from using the teleporter subsided and she was able to stand.

“I'll tell you everything,” she said, “but first I need a bath.”

“Sure,” he said. He wrapped his arm around her for support and helped her to her room.

Once in her quarters, Roger sat on a chair by the bed while Val disappeared into the bathroom. The tub's faucet started a moment later.

After a short while, he heard the door open. Val emerged from the bathroom completely naked and searched through her dresser for clothes to wear. Roger, surprised by her uninhibitedness, tried to look the other way. She noticed his discomfort but paid it no mind.

“It'd been a long two years, Roger,” she said. She finally grabbed a pair of panties, a bra, a pair of slacks, and a blouse from the dresser and threw it on the bed. Instead of dressing, however, she jumped into the bed and began grooming, still ignoring Roger's clear signs of discomfort.

“I can come back later,” he offered.

Ignoring him, she continued: “I found out where the weapon is. Funny, how Archer suggested the teleporter would only work on earth; he was right. The weapon is on the moon, in an underground bunker.”

“I assume it's heavily-guarded, then?”

“Surprisingly no,” she said as she clipped her toenails. “Travel to the moon is mostly restricted, which is why I couldn't get there. We'll need to get Archer to modify this thing to travel anywhere.”

“Val,” he said, trying to steal her attention from her feet, “what happened to you?”

She smiled a bit since she expected him to notice how she changed. “Is my body that distracting for you?”

“Well, no,” he said, “this is your room. Dress how you want. I meant something else actually. You seem
different somehow."

“If you saw what I did, you'd know why,” she said with no emotion.

“Tell me.”

“If there was any doubt in my mind before whether destroying humanity and starting over was actually necessary, it's gone now. The world will get so much worse if we don't intervene. If I didn't know you better, I'd say you are psychic.”

“What do you mean?”

“Roger,” she said as she shifted to brushing her hair, “I want you to guess how many people will die from war and starvation in the next hundred years.”

“I wouldn't begin to speculate.”

“Over four billion – even more from a new biological weapon they design twenty years from now. The good thing, if you can call it that, is that they've cured all forms of infertility so there were plenty of extra people to die. Almost twelve billion by the end of the century.”

“Twelve billion?”

“And it only got worse by the time I arrived. Do you realize how long it took just for me to get a job?” she said, changing subjects suddenly.

“Why did you get a job?”

“Because there was no way I was going to learn anything poor. The one thing I didn't have a hard time learning about was the weapon. Everyone knew about it, and everyone knew where it was. But no one knew how to get to it. That's what took so long.”

“So, what did you end up doing for work?”

She finished grooming and began getting dressed. “I ended up doing what I spent my whole life here avoiding – the opposite of what I'm doing now,” she said, putting on her bra.

“You were a dancer?” he exclaimed.

“And a good one too. I made enough money in three months to buy my own shuttle to the moon!”

“What took you so long getting back, then?”

“As ashamed I am of admitting it, it was actually a lot of fun. I hope you don't mind if I indulged myself a bit. I know we have work to do, but I figured 'what's the harm', right?”

He chuckled. “I suppose nothing. As long as you got it out of your system, my dear. After all, you're destined to remain celibate.”

She slid her pants and blouse on and affixed her hair into a ponytail. “That was actually my motivator. And yes, it's all out of my system.”

“Good. I imagine you're hungry?”

“I'm starving,” she said.
They left her room and headed for the commissary. As they walked down the corridor, Roger noticed something peculiar about the way Val walked – it was with an air of confidence that seemed to transcend mere comfort in her own skin. Now, she moved with a skip in her step that Roger could only describe as arrogant. Whatever else happened in the future, it had hardened Val.

Roger spent several days nursing Val back to health. Although she appeared healthy, the ship's doctor said she was malnourished and so Roger ordered her to stay in her quarters and get some rest. He checked in on her often and within a week, she was ready for duty.

His next assignment for her was a mission onshore. Before departing, he asked Archer if the teleporter could be modified for travel to the moon. Archer wasn't given a reason, but then again, he never was.

Where Roger and Val were going wasn't disclosed until they were already in the air. Val was dressed more professionally than he was accustomed to seeing. She was also less chatty. Besides what she disclosed the night she got back, she spoke very little of her life in the future. Whether she was ashamed or because none of it was relevant to their goals she never said, and Roger never pressed her for more information than she offered.

“I assume this is a secret mission?” she asked, tying her hair back.

“We're going to meet the Cabal,” he answered her very plainly.

“Are you going to tell me why?”

“Of course. It was always Jennifer's vision for the factions to be one day brought together, to put aside their petty differences and pool their resources. Although I'm nearly certain of the answer, we're going to offer the Cabal a place in our future.”

“How many will be there?”

“I've asked all of them to attend – about four or five. If any of them come, it will be just the leaders. We never bring security.”

“You're awfully trusting,” she said.

“It's never been a problem before. I do have an ace up my sleeve, however.” He reached up his sleeve, removed a wrist teleporter, and threw it to Val. “We could just as easily use these to get there, but I don't want to reveal too much tech. If something goes wrong – assuming it might, given the subject matter – we can escape quickly.”

“What would you like me to do?”

“To be frank, the Cabal has become more and more like a gentleman's club. Few of the leaders trust women, which I've always found to be odd, given our founder's gender. Still, I feel that having a woman present may do one of two things: remind them of our original goal – unity – or reveal what's in their hearts. If they scoff at you, then I'll know they've come too far and I will sleep better tonight having left them behind.”

“I'm glad my genitals can once again serve a useful purpose,” she laughed, and for the first time since she returned.

“Funny how versatile they can be, isn't it?” he laughed along.

“So where are we going?”

“Cleveland.”
Val tried to hide her surprise as she imagined something more out of a James Bond movie – perhaps the French Riviera, at least going by Roger's description.

“Are you shocked?”

“It just seems like the place where the fate of humanity is discussed would be a little more...dramatic.”

“Then you're going to be really surprised when you see the hotel!”

Less than an hour later, Val saw what Roger meant. The movies clearly affected her perceptions a lot more than she realized because instead of a secure bunker to hold a discreet summit, Roger led her to the conference room at a Holiday Inn. A couple of cardboard tables were set up in the middle with about a half dozen folding chairs surrounding it. Waiting for them at the table were the heads of the other organizations.

“Sorry to keep all of you waiting,” Roger said with a smile.

None of the other men returned the smile, although their collective glance shifted to Val as she entered behind Roger. Roger walked in without a care in the world; after all, it was he with the solution all of them so desperately wanted for themselves.

“Roger, do you mind explaining why you called us here?” one of the men demanded.

“Certainly, Dave,” he replied. “I called all of you here to...bury the hatchet, as they say.”

The men chuckled at the idea. Another of the men put out a cigarette and shook his head. “It's too late for all that.”

“Is it? Look, I know we've all had disagreements since my wife died...”

“You took New World right from under me!” Dave shouted.

“You took New World right from under me!” Dave shouted.

“I'm not here for this, Dave,” he answered. “The fact remains that all of us have been chasing the same thing, just from different directions.” Roger finally sat down at the table. Val followed.

“Now,” Roger continued, “since my wife's death, we've all been searching for the ultimate solution. Dave, your men have done a fine job of hiring militias. But did destroying the capitol bring the end you sought? All of you need to ask yourselves the same question.”

The men sat motionless.

“I'm here for one reason, gentlemen. We started this mess together, and I think it only appropriate we end it as one.”

The men exchanged looks, some intrigued, while others skeptical. “What exactly are you suggesting?” a man called Vincent asked.

“I'm offering you all a home for reconstruction. We've come into a possession of a weapon that was built as the ultimate deterrent for nuclear war.” Val knew his words to be untrue but sat expressionless. “Essentially, it will eliminate all life on earth with the flick of a switch. Those left are the ones who will be able to claim the earth for the righteous.”

“No such weapon exists,” Dave said dismissively.

“No, not yet,” Roger said. “That's the other part of our plan. Without giving away too much, I believe I've given you all enough information to consider my offer on its merit.”
“And what's to become of us?” Vincent asked. “Will we be forced to answer to you?”

Roger shook his head. “These politics will soon be a part of the past. Such pointless bickering has gotten us nowhere, Vinnie. My offer stands. You all know how to reach me. Val?”

He nodded to Val as they stood up and turned to leave. As they approached the door, Dave cleared his throat.

“You're not going anywhere without us,” he said with menace in his eyes.

Roger nodded, understanding the threat. “I truly hope you're right. I look forward to hearing from all of you. But time is shorter than ever.”

They left the room quickly and proceeded directly to the car waiting outside. They got in but there was no response from the driver. Roger got out, walked around to the driver's side, and saw the driver – dead. Without panicking, he gestured for Val to get out.

“What's wrong?” she asked.

“We're taking the short cut; forget the plane. Let's go.”

A dozen men with the Cabal stormed out of the hotel with guns drawn on the car. The dead driver was inside, but Val and Roger were gone.

“Did that go as well as you hoped?” Val said, laughing aboard the top of the rig.

“It did, actually. No matter, they need to make up their minds. It looks like a few of them already have by the looks of that driver.”

Val stopped laughing to catch her breath. “These things can't be tracked, can they?”

“No unless Archer's got a factory in Taiwan making these things for retail. No, they can't be tracked.”

Roger and Val left the bridge of the rig and retired to their separate quarters. He stayed up half the night, hoping for a positive response from the Cabal. No one called.
Chapter 6

Val lied still in her bed, staring up at the ceiling and wondering if anyone from the Cabal had made contact with Roger yet. Although disappointed by outward appearances, she knew that Roger was the real deal and that meetings of their kind were always low-key affairs. If she didn't know better, she would have thought the men in that room were there to sell each other Amway. Still, as she lied there, she wondered why Roger made the gesture at all – especially since he knew their answer in advance. Maybe he still cared for the men he used to call friends; maybe he was just fulfilling his wife's request. In either case, she jumped a little when she heard a knock at the door at 4:00 A.M.

Val jumped up from bed and rushed to the door, neglecting to cover her nakedness. It was Roger.

“Did you hear anything?” she asked.

He held up his phone: the message was just a string of digits – the coordinates to their base. “We have to move.”

“Let me get dressed.” A moment later she appeared, ready to follow Roger anywhere. “Where are we going?”

“I don’t know how they found us, but I can promise they are coming, if they haven’t sold us out to the government first. I just met with Archer and he is rigging the entire base to teleport. We still have a few hours before we’re ready.”

“What do you need from me?” she asked.

“I need you to decide where we go. I will program the coordinates myself in Archer’s device; you and I will be the only ones who know. You’re the only one I can trust. Especially if we have a saboteur on board.”

“Do they know we’re just an oil drilling platform sitting somewhere in the Pacific?”

“Yes, and they’ll know where to look.”

“I have an idea!” she whispered. “Meet me on the deck in five minutes!” Val took off down the corridor without saying another word.

“Val, wait!” he yelled after her. When he rounded the corner to chase her, she had disappeared. Instantly, he knew her plan. As quick as his legs could move him, he ran to the deck and waited.

Val reappeared from thin air in the middle of a desert. A hundred meters away, she saw a guardhouse with a solitary soldier sleeping. She snuck up behind the man and broke his neck. It won’t matter here in the future.

She opened the door with the guards hand and before leaving him, she grabbed his sidearm.

Downstairs, she saw a labyrinthine web of stairwells and corridors running in all directions. Looking down, she saw the ground floor, an area marked by red, flashing lights. She teleported to the bottom level, skipping past the myriad of guards wandering the base. Once at the door, she peeked inside and saw several well-armed troops guarding another door inside the next room. She knew she’d need something other than a gun to disarm them.

Inside the door, the troops held their guns ready when a beautiful, naked girl appeared before them, seemingly out of nowhere. They flinched and kept their guns aimed, but hesitated when they saw her smile. It was enough to distract them. She shot both of them, opened the door she teleported through, and put her clothes back on.
The next door was sealed, but it opened easily—all she had to do was enter a code, which she already knew.

The base Val had broken into had a singular purpose: to guard the most advanced craft ever designed by the United States government. The ship, built to endure spaceflight, was large enough to hold the entire platform Roger needed to move. Fortunately, she was not the only one who could travel through time; the government possessed a similar device as Archer and conveniently affixed the one and only prototype to their flagship spacecraft—which Val was about to steal.

Roger waited on the deck of the platform and stared at his watch, wondering how close to five minutes he would need to wait for Val’s return. With eighteen seconds to spare, he heard a thunder crack and followed the sound. Below the platform, the stolen vessel from the future was floating gracefully above the surface of the ocean. Roger was stunned by the size of it.

“Will this work?” Val said, approaching Roger from behind.

He turned and rapidly nodded. Overcome with excitement, he grabbed Val and hugged her tight. “How did you do it?”

“One of my loyal patrons at the club was a soldier. He talked in his sleep. I’m kind of surprised I still remembered the security code,” she said.

Roger laughed. “How are we going to explain any of this to Archer?”

“Oh, you’ll figure that out, won’t you? After all, I’m not allowed to see him yet, am I?” She turned away and skipped below deck, confident she had done enough to earn a quiet night sleep. “And by the way,” she called out to Roger, “I hear the far side of the moon is lovely this time of year.”

Roger watched her run off and shook his head, chuckling. He pulled a com from his pocket and called out: “Bridge? We need everyone to the surface to evacuate immediately. Have Archer meet me in my office.”

Roger sat quietly in the conference room with all one hundred civilians present. Over the last week, they had all been forced to move everything they could carry from their home on the oil platform to the vessel they now called home. Roger was forced to lie to Archer and tell him it was stolen from the present. Archer never believed it but went along with the story.

True to Val’s suggestion, the ship lied on the far side of the moon, away from the prying eye of any Earth satellite. Archer, Val, and Roger were the only persons who knew the ship was in space. While they were never lied to, the other celibates, the crew, and the civilians were told of the evacuation—all but Archer were told the truth (minus their location), while Archer thought the government was after them.

Despite the chaos on-board, the departure date was still approaching. Roger needed to go over the expedition itinerary with the civilians. That was why they were gathered now. Before entering the room, they were each given a copy of the constitution earlier presented to the celibates.

“So does anyone have questions about the new constitution?” Roger asked.

No one raised a hand.

“Well, as all of you already know, I have an open door, so if you have any questions, you are free to ask later.

“By now, all of you know the general nature of your place here. I stand resolute that if we tried to
govern ourselves exclusively with what we know presently, we would be back in the same place a few thousand years from now. Although none of us will be here, those affected will be your direct descendants, so I’m sure all of us have an interest in our success.

“For that reason, each of your groups – doctors, artists, engineers, et cetera – will have two months in the future to gather what you can with regard to the advancements our race has made. I hope that we will not just bring back cures and technology, but knowledge – knowledge that will help us live in greater harmony with the planet and will enrich our lives.

“A confidential, intelligence-gathering mission has shown money to be a bigger status symbol in the future than it is now. The good news is that cash is still king and hasn’t changed too much. You will each be given enough money to subsist for the two months and a little extra to get the most out of your journey.

“As for our return, I ask all of you to consider living by our constitution now. It will obviously undergo some revisions after we integrate what you learn, but it would still be wise to start practicing for the resettlement. While all of you are here to repopulate the species, we will still honor conventional relationships to maintain order. With that said, the priority on our return is to make babies. Therefore, for the first year of our arrival, there will be no formal marriages. We need every female pregnant as soon as possible. I know many of you are already working very hard to that goal…”

They all laughed.

“…and that is fine for now. When we get back, we’ll need to get a little more serious. Since we have fifty men and fifty women with us, two in each field, you will all be required to live as husband and wife for the two months we are gone. If you would like to begin doing so now, I have no objections.”

The group sat quietly, many of them with broad smiles on their faces. Many looked around at the opposite sex, some even flirting across the table.

“Any questions?” Roger asked.

Still, not a word from the group.

“Okay, then I’ll be in my office down the hall. You all know how to reach me.”

Roger left the room promptly and the civilians followed suit – except the two from the Philanthropy group, who stayed behind and locked the door.
Chapter 7

The ship Val brought back from the future was far more advanced than Archer first realized. It already had time-travel capability and was well built for space. As always, Archer never asked where it came from, but Roger never tried to keep something this big a secret. When pressed for information about it, Roger would never confirm its origin directly, but would give away clues nonetheless.

One of the first tests conducted was on the time machine. It didn't take long for Archer to modify the teleporters to work with the new machine; it was based on the same technology. This revelation made Archer proud, since it proved just how far ahead he was of his colleagues (if his assumptions that the vessel came from the future were correct). In just days, Archer had enough teleporters ready for the entire civilian group and a few extra at Roger's request.

Presently, Roger sat on the bridge of the vessel as Archer and the crew ran a series of checks.

“Well, Roger, wherever you got this thing, it seems to be able to do all the things we need it to do.”

“That's a good thing, right?” Roger asked.

“Sure. In fact, it means we can do things safer. The other craft – which now sits safely at the bottom of the ocean – was never designed for space flight. But the space-time continuum is a lot easier to manipulate in empty space.”

“Then it's a marvelous stroke of serendipity that we came upon our new home.”

Archer tried to read Roger's expression but he just sipped his tea – while simultaneously giving Archer a wink.

“No matter where you got this thing, it seems to be in good order, almost as if it's never been used. We should be ready to leave in the morning.”

“Very well, Doctor. The expedition crew will be at your disposal. They all have their assignments and will serve you well. Did you look over that itinerary I gave you?”

Archer bowed his head a little. “I did, but...”

“But what?” Roger asked.

“Well, I don't understand why you need me to find a lot of these things. I mean, I'm a physicist and you have me tracking down water sources on the moon.”

Roger had indeed given Archer a laundry list of side-missions to achieve, none of which were necessary. On the contrary, while he and the civilians carried out their assignments, the one thing the crew needed was to keep John Archer in the dark for two months. Roger asked Val for a suggestion and Archer's itinerary was the result – a sort of cobbled together agenda filled with impossible or pointless tasks that would take up most of his time. Many of the items would be useful if found but hardly relevant to their ultimate goal; and they were abstract enough given Archer's limited knowledge of the plan. “The teams will be quite busy already, Doctor Archer. The list I gave you contains a few things that either could not be fitted into anyone's schedule or fell outside anyone's realm of expertise.” Roger paused to sip his tea. “You should be flattered you were only given two months to achieve it all. Anyone lesser would've have required twice as long.”

Archer smiled, although he was accustomed to Roger's form of flattery. He never doubted Roger's respect for him, but in this instance, he felt it far more likely that he was being sent on a wild goose chase instead of given a real top-secret mission. “Thank you, Roger.”
Roger exited the vessel and returned to Val's room. Gently, he knocked on the door.

“Come in,” he heard her say.

He opened the door and walked in. Val was milling about the room in her typical undressed state.

“Val, you'll promise to start wearing clothes more often after we get my wife, won't you?”

She turned to him, laughed, and nodded. “How do you know she won't mind?”

“Because, like most women I know outside of Mardi Gras, she's a very modest woman. Anyway, the reason I came by is that Doctor Archer accepted his assignment, but less than graciously. We're set to leave tomorrow.”

“Great,” she exclaimed. “Are you sure you don't want to leave him behind?”

“Not at this time. A part of me still hopes all it'll take for Archer to see our point of view is two months in the nightmare you described.”

“And if he doesn't?”

“Well, he'll have to take his place with the rest of the crew. It will be sad to see any life lost, but Archer is in a unique position: he'll have been warned.”

“Then I guess your conscience should be clean, right?”

He nodded. “I just wanted to let you know that upon our successful return, and after the weapon is fired, you and I will leave promptly to get Jennifer. She'll be very proud of you.”

“I'm looking forward to meeting her.” Val smiled. “And Roger?”

He turned and raised his eyebrows.

“I don't believe I've ever thanked you for bringing me here.”

“Don't give it a second thought, my dear. Would you like to join me in a toast?”

“Sure.”

“Good. Meet me in the mess hall then...after you've put some clothes on.”

He turned and left. She reluctantly dressed and followed him a few minutes later. As they walked down the hall together, they both had a slight bounce of excitement in their steps, unaware that their mission set to start tomorrow, would be postponed by disaster.

The damage to the ship was only slight, but the sabotage destroyed the entire time machine component. The crew worked quick to put out some of the fires caused by the small explosion. Archer stood nearby, surveying the damage in stunned silence. Val heard the explosion but was intercepted by Roger to stay in her room. As far as he was concerned, whatever happened had not altered their plans.

When Roger got to the bridge of the ship, which he since dubbed the Apocalypse, he saw Archer in a panic, moving back and forth around the ship seemingly without direction.
“John,” Roger said, to which Archer stopped and turned to face him. “Were you hurt?”

“No, I'm fine. I was nowhere near when it happened.”

“Where are they?”

“The saboteurs? In a storage compartment downstairs. Members of the crew have them under guard.”

“Good. Make sure they aren't hurt. I'll speak with them directly. Is there anything you need from me?”

“Not right now. Let me get the damage contained and we'll talk.”

Roger nodded and headed away from the bridge. Once out of earshot of Archer, he tapped his earpiece and said: “Val, grab a gun and meet me in storage in two minutes.”

A few minutes later, Roger and Val were face to face with the saboteurs, both of them a little bruised and bloodied by the crew, who were all excused when Roger and Val arrived. The saboteurs were a man and woman, both of them in their thirties, and both of them unremarkable in every way.

Roger cleared his throat for their attention. “I take it you aren't going to die without giving me the message you carry first? Who do you work for?”

The man spoke first. “Who else, Roger? You've kept your technology from us for the last time.”

“And your wife will never live again!” the woman shouted.

“The Cabal,” Val whispered. She turned to Roger: “How did they get aboard?”

“They must have gotten through the screening process. Doctor Archer interviewed them. It doesn't surprise me, Val. After all, they possess the same desire we do – for change – but we differ only in method.”

“I have a message for you,” the man said. “My superiors want you to know that if they can't come with you, no one goes at all.”

“I offered all of the leaders a chance. They were all told about this and they refused my offer. You were lied to,” Roger said.

Val approached the woman. “You realize how futile this all was, don't you? We're just going to rebuild.”

“They'll find you first,” the woman answered.

Val shook her head and chuckled. “Not likely. We're outside their reach, aren't we?” she asked Roger.

He nodded. “You both think we're still on Earth, don't you?”

The couple looked at each other as fear overcame them. “You're lying.”

“But not,” Roger said. “We're on the dark side of the moon as we speak. Rebuilding will not be a problem.”

The man snickered. “Not with Archer's work destroyed. It was all on-board that floating platform we destroyed.”
Roger laughed aloud. “You see, my dear,” he said to Val, “this is why you keep secrets.” Turning to the couple, he said: “You're referring to the other ship that Archer built, yes?”

The man and woman nodded victoriously.

Roger went to the intercom by the door and spoke into it: “Doctor Archer?”

“Yes, sir,” came Archer's voice.

“Where is the other vessel you designed?”

“Where we left it, Roger. On the ocean floor.”

Roger turned to face the conspirators and saw the disappointment on their faces. “Is there anything else you both would like to say?”

The woman approached the fence that separated them from Roger and Val. Swiftly, she spit in his direction. “May your wife burn in hell!”

Roger snorted and left the room, but not before giving Val the unmistakable nod of permission. Seconds after he left, two shots were fired from Val's gun, and the saboteurs were no more. She exited the room and smirked. “Two down. Seven billion to go,” she said as she went back to her quarters. Roger walked off in the other direction, but only after shaking off Val's callous talk, which he was unaccustomed to.

Back on the bridge of the ship, Roger returned to check in on Archer's progress.

“Where are the criminals?” Archer asked.

“They will no longer be a problem,” Roger said.

“I see,” Archer answered. “Why did you ask me about the other ship?”

Roger sat down in the captain's chair and closed the door to the bridge so he and Archer could be alone. “We're going to scuttle the other ship for parts. How long will it take to transfer its time-machine here?”

“Six months, maybe more,” he said.

“Then let's do it. When you have some free time, we'll also need to look for replacements in the Philanthropy group.” Roger really didn't care if replacements were actually found – his mission could be just as successful with ninety-eight fertile participants. Still, to keep up appearances for Archer's sake and to fill the number Jennifer requested, he made the demand anyway.

“Very well. Let me get a team together and we'll head back to the ground ship.”

“Thank you, John. Take your time – we have plenty to spare, but we need to get this right. And I'm strengthening security protocols. I expect no further incidents, but the work ahead of us is our chief priority.”

“Yes, sir. I'll get to work immediately.” Archer left the bridge and was beneath the surface of the ocean an hour later, salvaging all he could from the sunken – but operable – vessel.

Archer sat behind the desk in his office where a massive pile of books was stacked. Roger entered suddenly and took a seat directly across him.

“So the ship is finally ready. Have you found a new civilian to replace the moles?” he asked.
“No. Six months, and I can't find an altruistic soul out there.”

Roger nodded in approval. “That doesn't surprise me.”

“I've found several of interest, but none really jump out. Except for this fellow who started a children's charity a few months ago. Are you sure you don’t want to just keep it the way it is: forty-eight groups of two?”

“We need fifty couples.”

“Then this Grant fellow it is. He’s full of passion.”

“Passion is a good thing. What's his background?”

“That's the strange part: up until a year ago, he was just some guy living at home with his parents. His father died a few months ago, just after he married. He took the money given him in the will to set up the charity.”

“You're kidding me!” Roger said as he reached across the desk to read the report Archer handed him. “It says here he’s already married. What do we know about her?”

“Nothing. She has no history, no social security number, no maiden name. She seems to have appeared out of nowhere.”

“Keep looking, John. I want people we can trust.”

Roger turned to leave. Archer cleared his throat. “There's something else, sir.”

“Go on.”

“There have been some mysterious entries in the time-travel log in the past few days.”

“Oh? I thought someone had to have a security code to engage it.”

“They do,” he said. “It was your code.”

Roger shook his head and said: “Do you have the log?”

“Yes, sir, right here.” Archer handed him the paper. Roger scanned it and then crumbled it as he stormed from the office, tossing the paper into the waste basket on his way out. Once in the hallway, he touched his earpiece and said: “Val. Come to my office immediately.”

“Be right there,” she said.

He stormed down the stairs to the lower level and slammed his office door behind him. Val was already sitting in front of his desk. “You broke my trust,” he said.

“What are you talking about, Roger?”

“Your late-night trips through the time machine.”

“How did you know?”

“You should know by now that there is nothing on this ship that happens and escapes my attention.”

“So you spied on me?”

“I can’t believe you did this, Val. We are so close to making this all a reality. Tell me: what was so
important that you couldn’t come and tell me about?"

She paused before speaking and shook her head. “I wanted to see Paul one last time. I only spent a month with him before he went to war and died.”

“What did you tell him? And don’t play games with me. You look different than you did before. Surely he recognized that. What did you tell him?”

She said nothing.

Roger finally sat behind the desk and opened a drawer. He removed a small gun and set it between them on the desk. She stirred at the sight of it, unsure of his intentions. “So you went back in time and told someone where you were from. I’m sure you can see the problem you’ve created for me. And I don’t need to remind you what happens to people who stand in our way.

“If you’re going to shoot me, go ahead and get it over with. Otherwise, I need to take a shower.” She stood and walked to the door.

“Sit down!” Roger shouted.

She turned around with a scowl across her face and reluctantly sat down and put her feet against his desk.

“I’m not going to shoot you. But should you choose to remain here, you will do so as one of the civilians.”

“Are you kidding me? For that?” She stomped her foot into the desk and jumped back out of her chair. “I use the time-machine so I can see my husband and you turn me into a whore?”

He stood and came around to the front of the desk. He picked up the gun and placed it back inside the desk drawer. “With the saboteurs gone, we are down two people. I’m willing to give you one of those spots - with the provision that should things work out, you can rejoin the leadership. But my wife will have to decide that. She wanted one hundred civilians, and I want to deliver as close to that number as possible. As far as I’m concerned though, your job will be the same as all the others: make babies. Is that acceptable to you?”

She folder her arms in protest, stewed in anger, and fell into her chair. “Do I have a choice?”

He looked back the drawer with the gun and then looked into her chair. “No, you don’t. You’ve seen more than anyone else on this ship, and I’m greatly disappointed in you.”

“Why don’t you just kill me then?”

He took a deep breath and sighed. “Promises are promises.”

Val’s stomach was churning as the rage stirred. “So who is the other civilian?” she asked.

“Doctor Archer has his heart set on a philanthropist he found. At this point, I’m inclined to give Archer whatever he wants. I think he’s getting a little suspicious. There’s a problem: this Grant fellow is already married, and we know nothing about her. We can’t use her.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“We need him on board with the mission. I don’t want him to know everything; he’ll know as much as Archer does. I want you back at my side, Val. But I can’t overlook what you did. You’ve put us all in grave danger. So until you meet my wife, I’m setting up a contingency plan to ensure that you survive. That’s what Grant is all about; he is your ticket to my good graces. If Jennifer wants you as one of us, then so be it and we can dispose of
Grant with Archer and the others.”

She hung her head and weighed her options. Although furious with Roger, she still believed in his goal.

“Here,” he said as he tossed her a wrist device. “You’ll need that to move about. Make this happen, Val. For your own sake.”

She strapped the device around her wrist and left his office.

Once she was gone, Roger touched the paging device in his ear. “Doctor Archer?”

“Yes, sir?”

“Please come to my office.”

A few moments later, Archer strode into Roger’s office and sat down. Skipping the pleasantries, Roger said: “This Grant fellow is going to work out fine. You can take a plane tonight and make him an offer to join us.”

“Why the rush?”

“His wife is dying,” he said.

“What about his partner for the mission?”

Roger smiled and said: “I have just the girl for him.”
Chapter 8

Genesis hustled about the kitchen to prepare dinner for James, who had just left his office and would be home any minute. Their new life together was just what she had looked for all those years wandering through the stream of time. The timer for the oven buzzed and Genesis reached for a glove to remove the food from the range.

She felt a slight pinch on her right shoulder and fell to the floor just as she finished placing the food on the counter. She never saw Val standing behind her with a syringe.

Just as the front door was about to open, Val disappeared from the Grant home as quietly as she arrived. James rushed to the floor to care for his wife and called for an ambulance. The next few hours beside her in the hospital would be the last they would share together. We would leave her side to join Archer with the hope of one day returning with her cure.

Archer stood behind Roger, who was seated at the desk in his office. In front of them was a young woman who could not have been older than twenty-five. Roger introduced her as Val, and Archer was eager to meet the girl Roger spoke so highly of. He was also intrigued to learn why Val would make a good addition to their expedition.

“Val,” Roger began, “I wanted to take a few moments of your time to introduce you to Doctor Archer who will be heading the expedition we spoke of previously.”

“I appreciate that,” she said meekly.

Archer cleared his throat and said: “And may I just say that I trust Roger’s experience in selecting you. He is an excellent judge of character, and I don’t just say that because he chose me.”

Val chuckled. Archer liked her immediately.

“Still,” Archer went on, “there is a young man that has just joined us. I think he will make a great addition to the Philanthropy team. I know your formal training is in another field, but Roger suggested you might prefer to work alongside this other fellow I’ve just recruited.”

Val smiled with delight. “That’s no problem. I believe in this mission either way. I’m just glad to be a part of it.”

Archer smiled in kind. “That’s what I wanted to hear. You see, the most important trait I look for in this group is altruism. Without a desire to help each other, this mission will never succeed!”

“I couldn’t agree more,” she replied with a wholehearted grin.

“Good then,” Archer said. He nodded to Roger. “Thanks for sparing a few minutes. I’ll let you get back to her paperwork.” Archer shook Val’s hand and left the office a moment later.

Roger looked at Val and smiled. “Now that that’s done with,” he said as he took her paperwork and tossed it into the garbage can beside his desk.

Val’s demeanor softened and she relaxed in her seat. “He’s clearly in step with the program, isn’t he?” she asked.

“He is. Still, you’ll come to see his brilliance and it’s important you play along, Val. As I’ve said, everything depends on Archer being kept in the dark about our real goals. Unfortunately, he promised Grant that we
would save his wife upon our return.”

“The same as your wife?”

“No, I'm afraid not,” Roger said. “I won't be honoring Archer's promise to Grant. If Archer doesn't fall in line by the time we return, he's being left behind.”

“And Grant?”

He shoved a photo of James across the desk, which she quickly snatched up and studied. She didn't look impressed. “That's up to you what we do with him,” he said with a wink.

Val smiled. “I don't think so. But if you want me to play along and even seduce him for the sake of the project, I'm at your disposal. I just want to make up for my mistake any way I can.”

“You needn’t worry too much,” he said. “My wife is a merciful woman. But we are past the point of no return, as it were, and so you’re place in the future society is secure. The role you will play is what’s up in the air.

“On a brighter note,” he continued, “now that Archer knows of your existence, you are no longer confined yourself to your quarters.”

Val stood up, walked around the desk, and kissed him on the cheek as a daughter would her father. “I promise I’ll behave,” she said obediently. “And for what it’s worth, I’m sorry for my attitude earlier.”

James did not adjust easily to his new life aboard the organization’s vessel. Doctor Archer urged him to leave immediately. James resisted at first. Then the nurses and doctors confirmed the worst: Genesis’s coma was now permanent, and she was in a persistent vegetative state with little chance of ever regaining consciousness. With that tragic news, he made the difficult choice of leaving his wife attached to a machine while he left to find the cure. If Archer failed in his mission, James decided he would spend the rest of his life finding a cure rather than give up on her chances.

Eventually, as weeks passed and the deadline for their departure loomed, James was able to sleep through the night. The other participants made efforts to reach out to him - particularly a few of the women - but he remained cordial and avoided any of their attempts toward friendship. For him, this mission had a singular goal and whether anyone else was successful was unimportant. Still, there were aspects of life aboard the Apocalypse that upset James. He was not used to a communal shower and so often took showers late at night when everyone else slept. It didn’t take him long to observe the loose morals of the other participants, but since his wife was very much alive to him, he avoided their influence and kept to himself.

The day of the launch, on the bridge of the Apocalypse, men scurried back and forth in their duties as Archer sat in the captain’s chair. He took a moment to observe all the men and women the organization recruited for the mission, all of them working for a cause greater than money, or so he thought. A smile came to his face. He motioned a hand to a technician.

“How soon can we leave?” he said.

The technician smiled proudly. “We can leave now, sir.”

“Excellent!” Archer said with joy. He picked up a communication device and said: “Roger?”

Roger's voice screeched out of the device's tiny speaker. “Go ahead.”

“I've just been given word that we are go for launch.”
“Godspeed, Dr. Archer,” Roger said with delight. “Let me know when we’ve arrived.”

“Of course,” Archer said. He placed the device down and nodded to one of the officers. “You are cleared for launch.”

Archer buckled his harness and listened to the ship rumble, its massive engines spun up. A few moments later, one of the crewmembers gave Archer a thumbs-up. Archer returned the gesture and the ship drifted away from the moon and disappeared in a magnificent explosion of azure light.

Instantly, Archer knew they had reached their destination. He called out to one of the crew officers: “Cloak the ship from radar immediately.” Outside the port window lay the deep shadow of the moon’s dark side, only in this century, several small settlements could be found on the surface.

“Are there any signs of life down there?” Archer asked.

“No, sir.”

“Good. Stay cloaked anyway.” He reached for the com and said: “Roger?”

“Go on.”

“We’ve arrived.”

“Good. Carry on the landing parties at your discretion.”

After a quick toast with the crew, Archer was in good spirits to begin the next leg of their mission. All hundred of the mission participants were led into the conference room for debriefing. James took his place quietly near the back of the room. Around him sat the doctors, engineers, artists, and poets who were along for the ride.

Archer stood at the front of the room waiting patiently for the last of the crew and security team to exit. As the last of the ship’s crew left, all other chatter dulled first to a whisper, then to silence.

“We are heading towards Earth now under the craft’s own propulsion. Intelligence gathered before our departure tells us that along with the advancements in medicine and technology, we are also at risk of being detected. Not to worry, the ship is cloaked. Nonetheless, it is prudent we are organized and ready to depart long before we reach the atmosphere. You will all have two months, people, to achieve your primary objective: gather what information you can in your respective fields and get back here in time to transport. The folder in the possession of each team leader will contain all the specific information you need.”

The group sat silently, waiting for further instruction.

“One last thing,” Archer begins, “but I want to express again the importance of staying within your groups and trying not to get too involved in events here. The tendency for many of you who have watched science-fiction movies is to let loose and kill whomever you want because it can all be changed by going back in time. If any of you are that anxious to kill a man, then by all means, indulge yourselves; know this, though: if you are put in jail or executed, no one is going to rescue you. We leave as scheduled, and nothing will change that.” The group remained silent. “Any questions?”

The room fell silent.

“Then let’s move out. We transport down in ten minutes.”

Everyone in the group stood and started loading their gear. James did not have many provisions to take with him except a bag with clothing and the limited food and water rationed between the volunteers. As James strapped his sack together and swung it onto his back, a young woman approached him. She smiled warmly as she tried to enter his field of vision.
“Hello,” the woman said. “I’m Val, your partner.”

James looked up and caught Val’s eyes; they were green like Genesis’s. “Hi,” he said. “Nice to meet you.”

“Likewise,” she countered. “It looks like we’re partners. Funny that they needed charity organizers at all, isn’t it?” She chuckled.

James smiled. “I thought the same thing once. Still, I couldn’t pass the chance to make a difference. You?”

“Nut-uh,” she said. “Are you almost ready to go? I’ve never done that transport thing before. Except when we were brought aboard from Earth. The one moment, I was in a facility I didn’t recognize and a few seconds later, I was in a strange ship I didn’t recognize. I wondered at first whether I really traveled anywhere at all, right?” She stopped to take a breath. “But obviously I did because here we are: thousands of miles above the planet…unless that’s just a really cool painting, right?” She laughed hysterically at her own joke. He chuckled politely, although he couldn’t help but think about asking Archer for a reassignment.

Nah, he thought. If all I have to do is put up with this chatty girl for two months to get Genesis back, I still come out the winner.

“I’m ready to go,” he said. He and Val followed the rest of the group out of the conference room into the corridor.

“Are you scared?” she whispered to James. “I mean, has this thing been tested from space before? What if we don’t make it all the way?”

“If that happens,” he said, “you won’t be alive long enough to know the answer.”

Moments later, the group arrived in a storage compartment that was just big enough to hold the hundred and one people, including Archer, going down to the surface. A few minutes later, the team of participants activated their wrist devices and disappeared from the room in a brilliant display of light.

As soon as the civilian group departed, a separate armed security force entered the room. “We are ready as well,” one of the troops said to Roger, who walked in just behind them.

“Make sure you leave no traces,” he said. Seconds later, the armored team activated their wrist devices and disappeared.

Two months later and right on schedule, the ship was again populated with the returning team members. Many of them were dressed in regional clothes from their respective assignments; others were fashioning changes in hairstyle or other cosmetic adjustments. Archer stood away from the crowd to make a final head count of the team. He nodded as he counted the last and allowed everyone to exit the compartment.

Roger stood outside the room and welcomed everyone as they exited. James smiled as he passed Roger, but never noticed the exchange of looks between his partner, Val, and their boss. Val again looked a little different – her hair was yet longer and she wore more makeup than usual. After the last of them left the room, Roger walked in to greet Archer.

“So how did things go?”

“Well, it looks like the participants were a lot more successful than I was.”

“Rubbish, Doctor. I’m sure you did a fine job. Go on and get cleaned up. We’ll talk more later.”
Archer left down the hall and not a moment too soon: a few moments later, the group of armed men arrived with a large container in tow. All of the men appeared more hardened than before and many were out of breath. Roger stepped forward to greet them.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

“Barely,” the team leader answered. “We faced more resistance than we expected, but we got the device.”

“And just in time too,” Roger said.

“I’m sorry, sir. We faced resistance on the moon.”

“No need to apologize. Job well done, men. I want the device placed in my quarters.” The men nodded and began to exit the compartment. Roger smiled and called out after the troops: “Get yourselves cleaned, gentlemen. We aren’t finished yet.”

The team of volunteers gathered in the conference room, laughing and sharing stories of their adventures. As they talked, the engines of the ship sped up and the craft began moving away from Earth. Val looked out the window and waved goodbye to the planet as it drifted away from them. James set his gear on the floor and took his boots off.

“So did you have fun?” he asked Val.

She nodded enthusiastically.

“Let’s just hope everyone else did – or more to the point, let’s hope they were more successful than us.”

“You don’t think we did a good job?” Val asked.

“It’s not that,” he said. “The real work for us is when we get back; when we have to lobby the government to accept our suggestions. Then some real good can come of this whole thing.”

Val shook her head. “So you just wanted the fun part and none of the work, huh?”

He grinned. “Few people would have it any other way.”

Val smiled at James warmly. “At least you won’t be doing it alone, James.”

James smiled back at the young girl in recognition of her sentiment. However, he was also well aware of her real intent. Over the last sixty days, and despite her best efforts, Val had grown quite attached to her partner. They became fast friends, but it didn’t take long before her initial ruse led to a real emotional connection. Before long, she could no longer contain her emotions and made several romantic advances toward him. James always firmly rejected her kindly. He never explained his real purpose in going on the expedition and never spoke of Genesis for fear of revealing too much. His silence, though, only encouraged Val to try harder to win his affections, which she assumed would eventually be won from his wife. She didn’t know his wife was in coma; she assumed she was dead.

He resisted her on every occasion, although it took all of his willpower much of the time. During their travels, they pretended to be a husband and wife tourist couple. They shared hotel rooms, shared a bed, and on more than one occasion, and in situations beyond his control, were forced to shower together. Val hoped that these instances would arouse feelings in James for her. She certainly didn’t make it easy for him to resist her, as she often insisted on undressing in his view, spending much of her free time in the nude – even sleeping naked next to him when they had to share the same bed. James was proud of himself for not giving in to the temptation. It would have been easy to reason that Genesis might never awake and their mission to save her could fail, but James was still very much in love with her. Even in his weakened state, in need of comfort and affection, James saw his celibacy, not as
rejecting Val, but being faithful to Genesis. “I have to go report to Archer,” he said.

James left Val behind in his quarters on the ship while he went to Archer’s office to plan for their return. Archer was seated behind his desk, had a pen in his hand, and appeared to be in deep thought. “Sir,” James said, “do you have a moment?”

Archer looked up and smiled when he recognized James. “Of course. Come in.”

He entered the office and took a seat in front of Archer’s desk. “I know you have much to do for our return, but were we successful with the other thing?”

Archer smiled warmly. “My friend, I was just about to come find you. The medical team tells me that we were able to locate the drug your wife needs.”

His enthusiasm level increased suddenly. The change in his expression and demeanor was so intense, Archer felt like he was meeting him for the first time.

“As for the rescue,” Archer said, “we’ll plan on getting you transported to the hospital in plenty of time to satisfy my end of our little deal. Will that work for you?”

James’s smile stretched from ear to ear. “Oh, absolutely! Thank you so much!” He jumped to his feet and shook Archer’s hand profusely. A moment later, he was practically skipping out of the office. Just outside the office door stood Val eavesdropping, finally accepting that her attempts would never succeed. She had failed too; Genesis was still alive.

James went back to his room and climbed into bed. He lied on his back and let his thoughts drift to his future reunion with Genesis only hours away. As his mind cleared of all anxiety from his trip in the future, Val entered the room, a sad look drawn on her face. He ignored her entrance, although not intentionally so; his mind was dwelling on other things. Val stood silently over him for a moment before deciding to make her most desperate move for his attention.

She lowered the light in the cramped little bedroom. James’s eyes were wide open but he was staring at the ceiling and didn’t appear to notice the newly dimmed lamp. Val proceeded with her next move: she removed her blouse. Still nothing from him. Within a couple of minutes, she had removed her slacks, her bra, and her panties; each time an article of clothing was removed, she studied James for a reaction. There she stood over him, naked as she often was in his company, the soft light from the light reflecting off her bare, silken skin. She raised her arms behind her head and pulled her hair back. If she didn’t know better, she would have concluded he was blind. Still, what she revealed now was nothing new to his eyes. Therefore, she tried something more desperate. As he daydreamed of Genesis, the sly, nubile woman climbed slowly into bed beside the man and gently started to kiss his neck.

Immediately, James came to and realized what she was doing. He turned to Val with a shocked expression across his face as though screaming for a reason for her actions. Val only smiled and glanced down at her body, welcoming James to take advantage of her. He sat up, bumping his head on the bookshelf and night lamp above him, and climbed over Val and out of bed.

“What are you doing?” he shouted.

Val sat up on the bed and sunk her head in shame, although she did not attempt to cover herself. “I want you, James,” she said softly.

James shook his head and huffed in desperation from pushing her away. “I figured as much. The last dozen times you stripped for me made it pretty clear, Val.”
“But why don’t you want me? I love you,” she pleaded.

James turned away out of respect for her indecency.

She sat still a moment, trying to figure out whether she should give up her seduction. “Is it your wife?” she whispered carefully.

James didn’t move an inch.

Val stood up and walked up behind him. She tried to wrap her arms around his midsection to console him but he nudged her away. “Why won’t you talk to me?” she asked.

He shook his head. “I don’t want to talk about it.” He turned to face her. “You’re a beautiful girl, Val. And if I wasn’t so in love with Genesis, I would never have gotten out of that bed with you.” She smiled. “But I don’t think I’ll ever get over her, at least while there’s hope.” He nodded firmly in an attempt to punctuate his thought without hurting her feelings. It didn’t work; she was devastated.

He turned from her again, but this time he left the room, leaving Val standing naked and alone. I can’t do anything right, she thought.

Roger sat behind his desk hovering over a titanium case. Inside was a small device that at first glance looked like a bomb. A security guard entered the office and approached Roger from behind. “Sir,” the guard said, “you wanted to see me.”

“Yes,” Roger answered, closing the case. “I just wanted to make sure you can still be trusted with the organization’s plan. Are you?”

“I am.”

“Good. We also need this weapon ready for use as soon as possible. Do you know how to work it?”

“Yes, sir,” he said. “I have the manual.”

Roger looked at him curiously, missing the joke.

“Sorry, sir. Yes, I know how it works. Will the operation be carried out immediately?”

“As soon as I give the final word. Imagine society when we are done: No more money, no greedy corporations, and no disharmony with the environment.

“Of course, to get to that point, we need to do some pretty ugly things.” Roger stood from behind his desk and stepped in front of the guard. “I’m afraid we find ourselves in an unusual circumstance here. Should we fail, there’s no hope for any of us.”

The guard’s eyes met his glare. “We understand, sir. We’re committed to the end.”

Roger smiled. “I know. The next few hours will be emotional for all of us. We will be ripping a very sticky Band-Aid off a fresh and bloody wound - seven billion lives will be destroyed. I just wanted to make sure the men are committed.”

The guard nodded and turned to leave. As he hurried down the hall, James stepped out of the shadows near Roger’s office. He heard every word spoken in the office but turned away for his quarters instead of confronting the man Archer had so often spoke highly of. Val may very well still be standing in the same spot she was when he left, and may not have gotten dressed for all he knew. The hallway between Roger’s office and his
quarters were usually noisy; many people were often bustling about. Not now. James heard nothing but he needed to find the other civilians and let them know of the organization’s real plan.

James didn’t make it to his room. Archer’s voice called from behind.

“James!” he shouted. “Wait!”

“John,” he said, “I just heard Roger in one of the empty offices. He was talking with a security guard.”

“What's going on?”

“Tell me the truth. What is the purpose of this mission?”

“The same as I told you the night we met: to bring back advance knowledge from the future and help the world. Why do you ask?”

“And there's nothing else you know about?”

“No, James, I've told you. Did Roger say something different?”

“It’s worse than that, John. He has a device. From the future. The guards are in on it. Do you have any clue what he's up to?”

“No, but I've often been kept in the dark,” Archer replied, shocked. “I’m so stupid for trusting so blindly.”

“I know you and I believe in the mission, but it looks like it was all a ruse to find this weapon he has.”

“I swear to you, James, I had no idea of any of this. Please tell me: what else did you hear?”

“Seven billion lives will end. Whatever that weapon can do, we can’t let it happen. What do we do?”

“We have to figure out who else is in on it,” Archer said. “But only after you return with your wife.”

“Are you sure?”

“Absolutely. We made a deal, James. It'll give me plenty of time to come up with a plan. We’ll be arriving in earth’s orbit in a few minutes. Do you have what you need?”

“No, I haven’t picked up the medicine yet. I was distracted by my...partner.” James remembered the furiously angry and naked woman he left alone in his room.

“I always suspected that girl would be a handful,” Archer said, smiling. “Be careful. The vial you need has a red rubber band on it. I’ll alert what members of the crew I know I can trust and I’ll have a plan by the time you return.”

James smiled. “I appreciate it, John.”

Archer ran down the corridor in the direction of the bridge.

James made his way back to his room to get his wrist teleporter. As he approached the room, he saw Val sitting quietly on the bottom bed. She’s dressed, thank God! She saw him enter the room and smiled uncomfortably.

“I need to talk to you,” he said.
“About before, I…” she began.

“No, it’s a little more important than that, Val.” He sat on the bed next to her. “I need to leave for a while, but I’ll be back. I need you to do me a favor, though. Whatever Archer tells you to do, I need you to listen!”

“What’s wrong?” she said. “You’re scaring me.”

“Everything will be okay. Roger has a device from the future. We need to stop him.”

Val shook her head.

“What’s wrong?” he asked

“Oh, James,” she said, “you weren’t supposed to find out about that.” She stood up, reached for a gun behind a lamp, and held it to James’s head.

“You knew?” he said.

“Of course I knew. Everyone on this ship knew. You and Archer are too shortsighted to see the truth: this world can’t be saved. It needs to be destroyed! And I joined this mission to see that it does.”

“Val, please,” he pleaded. “I need to see my wife. I have to save her first. Help me get to her before they do anything stupid. We’ll talk about all this later.”

She cocked the gun and moved closer to him. “Why should I help you save another woman?

“I was assigned to keep an eye on you for Archer’s sake, James, but I also meant what I did before.” She stepped closer to him. “Something happened during those two months. It stopped being an assignment; I fell in love with you.” She lowered the gun and her grip on it a little.

James pushed her away. “I told you already. I’m in love with my wife, and I have to save her.”

“There isn’t enough time. Everyone on that planet is going to die, James. If you want to live, you have to stay here…with me. We’re willing to let you help us rebuild if you stay with me.”

James stepped closer to Val and embraced her, as though accepting the offer. “You’re a beautiful girl, Val.” Val smiled broadly; I’ve got him! “But Helen of Troy couldn’t keep me from her.” Val didn’t have enough time to get angry with James. She suddenly felt a cold shiver, but only for a split second. She was unconscious so quickly, she never realized how hard James struck the back of her head with a lamp. She went limp but James caught her before she fell to the ground. He carried her to the bed and laid her down.

With Val no longer a concern, James ran out of the room and hurried to the medical lounge where the drug awaited. Inside one of the lockers, he found the vial with a red rubber band on it; the one Archer assured him was the cure for his wife. He placed the vial in his jacket pocket and rushed to one of the empty cargo holds. He entered the name of the hospital into his wrist device. Within seconds of the device finding the correct coordinates, he saw the Apocalypse no more.

James knew the mission to save his wife might be the last thing he ever did if Archer’s coup never materialized. It didn’t matter to him. If Roger’s device could really annihilate everyone on earth, there was little he could do alone. Standing alone against a spaceship with the power of a doomsday weapon was foolhardy. His only hope was that Archer could find someone on that ship that didn’t know Roger’s true intention. If his days were indeed numbered, he was going to spend them with Genesis – even if only a few minutes.
Val awoke on the bed in James’s quarters. She immediately massaged the back of her head where she was struck. Grabbing the gun still on the floor, she ran from the room to report to Roger.

Roger was in his office and unaware of any commotion on-board.

“Roger!” she shouted as she entered the room.

“What happened to you?” he said as he noticed her gripping her head.

“Grant! He’s on to us. He knows about the weapon. And Archer, he’s staging a coup.”

Roger calmly stood up and helped Val sit down. “There’s no need to worry about Archer. The crew is loyal to the cause. We’ll find him. Where’s Grant?”

“I don’t know. He left talking about saving his wife. I failed. I did what you told me, Roger. It didn’t work. He’s still in love with her. I tried so hard.”

“Val, you did well,” he said. He knelt beside her. “You’ve more than redeemed yourself in my book. Will you be all right?”

She wiped a stray tear from her eye and cleared her throat, toughening her demeanor. “I’m fine. I’m with you now to the end.”

“I’m glad to hear that. Come!” he said, helping her to her feet. “We need to get Archer. He and the crew need to be on the surface when the device is fired!”

James arrived at the hospital’s entrance in a flurry of light from the teleporter. He hadn’t reset his watch to the current time but the clock outside the hospital told him he only had minutes before his other self would leave her room for the last time and leave the hospital with Archer.

James rushed ahead to the hospital and into the room where Genesis lay just after he saw Archer and the other James leave the parking lot. She was just as still as he left her. He grabbed the vial from his pocket and took a syringe from the nurse’s tray. Hoping desperately he did it right, he injected the medicine into her arm and waited. A moment went by and there was no change in her condition.

Minutes went by and still Genesis was motionless. The weapon on the ship could be fired at any moment. All he wanted was to see her smile one last time. He knelt beside her and held her hand. He kissed her skin tenderly and whispered to her: “Wake up. Please wake up.”

To his shock and simultaneous joy, Genesis suddenly awoke. She coughed slightly before opening her eyes, but James finally saw what he spent months of waiting and slaving for the organization to see: the beautiful smile of his wife. Genesis immediately sat up in surprise and grabbed hold of James’s hand.

“What happened?” she said.

He grabbed hold of her and kissed her deep. “Too much to explain now. Hurry! We need to get out of here quickly.”

“Are we in trouble?” She jumped out of bed and started getting dressed.
“Not with the law; worse. I’ll explain as we go.”

“Where are we going?”

James hadn’t thought of where to go. “I don’t know yet, Gen.”

Genesis sensed something was wrong. James’s anxiety was palpable. “Tell me. What’s wrong?”

“I’ve been through hell and back to get to you. I last saw you over three months ago.”

“I was in a coma for three months?”

“No, I had to travel decades from now on a spaceship to get the cure I just gave you. But all that effort to see you again has come at a terrible price: the people I worked with lied to me about their intentions. Right now, a terrible weapon is about to launch that will kill every person on this planet, leaving only the people on that ship to survive. I had to choose whether to save the world, or spend ten more minutes with you.”

Genesis finished dressing and grabbed hold of James’s hand. “Then let’s not waste anymore time. We’ll stop them together.”

James and Genesis ran out of the room and through the maze of corridors in search of the hospital’s exit. Outside the building, they witnessed a terrifying sight. Above them in mid-atmosphere hovered the massive ship James had abandoned only minutes ago. Chaos ensued on the ground as people screamed and ran in every direction.

“Is that where the weapon is?” Genesis asked.

“Yes, and I’m worried that my only friend on that thing has failed.”

“Can we get aboard?”

James looked down at the teleport device and tried to activate it – it didn’t work. He shook his head. “I guess you should have held onto your powers a little longer.”

She smiled at her husband. “I don’t regret one second of our life together. If I have to die, at least I’m with you.”

The ship dropped lower to the earth, close enough for James to see people on the bridge. Among them, Roger smiled down at him from the bridge. He motioned to the teleporter on James’s wrist. Suddenly, he heard a voice come from the device.

“Archer’s plan was unsuccessful,” Roger said, his voice blaring from a small speaker on the device. “But I’m afraid you chose poorly, Mr. Grant. Your friend, Doctor Archer, made an impressive and lonesome stand against us. Unfortunately, his contribution to our mission has ended. I regret to add that his will not be the only death this night.”

James took hold of the device and answered back. “I stand by my choice.”

“Are you sure?” Roger grinned again as Val approached his side. She waved to Genesis and blew a kiss to James. She then disappeared from view, her laugh drowning out on the device.

Genesis looked up at her husband and gave him a reassuring smile; he didn’t need to defend himself.

They embraced as the ground beneath them began to shake from the ship’s engines revving up. James looked up at the ship with an expression of fear that Genesis had never seen before.
Genesis turned to face James. “I love you, James.”

He smiled, pulled her close, and tenderly kissed her.

The ship lifted and stationed itself high in the atmosphere. James and Genesis stood holding each other, preparing for the worst, when they saw a flash of blue light all around them. The ship’s crew stood gathered in a group – seventy men and women – huddled together in fear of their fate, which they now realized was unavoidable.

The weapon fired a moment later. All over the planet, human beings were vaporized while all other forms of life watched the massacre. Outside the hospital, the people around James and Genesis Grant gasped at the sight of each other’s death. Bloodcurdling screams from all over the planet cried in unison as nearly seven billion souls breathed for the last time.

“I’m scared,” Genesis said. Suddenly, she felt the same sensation she hadn’t felt since returning to James. She looked up at her husband in fear as a wash of blue light surrounded them.

“What’s happening?” he asked.

“A miracle,” she said.

As the last humans on Earth dematerialized into thin air, James and Genesis disappeared from in front of the hospital. They were gone, lost in the streams of time.
Part 4
Chapter 1

John Archer was crouched on his hands and knees on the bridge of the Apocalypse just before the weapon was fired. The crew was already gone, sent to their deaths on the surface of the earth. His trusted friend, Roger, stood over him with a gun to his head, while the young woman, Val, looked over him with disapproval.

“You disappoint me, Doctor,” Roger said. “All this time together and you still don’t trust my motives.”

Archer coughed up a small amount of blood that resulted from a beating by the guards earlier. “I should have known when you asked me to turn traitor.”

Roger laughed. “As I told you before, there are more important things than lines on a map. We are restoring the world back into balance. One hundred loyal individuals who will rebuild a new civilization without the petty annoyances of this bankrupted culture.”

Archer struggled through the pain to muster a laugh of derision at Roger. “I used to believe that pure evil doesn’t exist. I die knowing that whatever good is left won’t exist either.”

“How poetic!” Val said, her tone of voice filled with ridicule. “The only thing that will die with you and all those people is short-sightedness.”

Archer turned from them and caught a glimpse out the bridge window. On the ground below stood a crowd of people gathered in fear and panic. Although knowing he was seconds from death, Archer smiled, knowing he had done all he could to give James one final moment with his wife.

“Any final words before you join the rest of humanity?” Roger demanded.

Archer turned to face Roger and Val and said nothing. He only smiled.

Roger looked down at the ground and caught sight of the extinction. “What a waste!” he said. He turned to address Archer but he was already dead, killed in cold blood by Val.

She turned to face Roger, wiped Archer’s blood off her face, and said: “Let’s get on with it.”

The death of every human being standing on the ground when the Apocalypse fired its weapon marked the end of an entire society, but James and Genesis were nowhere to be found. Deep in a thick, humid jungle, a naked man and woman suddenly appeared and held each other for comfort as they tried to figure out where they were.

“What just happened?” James said, looking around for any other signs of life.

“I’m not sure,” his wife replied.

“I thought you said you lost your powers.”

“I should have. That’s what the scientist told me.” She looked around their location for any signs of civilization. She couldn’t help laughing as James crouched sheepishly in a vain attempt to cover his nakedness. For her, it felt good to be outdoors again and not have to worry about being modest.

“I can’t believe we made it out of there,” James said. We’re in the middle of nowhere, he thought. “I need to rest.” He sat down on the stump of a tree and put his head against the trunk.

“I had no idea I could still do that,” she said.
He smiled at her while beckoning her to come close. “I know you didn’t. Remember our deal the night we got married?”

She nodded as she sat on his lap and rested her head against his shoulder. “Of course. No secrets.”

“Right. So let’s try to figure out what happened: the man who made you said you would be restored to normal when you came back, right?”

She nodded.

“But I’m sure getting poisoned wasn’t his idea. After all, he made you to be genetically perfect.”

“ Poisoned?” she said aghast.

“Yes, the doctor said they found a strange chemical in your blood. Whatever it was, it was supposed to kill you. Instead, it gave you cancer, which gave me a chance to save you.”

She thought back to the last thing she saw in her kitchen as she prepared dinner. Then she remembered the pinch on her shoulder just before her mind went blank. She looked at her shoulder but couldn’t find the puncture wound. It had healed as though it never happened. She then recalled what her creator had told her about her first trip and how it was triggered by her fear. She now realized why she was able to travel back in time: it was fear, an emotion she had never felt in all her time with James. “My creator said my first jump was triggered by anger and fear. Maybe that’s how we ended up here?”

“Yes, but it doesn’t explain how you suddenly got your powers back.”

She stood up and started pacing as she thought. “There can only be two possibilities: the man lied and only restored my height to normal, or he kept his word and something else changed my genes later.”

“The cure!”

Her eyes widened as she put the puzzle together in her mind. “The cure,” she repeated.

“Right! The injection I gave you killed the cancer but maybe it also undid some of whatever your creator did.”

“Does that mean I’m going to shrink again?”

“I don’t know. Maybe the cure just balanced out his mistake and you’ll be yourself and have your powers.” He pulled her close and held her close. “Should be pretty cool, right?”

She nodded. “It still doesn’t help us get back. Or save all those people.”

“We’ll think of something,” he said. “First, we need to figure out where and when we are.”

Just then, they heard a branch crack in the distance and they quickly ducked down behind a log nearby. Another branch cracked, and soon another. Soon, they heard all sorts of vegetation crushing and breaking in a slow and steady rhythm as though something approached.

“An animal?” Genesis whispered.

James shrugged his shoulders. A moment later, though, they found out precisely what it was. They looked up from their hiding place and hovering over them was an animal no human had ever laid eyes upon: a small but hissing dinosaur.
“I guess this explains when we are,” he said. He grabbed her arm and they began to run. It was far too late for running, as around them a herd of the same animal formed a circle and hissed and shrieked in unison. He looked at his wife and said: “I’ve got a bad feeling about this.”

The earth had just suffered an extinction event far worse than anything else in its history. Seven billion humans were destroyed in an instant. No other forms of life suffered; in fact, it seemed to be a comfort to animals previously kept under man’s control. Even the trees appeared to breathe a sigh of relief!

Val stood watch on the bridge of the Apocalypse as it hovered over the earth in orbit. From her vantage point, she watched a storm rage in the Pacific and a clearer view of the American continent than she had ever seen.

Her watch was almost over, which she saw as a very good thing since she had a lot of work to do. She looked down at the residual blood staining the floor near her feet where John Archer came to his end. Something occurred on the surface beneath them right after the ship’s weapon fired that kept her attention as she stared out the window. She saw a blue light seem to explode on the ground right as the population of her home planet was vaporized. For the past couple hours since the holocaust, Val had feverishly been trying to analyze what it might have been. Before taking her shift and on a hunch, she programmed the time machine’s computer to record all temporal displacements since their arrival.

One of the remaining guards finally approached her from behind and handed her a clipboard.

“Ma’am?” he said, with just a touch of fear in his voice. After all, he had witnessed her shoot Archer in the head and there was a chance her anger had not subsided.

She nodded as she received the clipboard and waved the man away, to which he scurried off the bridge. The report appeared conclusive – although she would need one of the engineers to confirm her suspicion: there was a jump through time - only not the ship. Something else had traveled through time.

Her shift was over a few minutes later, and without even acknowledging her replacement, she hurried to her quarters to change and then ran to Roger’s office.

“I think I have something,” she said.

Roger welcomed her in and offered her a seat. “Would you like something to drink?”

“No, I’m fine,” she said, still out of breath.

“Val, you need to rest. You haven’t slept since your head injury.”

“Forgive me, sir, but there’s something I need to show you that can’t wait.” She handed him the paper from the clipboard. He looked at it carefully and nodded as he tried to decipher the computer’s language.

“Have we run this by one of the volunteer engineers?”

“No, sir, not yet. I wanted you to see it first. I think that explains where James and that girl went.”

He shook his head to himself. “I understand you want revenge for that bump on your head, but the possibility still remains that those two died with the rest of their kind.”

“Sir, I know, but…”

“It’s okay, Val,” he cut her off. “From this information, it does appear that something other than us has passed through time. Your memory of visual phenomena, which we have concluded did not come from the ship, certainly adds credence to your theory. But it still does not explain that if those two traveled through time just before
being destroyed, how they did it. I deactivated his wrist device when we caught Archer.”

She bowed her head in respect since she did not know the answer either. “Sir, with your permission, I would like to find out the answer.”

Roger closed his eyes and sat back, thinking of the possibilities. “I suppose you’re right. If they have the means to travel through time, then they pose a significant risk to our plans.”

“Do I have your permission to begin a search?”

Roger nodded. “We still have several days before we are planned to settle our first new city. You have leave to find them if you can. Keep me informed.”

She nodded and immediately jumped up and made way for the door.

“Val!” he called out. She turned and faced him. “If they can narrow down who was responsible for what’s happening, the possibilities to interfere are endless. Please hurry. As we speak, they may be trying to stop our plan.”

James and Genesis stood their ground amidst a hoard of screaming lizards that continued to close in on them. As seconds passed, it appeared as though there was little they would be able to do.

“Can you get us out of here?” James said.

“I can’t!” she exclaimed. “It’s not working!”

“Let’s hope getting us here wasn’t just a one-way trip.”

Genesis nodded and tried desperately to think of a way to free them from a gruesome death. My other powers!

James tried his best to keep the dinosaurs away by making noises and throwing sticks and rocks at them, but they continued to get even closer.

“Can I try something?” Genesis said, smiling.

James nodded and said: “Be my guest,” as he dropped the rock in his hand.

“You’ve never seen me do this before,” she said. Genesis bowed her head and took a deep breath.

James felt an intense heat on his back. He turned to look at Genesis and fell to the ground at the sight of her. The blue light James had been accustomed to was replaced by a bright red glow that surrounded her. He tried to see what she was doing, but the fire was too brilliant. He looked up at the lizards instead to see their reaction, but it was too late for them: a massive shock wave rippled in every direction and simultaneously ripped the flesh from their bones. James was thrown back by the blast as well, but – as always – he was protected by the woman he loved.

A moment later, all was calm and Genesis crouched down to offer James her hand. She helped him stand and kissed him deeply. He didn’t say another word, but thanked her in the best way he knew how. Although only hours had passed for Genesis, James had gone months without the affections of his wife. And even though a gentle fire consumed the vegetation around them, the floor of the jungle seemed as good a place as any to confirm their love. For all they knew, they might never make love again.
Chapter 2

On the bridge of the Apocalypse, Val waited for one of the engineer civilians to confirm the time machine’s latest report. A few more hours had passed since she left Roger and Val had wondered if the ship’s computer was capable of detecting where someone traveling in time might end up. It turned out that Doctor Archer was indeed a brilliant man, someone she finally resented killing, if only because he would serve her interests.

“What am I looking at?” she barked as she examined the report.

The readout from the computer showed what appeared to be a massive time-line and other lines of varying brilliance and lengths drawn over it. What the engineers had helped Val understand was that traveling through time was traceable; a marker was left in space-time, telling the machine where and – more specifically – when a jump was taken. The most recent trips through time were represented by the brighter lines on the time-line, while dimmer lines were considered unreliable since those trips had taken place too long ago.

Two lines piqued Val’s attention. One of them clearly represented where James and Genesis had escaped to: some point in Earth’s distant past. The line began at the precise moment the ship’s weapon was fired, but there appeared to be no jumps following it. Val concluded that wherever James and Genesis were, they were perhaps unable or unwilling to jump back – yet.

The other line intrigued Val a lot more. It appeared to represent a jump taken over a year ago, but it was still brilliant. Most other jumps through time in that period had faded, but this one – the oldest – was brighter than even the most recent.

“Are you sure this is right?” she asked the technician.

“Yes, ma’am,” he said, “the physicists confirmed it.”

Val left the room and ran down the hall to Roger’s office.

“Do you have a minute?” she asked.

He nodded and she came in and sat down.

“I just got the computer’s latest report,” she began. “Remember how I told you we were trying to track down jumps through space-time?”

He nodded again.

She set the paper on his desk and pointed to the bright line on the time-line. “This trip was taken a year ago. I checked the ship’s log: no jumps were made back then because the machine didn’t exist. Who could do this?”

“You think it’s the girl with James, don’t you?”

“You yourself said we know nothing about her; she has no past. How else did this happen?”

“That’s a valid hypothesis,” he said. “But if you’re right - and this chart is accurate - that girl has been jumping through time all the way back to 1907.” He studied the paper further and tried to double-check her conclusion, but he was no engineer. “What do you plan to do with this information? Go after her?”

“Not her. Where she came from. We have to catch them before they try to interfere in our plan, and we now have a chart of all the times she has visited. It may be the only way we stop them.”
Without hesitating, Roger replied: “What do you need?”

“A few of the guards for protection and some wrist transporters.”

He sat silent, thinking over her plan and making sure there was nothing she missed. A moment later, he replied: “Good. Return as soon as you can. We land in forty-eight hours. I go to see my wife in four.”

Val bowed her head and then left the room. The security locker contained a cache of future weapons which she promptly gave to the guards. A few moments later, Val and the expendable men she brought along for her own protection were no longer to be found in the present.

She followed the readings from the computer and pinpointed exactly where the first jump through time originated: in 1942. Fortunately, one function of the Apocalypse’s teleporter was to allow the ship to travel great distances through all four dimensions. The engineers enabled her wrist device to do the same thing.

When Val and the soldiers emerged from the stream of time, they were in a dark room made of concrete. Parts of a nearby wall were blown out by an explosion, and outside on the ground were German soldiers hustling about as planes soared overhead. The hole was too small for them to escape and none of them were able to find an exit.

The lights above flickered on and a door at the far end of the room opened. Most of the soldiers fell to the ground before they turned around, but Val and the others fired toward the door as Nazi soldiers streamed into the room and returned fire. More of Val’s guards tumbled to the floor, but not a single bullet was shot in her direction. Out of ammunition, Val tossed her gun aside and crouched behind the bodies of her men. The Nazis stopped firing and all she heard were footsteps coming toward her. She took a deep breath and jumped to her feet, ready to attack.

As she prepared to strike the source of the footsteps, two guards grabbed hold of her and threw her to the ground. Within a matter of seconds, her hands were bound and she was knocked unconscious.

Val awoke with a severe headache and was strapped to a gurney in a similarly darkened room; her hands and feet were bound, her mouth gagged. She had been stripped naked and felt the sores on her arms where intravenous needles dug into her. Very little light shined, but she could see common laboratory instruments on the tables nearby.

A light fixture snapped on above her and light blinded her eyes. She heard the same footsteps from earlier approach.

A woman in a lab coat stepped into the light and shook her head. “This wasn’t completely necessary,” she said with a German accent as she removed the gag from Val’s mouth. “Who could hear your screams down here?” She laughed.

“Where am I?”

“You’re in an experiment facility a hundred feet below the surface,” she answered in very broken English.

“I don’t want any trouble. I’m looking for a girl; she’s very dangerous.”

“A girl you say? We have several of them down here.” She walked to the wall and turned the other lights on. Val looked around and saw dozens of other women tied to tables, naked, their arms and legs covered in puncture wounds from needles.

“What are you going to do to me?” Val asked with a slight quiver in her voice.

“The same thing we are doing to the rest of these women. We are trying to design the perfect soldiers.
Once we have,” the woman paused, “we will breed them.”

Val looked away from the other women and closed her eyes. The woman turned around to check on one of the girls and Val tested the strength of her bounds. No good.

“Before we continue with you,” the woman said, “we have some questions for you.” She held up Val’s gun, then her clothing, and finally Archer’s wrist device. “Would you mind explaining what these are? They do not exist in our time.”

“No, they don’t,” Val said. “I’m from the future.”

“Most scientists would dismiss your claim outright, but I know you speak the truth.” The woman tossed the clothes and guns into a trash container but kept the wrist device in her hand. “I imagine this device is how you came to be here. I think you can be of help to us.”

Val snorted and spit at the woman. “Now why would I do that?”

The woman reached for a needle on a cart near one of the other girls and raised it for Val to see. Val struggled, but it was useless. “We’ve lost something very dear to us,” she said as she injected the serum into Val’s arm. “One of our girls has escaped from us. We believe the scientist in charge of her project gave her abilities the Fuhrer did not approve of. We need her back.” After emptying the needle, she grabbed another one and jabbed it deep into Val’s hip. Val let out a scream, but the woman only jabbed harder, shoving the tip of the needle into the bone. “There,” she said. “You now have no choice but to help us.”

“What did you do to me?”

“You are now like her. There were a couple of problems with her creator’s formula, but for your purposes it will work fine. You are to retrieve what was lost and bring her back here.”

"Who?"

"Genesis. She should be easy to find - she's the only human to have travelled in time."

Val felt a sudden surge of energy race through her body as the bonds began to weaken. "And what if I don't return?"

"It will be in your best interest to return as soon as possible. You see, there is a very different concoction mixing with your red blood cells which will provoke a very sudden and painful death in the next twenty-four hours if you do not come back. And please, dear, don't think of going back in time to prevent this from happening. The past is already written.” The woman turned to leave and heard the bonds keeping Val to the gurney shatter. She heard Val's feet hit the floor and said: "Killing me will not help you. I am the only with the antidote for the poison pumping through your veins." The woman left Val alone in the room with the other test subjects.

Val took a quick look around before she realized the truth of the woman's words: she had no choice. Besides, stopping Genesis was exactly what she came here for. Now she had the means to find her. Her plan could not have gone better. Before she left, she saw the wrist device the woman left behind. She smashed it beneath the leg of the gurney and tossed the remains in the trash container. With just the thought of travelling through time, she disappeared.

James and Genesis were comfortable wandering the jungle naked, but both of them agreed that the threats they faced earlier made it impossible for them to make a life there. Nor did they want to - the future events needed to be stopped.

“I’m not sure what we should do,” he said.
“Are we definitely going to intervene and stop Roger or let things play out?”

“That’s the big question, isn’t it? I’m sure – given what I know of you – that you would vote against interference.”

“Yes. Interference has caused me too much pain.” Her mind instantly thought back to Jadzia and the calloused way she tried to stop a World War, only to lose her sister in the process. “And none of these things happen at random, but they are the accumulation of tiny events, many of them seemingly insignificant.”

“Right. So what do you think it would take to prevent the extinction?”

She gathered wood for a fire as night came and the air grew colder. Once a sizable pile was built, she raised her hand up until it glowed red. Instantly, fire dripped from her palm and set the wood ablaze. “The first thing we would need to do is trace back all the events and people that contributed to the disaster.”

“That would definitely include Roger, Archer, and Val,” he said as he approached the fire and began warming himself.

“Right, Val...” She spoke with just a hint of jealousy in her voice. “But still, how do we know if they were the only persons responsible? What if Archer’s first-grade schoolteacher put some radical idea in his head? What if Roger met some guy in college who knew one of Archer’s classmates and got the idea from them? What if Val was born evil?”

He sensed the slight tone of insecurity in her voice when she mentioned Val. “Nothing ever happened, Gen,” he assured her.

“I know,” she said. “My point is that in order to stop all of this, it may require us to do some equally bad things.”

“Like what?”

“Well, suppose someone involved really was born wicked. The only way to stop him or her would be to kill them as a baby. So, is the death of one baby worth saving seven billion?”

“I don’t know,” he answered her.

“Me neither. It’s just something we need to think about. And what about the event that leads up to it. We might need to intervene in some innocuous incident that instilled the desire in someone to do bad. Imagine all we’d have to do: prevent wars, riots, protests, elections, and coups all over the world just because they all added up to form this intricate web of events.

“And what if you got caught? If I get caught, I can free myself. But you depend on me entirely!”

She drew close to him and kissed him. “We also have to think logistically, James. We might need to make hundreds of jumps through time just to find out where it all stems from, not to mention all the fixing it would require. And it wouldn’t be like before; I’m not tiny anymore. Imagine the confusion we would cause having a naked man and woman magically appear all throughout history!”

He held her tight by the fire and weighed their options. It seemed to James that no matter the course they chose, they would simultaneously be causing a myriad of heinous acts just to prevent one huge, terrifying event.

“I spent the better part of my life,” she said, “trying to find people in time to help. I only found two - and one of them was killed by my negligence.”
“You need to stop blaming yourself for that,” he said tenderly. “What happened to her was an accident. And she made her choice, as did I. You only provided the means for us to do what we felt was right in our hearts.”

“But I was made to serve humanity honorably. But this,” she said, “I wonder if this is all too much for even me to handle.”

“The greatest act of kindness I ever performed almost negated my own conception. So I’m not sure my moral compass is the best measure of right and wrong.”

“The only other course is to let events play out,” she conceded. "After all, if Archer never chose you, we'd both be dead. Maybe we survived for another reason.”

“What? Revenge?”

“No. But justice in its purest form is about balance. And in my heart, making the people who did this pay a price for what they did is well within my boundaries.”

He held her tighter. “And if we both get ourselves killed?”

“I won't let that happen.”
Chapter 3

Val awoke from her first trip through time without her wrist teleporter on a secluded part of planet Earth. Before she returned to the ship she saw orbiting overhead across the night sky, she wanted to find out what else besides time travel she might be capable of. The most obvious side effect was her nakedness – a product of time travel no one experienced with the wrist device. The ability to travel must now be in her DNA, she assumed.

How she traveled through time was at first a mystery to her until she recalled that the simple thought was enough. She wondered if her thoughts were linked to her abilities so she stood on top of a large rock and tried to think of jumping through time again. Trying even harder, she closed her eyes. A few moments later, she opened her eyes and saw she was in the same place – except that she now hovered fifty feet in the air.

“Cool,” she said aloud. She tried to keep herself aloft. After succeeding, she tried to fly even higher. She soon learned that moving across the sky and maneuvering through space was no harder than breathing.

A few minutes later, she felt confident in her new powers and returned to the Apocalypse. She thought long and hard about where she wanted to go and a moment later was safe in her room aboard the ship.

After getting dressed, she ran down the hall to check in on Roger.

“Sir, I'm back,” she said, rushing into his office.

“Good. I haven't seen the guards that went with you. Did something go wrong?”

“They're dead,” she said plainly.

“What happened out there?”

Val thought of the consequences of telling Roger of her newfound powers. And then she realized that possessing a secret ability might be advantageous if Roger decided to keep her out of the leadership for good. “A dead end, sir. You were right: I was being vengeful. I need to let it all go.”

He smiled. “I know how difficult it is to let someone go you care about. We can only assume that if either of them did survive, they would have surfaced by now.”

“I'm happy to take my place here, even as a civilian if you want.”

“I’m sure my wife will want you as a celibate when she hears of your devotion. The civilians and celibates are preparing to scuttle the ship. But you and I have one more item to attend to.” He handed her a slip of paper.

“Your wife?” she asked.

“That's correct. Are you ready to leave?”

“Sure.” She took the piece of paper and entered the coordinates into a wrist teleporter she brought from her room - for appearances.

Roger and Val disappeared a moment later.

When they emerged from the stream, Roger and Val were in a large, empty house. The decor was
slightly feminine but it was obvious from the rare sports memorabilia that a man lived here too.

“This was our home,” Roger said.

“Where is she?” Val asked as she wandered around, looking at little knick-knacks.

“She should be here in a few minutes.”

“Is she expecting you?”

“Yes. Long ago, we decided if either us succeeded, we would meet on this date. Oddly enough, this was
the day she died.” He checked his watch and nodded. “She should be here any second.”

True to his word, the front door opened a moment later. When Jennifer walked in and saw her husband,
twenty years older, she cried and embraced him. After a few seconds, they separated and smiled at one another. Val
appeared from around the corner and smiled as well.

“Jennifer,” Roger said, “this is Val.”

“It's very nice to meet you,” Jennifer said. They shook hands. “So, you’re the one who helped Roger
achieve our dream?”

“I did what I could,” Val answered.

Jennifer walked to the living room and sat down on the sofa. “So, then, I imagine you're ready to take
your place in the government like the rest of the celibates,” she said to Val.

Val and Roger followed her and sat on adjacent furniture. “Well, yes, if you’ll permit me,” Val said.

Roger smiled. “We hit a few bumps along the way, but Val has regained all of my trust.”

“Then you will have a welcome place in the new order,” Jennifer said. “I'm glad he brought you here to
see me. We have a lot to talk about.”

“What do we have to talk about?” Val asked.

Jennifer chuckled. “You haven't told her yet?” she asked Roger. He shook his head.

Val watched both of them exchange glances. “What's going on here?”

“Well, I suppose it's a good thing he didn't spoil the surprise. After all, I should be the one to tell you.”

“Tell me what,” Val demanded.

Jennifer looked down at the floor briefly then looked Val in the eyes and said: “I'm your mother.”

“My mother?” Val asked. “No, you've got it all wrong. My mother was a stripper.”

“A stripper, Roger?” Jennifer asked angrily. “You gave my daughter to a stripper?”

Roger shook his head. “I knew nothing about that, Jen. I only found out when I tracked her down.”

“So, that's why you promised me a spot in the government, Roger?” Val asked.

“It was,” Roger said. “I made a promise to Jennifer that I would help find you. She swore me to keep it
a secret from you.”
Val gagged. “But what about all those times you saw me naked, why didn't you say anything?”

“Naked?” Jennifer interrupted. “You didn't...”

Roger jumped in suddenly. “No, Jennifer. I've been faithful to you every second.”

“But why did you give me up?” Val asked.

Jennifer folded her hands and gathered her words. “Valerie, I had you just before Roger and I started dating. I was working at his father's office and I was confused. Roger contacted someone at an adoption agency that his father donated money to and they found you a home. I was just starting out my career, Valerie. Roger was barely ready for marriage when we met! I didn't want to risk losing the love of my life because of a mistake.”

“A mistake?” Val said. “Is that what I am?”

“A mistake I've been trying to rectify since it was made,” she replied. “I always wanted to one day find you, and when we planned the mission, we decided we'd bring you along.”

“I can't believe what I'm hearing!” Val shouted. “Do you know what I had to grow up with?”

They both shook their heads.

“I was raised in a day care with the offspring of strippers. Every friend I had in high school took after our mothers. I fought for years throughout college to have a good name. I was alone and scared when the war started, and just when things started to go well, my husband died! Now, don't you think you were both being a little selfish?”

“Of course we were,” Jennifer answered. “I was eighteen when I had you. I'm only twenty-five years old now. This means that Roger has spent close to twenty years waiting for the chance to save me and find you. The only reason he never came looking for you sooner was because I told him to wait until there was hope – hope that our family could be united peacefully.”

Val shook her head, her temper raging within. “And you!” she shouted at Roger. “You sent me on all those dangerous missions by myself. I could've gotten myself killed!”

“Val, all of this was a risk. We knew this from the start. But I needed you - I knew you had your mother’s passion in you; the same determination, even. I never meant to hurt you.”

“I'm truly sorry,” Jennifer said.

Val continued stewing and refused to make a sound.

“Val,” Roger finally said, “we should get back to the future.”

“I'm not going anywhere with either of you!” Val screamed.

Roger reached for his wife’s hands and shook his head. “I knew this was a bad idea.”

“There was no other way,” Jennifer said.

Val rolled her eyes as a tremendous anger boiled within. “Sure there was! You could have made sure I ended up in the hands of someone more responsible.”

Roger left his wife’s side and approached Val, the scowl on her face too impossible to hide. “I have many regrets in my life,” he said. “What we did was foolish, but we wanted to make it up to you the best way we
could. And when we made the decision to bring real change to the world, we knew we couldn’t leave you behind.”

“Val,” her mother said, “your father was raised by a Nazi scientist in exile. In Brazil. Can you imagine the hardships he endured? But those very hardships are what gave him all of the wonderful talents he possesses now. I’m sure the same could be said of you.”

Val saw her parents move closer to console her, but she had no need for their affection. She folded her arms and resisted any attempts to calm her rage. “If you are twenty-five,” she said to Jennifer, “then that means I am a seven year-old girl right now, living in a trailer overrun with cockroaches. Do you know what happened to me when I was seven?”

They shook their heads.

“My mother’s boyfriend molested me. Are you trying to tell me that was a good thing? That it made me stronger?”

“Of course not,” Jennifer said, her eyes welling with tears as she listened to her daughter. “In all of your father’s visits, he never told me of that.”

“That’s because I never knew,” he said, then realizing he had just given away their most precious secret.

“Wait!” Val said. “You’ve been visiting her with the time-machine? But you forced me to seduce another man as punishment for seeing my dead husband?”

“Your mother already knew of our plan. Your husband didn’t. It was too big of a risk.”

Val’s rage was uncontainable. They reached to put their arms around her, but she broke free and stormed to the other side of the room. She tossed her wrist teleporter to the ground and crushed it beneath her foot. “I’m done being your whore.”

“But Valerie, we have great things planned for you,” her mother said calmly.

“I’m choosing my own path.” Then, she disappeared into the stream under her own power.


“What happened?” his wife asked. “Where did she go?”

“We’ve made a terrible mistake, my love. A terrible mistake.”

Jennifer shook her head in disbelief. “Roger, what are you talking about? How did she do that?”

She never heard his answer. She doubled over in pain and slumped forward as Val emerged from the stream naked with a knife in her hand, its edge lodged firmly in her mother’s back. “No! Jennifer!” Roger screamed. “I love you!”

Those words turned out to be his last. Without warning, he lost consciousness as his daughter exacted revenge and struck his head with a small statue. Val left Jennifer to die on the floor and smashed a nearby window to give the appearance of a break-in. Without a trace of Roger’s blood in sight, she lifted his body and carried him into the stream, ensuring that the other Roger would continue his work as before and see his wife’s death as a victim of a robbery.

Roger never regained consciousness again. His daughter made sure of it, leaving his naked body somewhere on Earth with just seconds remaining before the Apocalypse’s terrifying weapon fired into the atmosphere. He was but one of seven billion casualties.
Chapter 4

James and Genesis returned from the distant past to a barren, forsaken earth – devoid of all human life. Above them in the night sky, the Apocalypse loomed overhead. The night air was calm and animal life roamed about the city with reckless abandon in man's absence. The young human pair who suddenly appeared did nothing to displace the small creatures that now treated the streets as their own.

“I have nothing to be afraid of, do I?” James said as a pack of wolves spotted them from down the street.

Genesis shook her head. “Of course not. We need to get aboard that ship.”

“You can do that, can't you?”

“Are you coming with me?” she asked.

“Sure, give me a second; I think I may be able to fend for myself for once.” He ran across the street and down an alleyway to the other side of the city block. The hospital they left earlier was across the street. Right where he left it, the wrist device lay on the ground, underneath the scattered and torn rags of former clothing left behind by the human race. He picked up the device and fastened it to his wrist. Suddenly, and despite his expectations, the device activated.

Genesis approached from the across the street. “What did you find?”

“The wrist device I had before. It works now for some reason.”

“That's good, isn't it?”

“Let's hope so. When I teleport, do you think you'll be able to follow me in the stream?”

“I should be,” she said.

“Good, because the first thing we need to do when we get aboard is get some clothing – at least for me.”

She giggled. “Lead the way.”

He input the coordinates of the vessel that were programmed in the device and disappeared. A moment later, he was in his old quarters aboard the ship. The last time he was there, he knocked Val unconscious to get away from her; a small spot of her blood still lingered on the carpet.

A split-second after he arrived, Genesis appeared. “So, this is where you lived with that girl?” she asked, but not jealously.

“No, this was my room. But she left her clothes from the mission here. She's the same height as you, I think, so feel free to take what you like.”

Genesis began sorting through the bag of clothing near the dresser when she noticed the blood on the carpet. “Is that blood?”

“Hers,” James answered as he sifted through his closet. “Once I discovered what they were up to, she tried to kill me. I hit her with that lamp to get away.”

“So she went from trying to seduce a man to killing him, huh? I didn't think black widows grew to her
“You know the funny thing about the whole trip?” he asked non-rhetorically as he began to dress. “Even though you were gone, the idea of cheating never entered my mind – at least in the beginning. What I mean is, the thought of betraying you was so far removed from my mind that I never realized she was coming onto me.”

“Really?” she asked. She finally found some of Val's clothing that seemed to match and started dressing.

“Well, at least in the beginning. Eventually, she made her intentions painfully obvious. Even then, I never gave in. You believe me, right?”

She laughed as she tried to fasten one of Val's bras and realized it didn't fit - too small. “I see now why you didn't.”

“If you're referring to the fact that you're way prettier than her, you're only half right. But I knew I was going to see you again, and so to me, you were never gone from my life.”

She finished dressing and approached James. “I love you, James,” she said. “And believe me: when we make it out of this, I'm going to make everything up to you.”

“Gen,” he said, “you owe me nothing.” He kissed her.

A moment later, he was finished getting dressed and ready to explore the ship. He looked at the clock and noticed it was still early in the morning, just before dawn. “Everyone on board is probably still sleeping. The first person we need to find is Roger; he's the guy in charge.”

The pair ran down the corridors as softly as they could. Just as expected, the ship was silent except for the ever-present sound of its engines humming. Not far from James's quarters was Archer's office. The light was off and most of the pages on his desk were disheveled as though someone had recently rummaged through his work. Along the corridor was the large storage compartment that served as civilians' communal bedroom.

Further up the hall was the bridge and control room, which James decided they should avoid because of the guards undoubtedly roaming about. Oddly enough, in all their time snooping, James and Genesis never saw a guard. Then he realized they might already have been sent to earth for destruction with the rest of the crew.

“Keep an eye out for Val. She's probably not far,” James warned.

They finally reached the office of the late Roger Cooke. Before they could open the door, they felt the subtle shift in weight from footsteps behind them. Just as they were about to turn, they heard:

“Stop!”

The voice was Val's.

“Surprised to see us?” James said.

“Not really,” Val answered. “Once I realized your little woman could travel through time, I knew you'd show up eventually.”

They turned around to face Val, who stood weaponless and naked.

“And what's to stop us now?” James said. “You?”

“Wait a second,” Genesis said. “Something's not right here, James.”
Val grinned.

“What is it?” James asked.

“I felt something in the stream when we came back. I should have known.”

“Are you starting to figure it out yet, sweetie?” Val said.

“She’s like me, James. Look at her: she’s not wearing the device on her arm.”

James suddenly noticed the missing device that all crew were required to wear at all times. “How is that possible?”

“That’s not important,” Val said. “What’s important is that Genesis come with me.”

“Not a chance,” Genesis answered.

“Why, Val?” James asked. “Why are you doing all this?”

“You have no idea the sorts of betrayal I’ve had to face.”

“You did this because I rejected you?” James said.

“James, don’t be so vain. Roger was right: the world needed to be rebuilt, and I’m going to make sure that history doesn’t repeat itself. No more deceptions, no more lies. Everything’s an open book.”

“Does that mean telling the rest of the civilians about your new power?” Genesis asked.

“The pro-creators will fall in line because I’m the one who will protect them.”

“Val, this is insane,” James said. “All of us have been betrayed by someone we love. You can’t really mean to make yourself ruler over these people!”

“Is that why you came back?” Val asked. “So the two of you could rule?”

“No,” Genesis said. “We returned for one purpose: justice.”

“Don’t push me, girl,” Val said. “I know what else you can do.”

Genesis made no expression but laughed on the inside. She spent the majority of her life perfecting all of the powers she was given; there was no way Val could match her strength. “Then leave James out of this!”

“Not a chance. He betrayed me, so he has to die!”

Genesis finally laughed aloud. “You have nothing to fear,” she said to James.

“I never do.”

Just then, Val tried to attack but Genesis merely chuckled, shielded James, and tossed Val against the wall with her mind. “James, go!” she said. He touched his wrist and disappeared.

Val came to and got to her feet. “I’ll find him,” she said.

“You are free to try,” Genesis responded.

Val grinned, then disappeared, but only slightly before Genesis followed.
On the surface of the earth, James stood waiting for Genesis to return. Not a second after arriving, Val appeared – more furious than ever. If fear was ever to grip James in the face of a girl he once rejected, it abated instantly when Genesis arrived. Val turned away from James and tried to lash out at Genesis. Fire erupted from Val’s hands, but a shield formed around her and absorbed the fire. Val prepared another attack when, above them, the Apocalypse listed to one side and began to descend. As it fell closer to the surface, James saw the faces of the other civilians on the bridge. The engines revved and the doomsday weapon charged for another discharge.

“Genesis!” he shouted.

Val smirked and disappeared into the stream.

Genesis grabbed hold of James and formed a shield around them as the weapon fired. She stood on the edge of the shield and focused all of her power into it. James huddled behind her. The weapon’s burst dissipated but the shield was holding all of its fury. She gathered all of her strength to keep it from penetrating the force-field.

“I can’t hold it forever!” she said.

James held onto her and realized the only option left would violate her most cardinal axiom: to never kill a human again. “We have no choice,” he said. “I forgive you.”

She knew what had to be done, and not only to save herself. She was always prepared to die instead of harming another soul. But she couldn’t let harm come to the man she loved. With every ounce of her remaining stamina, she pushed back against the surge of energy trapped within the shield. The energy finally reached the edge of the field where she channeled all of its strength into a narrow beam and fired it skyward, striking the Apocalypse. The shield collapsed and Genesis fell to the ground. They knew they were successful when the ship, now empty of all life (as well as a pilot), veered off course and fell to the ground miles away in a magnificent conflagration.

“Are you okay?” she said.

“I’m fine. You?”

“I’m a little winded. I need to get Val. But I’ll be keeping an eye on you. No harm will come.”

“I know. I’ll be here waiting.”

Genesis slipped into the stream of time to track Val, who was easily traceable. What Val apparently never learned was that jumping through space and time always left a mark, so her attempts to leap in and out of time to throw Genesis off her trail only made it easier for Genesis to find her. Amateur! Genesis thought.

Finally, Genesis exited the stream and saw Val standing in front of a massive tree about a hundred feet away.

“Not so fast,” Val said.

Genesis stopped and prepared to defend herself against the only woman who could claim to be her equal. “Well, well, Val,” she said. “Looks like your little ruse has failed.”

Val smiled broadly. “You can't kill me, Genesis.”

“I’m quite sure I can.”
“Even while I carry his child?”

Genesis did not react the way Val anticipated. Instead of lashing out with anger, Genesis merely tried to perceive James's presence, which his child would undoubtedly possess. To her chagrin, Val was blocking her ability.

“What, you don't believe me?” Val said. “It's not your fault he needed companionship.”

“I'll never believe you,” she answered.

“Oh, come on! We lived as husband and wife for two months. We both had needs.”

Genesis took a step toward Val, almost falling for her ruse. “There's more to knowing a man than trying to seduce him.”

Val rolled her eyes. “That may be true, but I must admit, James was a lot easier than most.”

Genesis lashed out finally, forced a ball of energy to her hands, and hurled it at Val, who ducked as it sailed passed and struck the tree behind her. The tree, having been hit by a mass of energy constructed of compressed space/time, curled in on itself, and reappeared as a tiny sapling as though it had just grown younger.

Val was prepared for an attack, but she was unaware of what exactly Genesis just threw at her. When she realized that being hit by it would have reverted her into an infant, she looked up at Genesis and scowled. “You're going to regret that!” she shouted. “But not yet.”

Val turned from her and immediately disappeared.

“Great!” Genesis muttered. She jumped into the time stream where she could sense Val looking for somewhere to exit. While never doubting her husband for an instant, once inside the stream, Genesis confirmed that Val lied about carrying a child.

Val sensed Genesis gathering speed behind her with tremendous velocity. Val slipped out of time and appeared in a new time period. She looked out from her new vantage point upon a battlefield of ancient Mongolian warriors. At seeing her standing among them stark naked, they dropped their weapons in shock as some of them ran towards her.

Genesis appeared a moment later and watched as Val stand paralyzed in fright.

“Oh, I forgot you're not used to this yet!” she shouted. Genesis too stood naked on the hilltop looking down on Val as she began to run. Unlike her nemesis, Genesis didn't have a care in the world. “You must be cold!” she scoffed.

Val looked up at Genesis as she ran when it dawned on her that she need not suffer the abuse. She spun around, faced the soldiers charging her, and lifted the boulders nearby with her mind and hurled them at the attackers. The boulders shattered long before they reached the soldiers, but their disappearance into powder forced the soldiers back. Val knew that the rocks were pulverized by her enemy, and with the warriors distracted, she turned to attack Genesis instead.

Genesis sensed the attack coming and slipped into the time stream with Val not far behind.

Val exited at the same point in the stream as Genesis, and the initial disorientation of time-traveling set in as her stomach churned. She was still recovering when she heard the roar of the massive Tyrannosaurus bearing down on her.

“Oh my God!” she screamed as she took off running as fast as she could. Genesis relished the fact that Val was still relying on her normal abilities as she safely watched the pursuit from the comfort of a tree limb. The lizard closed in on Val when she suddenly disappeared again.
“I really don’t like this woman,” Genesis mumbled. She jumped into the stream to follow Val again. Once in the stream, she tracked the point where Val tried to escape; she clearly had no direction. She wanted to lead Val to points in time she knew would prove dangerous for someone with her limited knowledge of their shared skills, but she couldn’t catch up to Val.

Val left the stream, spun around, and charged an attack in preparation for Genesis’s arrival. But her adversary appeared high above her and fired ice from her hands down at Val. She stretched her hands toward the falling ice and melted it just as she felt Genesis’s presence behind her. Another wave of ice rushed toward her. She pushed against the blast and melted it too but not before another wall of ice ascended from beneath her. Soon, she was overwhelmed by the barrage of attacks Genesis forged against her. She was buried against the ice, now falling from every direction. Encased in a foot of ice all around, she gathered her energy and tried to warm her entire body to melt the ice. But as each inch of ice melted, another inch was added on the outside. Soon, the melted ice collected and began to rise all around her. The hotter her skin got, the warmer the temperature of the water. Before long, she couldn’t decide if the cold ice or the near boiling water was going to be the end of her.

Outside the igloo surrounding Val, Genesis floated high in the sky and absorbed all the energy from the sun she could and channeled it through her body into a never-ending stream of ice, it descending upon the girl trapped inside. Then, the inevitable happened: Val realized the futility of fighting and simply jumped back into the stream.

“That was bound to happen,” Genesis said as she followed.

When she emerged again, Genesis was prepared for whatever Val threw at her. But then she recognized the point in the stream and realized she would need to defend herself - and James.

The room was dark when Genesis appeared. “Don’t move an inch,” Val whispered.

Genesis’s eyes adjusted to the low-light and knew instantly where she stood: James’s baby crib was just a few feet behind her. “Please, Val,” she said. The baby’s soft cry grew louder. “I beg you. Please leave him out of this.” She closed her eyes and tried to block from her mind what Val might be doing to harm her future husband as the cries of the baby grew ever louder. Then the room was aglow with azure light, and the baby cried no more.

She rushed to the side of his crib, but he was gone. Furious, Genesis dove into the stream and stormed after Val. She followed Val’s exit and gathered all her strength, but Val was too quick. Genesis fell to the ground as Val struck her on the head with a log. She tumbled down the slope and tried to regain her bearings but she slammed into the trunks of several trees before she finally righted herself and prepared a counterattack. She shook off the slight pain of the attack and, as usual, there was no blood.

She frantically looked around and finally saw her mark. Val descended from the top of the slope and hit Genesis in the abdomen before she could gather enough strength to defend. Then, she heard the cry of the baby. She tried to locate its source, but the distraction was enough for Val to attack again, this time grabbing Genesis by the hair and dragging her to the nearest tree. The baby’s cries echoed throughout the forest and Genesis struggled to fight off Val but couldn’t. This isn’t possible, she thought. How can she be stronger than me?

Val lifted Genesis by the hair with one hand and reached around her throat with the other. Genesis kicked away from the tree, crushing the tree behind her while also forcing her knees into Val’s stomach. Val dropped Genesis and fell to the ground, reeling in agony. With the upper hand, Genesis lifted Val and tossed her like a doll a thousand meters away, where she landed against a tree and toppled to the ground in a heap.

Genesis spun around and tried to find the source of the baby’s cries. High on the hill and in the boughs of a tree, baby James screamed for help. She rushed to his side and cradled him in her arms. Immediately, she disappeared into the stream and emerged in James’s room where she set her infant husband back in his crib. Val emerged a second later, but Genesis was prepared.

“Not this time,” she said as she took Val by the hand and dragged her back into the stream.
Genesis kept Val in the stream as long as she could but Val struggled to break free from her grasp. Genesis knew that if this battle were ever to end, she could not be the cause of her death. She only had one other option: lead Val into times or places where the odds were against her survival or fight Val emotionally, as Val had just done to her. Why not both? she thought.

Genesis finally let go of Val and exited the stream a few meters above the Pacific Ocean. Val appeared a short distance away and smiled as she realized that she hadn’t had a chance to combine her new abilities with water.

Val held up her hands and gathered energy from the sweltering sun and channeled it into an incredible ball of green, pulsing light. When the orb reached its limits, she pushed it deep underwater. At the bottom of the sea, the ball exploded and created a massive wave of water and energy that Val pushed toward Genesis, who simply stood on the water and took a deep breath. The wave approached with terrible momentum. To protect herself, Genesis lifted water from the ocean and formed a wall to block the wave. The two columns of water collided with a tremendous force that Genesis confidently ignored. But the energy Val created was too great to control. The force of the collision reeled – back to Val who was forced to watch the shock wave hit her, casting her high into the sky. She blacked out and landed in the ocean several miles away. Genesis flew to where she landed and from high above, looked down to see if Val would surface.

Is she dead? she thought. As minutes passed and the chances of Val’s survival lessened, Genesis turned to leave. Then Val rocketed as fast as she could at Genesis, who watched with delight as Val grew a deeper and deeper red as she approached. Although Genesis had never used this ability before to its full extent, she knew what Val was doing. Val had gathered energy from every source around her – the sun, water, and wind – and tried to reach a critical mass she hoped would overwhelm Genesis.

Genesis always assumed that her body, although strong, was not completely impervious. The forms of energy Val was accumulating all at once would overload her eventually. Finally! She's done it! Genesis thought. Right before the two women collided, Genesis held her breath, gathered what power she could, and disappeared into the stream.

Val followed and exited the stream an instant later and continued her flight toward Genesis. She saw Genesis hovering a great distance away and then noticed the great void around them. The brilliance of her own skin blocked her vision but behind Genesis she saw the faint glimmer of stars against a vast darkness. She gasped for air as she realized they were in deep space; she couldn’t control her trajectory anymore. Val hurtled through space and felt excruciating pain as though she was being burned alive. The energy within her could no longer be contained; her body collapsed long before she came close to harming Genesis. No longer could she suppress the terrible and violent rage that flowed in tandem with the energy in her veins. The energy pushed its way through the pores of her skin, but it could not be released fast enough. It finally discharged into the vacuum of space and vaporized the young girl amidst a brief, but terrible, explosion.

Genesis hovered over the area of Val’s destruction. She still held her breath and felt the surge of radiation from the explosion coursing through her body. Just as quickly as Val’s explosion dissipated, Genesis confirmed her enemy’s demise. Her conscience clean, she entered into the stream and looked forward to seeing her husband.

Genesis returned to the surface of the earth and fell to the ground to catch her breath. James was right where she left him, safe and secure.

“Are you all right?” he said as he rushed to her side.

She took several deep breaths and regained her balance. “I’m fine,” she answered. “She took a lot out of me.”
“Is she...dead?”

She nodded as she bent over with her hands on her knees, still recovering her energy. “It was all her doing.”

“I’m just glad you’re okay,” he said. He took her in his arms and embraced her tight.

She looked over his shoulder and noticed the total silence that surrounded them. Animals off in the distance frolicked and ran free across the city streets. Miles away, the remains of Apocalypse burned as smoke drifted into the sky; the last vestiges of Roger’s organization were gone forever. But so were all the people. “So, it's just us then,” she said.

He followed her gaze and watched the wreckage burn. “It looks that way.” The chill in the night air enveloped them as the loneliness set in – the awareness that no other human being lived in all the earth.

“Fortunately, it won’t be like this forever,” she said. “Val tried to convince me that she was pregnant with your child. When I was in the stream, I sensed your presence, but not from her. From me. I felt your son’s heartbeat.”

He pulled her as close to his chest as he could and kissed her deep. “You never actually believed her, right?” he said.

“No. I know who has your heart.”

They held each other tight and enjoyed the total silence surrounding them. All they heard was the soft wind blowing alongside each other's heartbeat.

“I can get used to this,” she said.

“There's only one problem. After the baby comes, it's still only us. Where will we find a wife for him?”

“I think I know just the girl for him,” she said.

“I just realized something else.”

“What?” she asked suddenly concerned.

“We don’t have to wear clothes ever again.” He smiled.

She laughed aloud and kissed her husband. “Face it, honey. We’re the new Adam and Eve.”
Jadzia was dragged from her bunk and thrown to the floor. The other women were forced to strip off their clothes and then gathered together by the door of the barracks. Jadzia followed the others, all of them on their knees and trying to cover their naked bodies. A guard forced a girl to put her hands behind her head but she resisted and cried out as she tried to cover her breasts. Another guard pushed the other aside and shot the girl in the head. None of the other women resisted; they all followed the guard’s orders.

Outside the barracks, gunfire echoed throughout the camp. Bombs fell all over the grounds of Ravensbrück. Jadzia heard the cries of prisoners in the adjacent barracks and wondered if there was a riot – or if the war was finally over and she would get to see her parents again and hopefully, receive their forgiveness.

The guards argued between themselves for several minutes. Finally, one of the guards lost the argument and his companion withdrew his sidearm and raised it to the head of the first girl in line. A single shot was fired and the girl slumped over dead. He stepped in front of the next girl and killed her as well. With each shot of his gun, Jadzia’s heart grew closer to leaping from her chest. Tears streamed down her face as she looked to the women at her left and right and felt tremendous guilt that she never knew any of their names.

As the guard approached Jadzia, the girl to her right prayed for peace. The woman at Jadzia’s left reached over and took Jadzia’s hand from behind her head. Jadzia looked at the strange woman with red hair kneeling beside her and saw that there was no fear in her eyes.

“My name is Genesis,” the woman said, “and you’re going to be all right.”

The guards never made it to Jadzia. The girl who prayed was spared a tragic end when the barracks were filled with a brilliant, blue light that blinded the guards. As they stumbled to recover sight, in a panic they both pulled their triggers, killing each other. The girl to Jadzia’s right remained on humble knees and prayed.

Jadzia was scared to open her eyes when she regained consciousness. Instead of gunfire or bombs falling, she only heard the tranquil sounds of ocean waves. Slowly at first, she reached around and felt nothing but sand. She felt the warm sun on her bare back as the cool seawater climbed the beach and touched her toes. Finally, she opened her eyes, assured that there was nothing she needed to fear any longer. She climbed to her feet and saw she was still naked. She quickly ducked back down to the sand and looked around – no one was there. Cautiously,
she climbed the beach to the high dunes a few meters away.

On the other side of the sandy hill, she saw palm trees, a forest reaching toward the horizon as far as her eyes could see, the trees climbing the side of a mountain that reached high beyond the clouds. In front of the forest on the beach, she saw a humble tent, and outside the tent, gathered around a small campfire, were three people, laughing and smiling—and just as naked as she was.

The oldest of the three, a man in his fifties, looked in Jadzia’s direction and saw the top of her head escape the shoreline. The woman, who looked no older than thirty years-old, and the young man saw her too, and after conferring with each other momentarily, the woman approached. Jadzia slid down her side of the dune as her heart raced. She looked down the beach and thought about running, but she was too late. A shadow overwhelmed her and when she looked up, she saw a beautiful redheaded woman standing above her, looking down with a radiant smile.

“Good morning,” the woman said in perfect Polish.

Jadzia recognized her voice and then remembered the last thing she saw before she opened her eyes on the beach. “Are you Genesis?” she asked.

Genesis nodded. “How do you feel?” she asked as she sat beside her.

Jadzia looked around and took in a deep breath of the salt-rich air. “I’ve never felt better.”

“Good,” Genesis said. “I’m sure you have a lot of questions about where you are and who I am.”

She nodded.

“And I have all the answers. The war ended over one hundred years ago. And I can assure you, you will never see another war in your lifetime.”

“How did I get here?”

“You won’t understand this easily, but I have the ability to travel through time. I haven’t used that ability in almost thirty years; the last time was when I rescued you from death and placed you on this beach. We’ve been waiting all these years to meet you.”

“I feel different,” she said as she noticed how much her figure had changed since her last night in the camp.

“You were very weak when we left. After I brought you here, I stopped by from time to time to nurse you back to health.”

“You mean I’ve been on this beach for thirty years?”

“Not at all. You’ve been quietly resting here for the last few weeks. But every day, I came here to make sure you had something to eat.”

Content with her answer, Jadzia’s mind raced back to the night she was about to die, and she thought of the other women, killed for no apparent reason. Only one question mattered to her. “Why me?”

Genesis sighed. “Perhaps even harder for you to believe is that you and I were once as close as sisters—in another life. You were my dearest friend, and I couldn’t wait to see you again.”

Jadzia was confused by her answers and then the disorientation of her surroundings set in. “Where am I?”
“You’re on a remote island in the South Pacific.” Genesis looked up and down the beach and breathed a sigh of deep contentment. “We come here every year.”

“Who were those men with you?”

“Would you like to meet them?” she asked.

Jadzia folded her arms to cover her breasts and drew her knees together. “Is there anything I can wear?”

Genesis smiled. “No, my dear, I’m afraid there isn’t. But don’t worry: my husband and son will think nothing of it.” She extended a hand which Jadzia promptly took.

She helped her to her feet and walked hand-in-hand with her friend back to the campsite to introduce her family. James and their son stood and smiled as Jadzia and Genesis approached.

The older man, James, reached out and shook Jadzia’s hand. She was still embarrassed by her nakedness and smiled sheepishly. “I’m so happy to finally meet you,” he said in Polish.

Jadzia nodded and said: “Thank you.”

“Jadzia?” Genesis said. “This is our son, Jacob.”

The young man inched closer and extended his hand, which was shaking ever so slightly. “It’s nice to meet you,” he said in very sloppy and broken Polish.

Genesis frowned. “I taught you better than that.”

“You didn’t tell me she was so beautiful, Mom!” he answered in English.

“That shouldn’t matter,” she said.

James and Jacob sat around the fire and warmed themselves by the flames as the sun started to set over the ocean. Genesis offered a place for Jadzia to sit before she cuddled next to James. Jadzia sat along the sand and said nothing, her thoughts racing.

“What is she thinking?” James whispered to his wife.

“I’m not going to tell you that!” she said. Then in French, a language their son did not know, she said: “But she did notice him.” James smiled.

“Would you like something to eat?” she said to Jadzia.

Jadzia took a piece of passion fruit and ate. Jacob sat across the fire from her and took a piece of passion fruit as well. Nervous and still self-conscious, Jadzia struggled with something to say. “So,” she began, “are there other people on the beach?”

Genesis and James exchanged a worried look and talked privately how best to answer. Jacob sat by and said nothing. Genesis inched closer to Jadzia and smiled. “A long time ago, there was a disaster that affected everyone in the world. My husband and I were the only ones who survived – and now our son with us.” She paused to gauge Jadzia’s reaction. Although her face was expressionless, Genesis waited a moment for the shock to set in.

Jadzia no longer needed to ask any questions; she now knew why Genesis rescued her from certain death. She looked up at Jacob, who sat quietly across the fire and smiled. She smiled back and ate the rest of her fruit.

“Would you like to walk along the beach?” Genesis asked. “We still have lots to talk about. And there
are two more people I want you to meet.”"

“Sure,” she said.

Genesis stood and took Jadzia by the hand. Over the dunes, beyond the jetty, Jadzia saw a man and woman walking hand-in-hand. As they approached and the sun’s rays reached across the ocean and touched their skin, Jadzia knew right away who they were: her parents – as naked as everyone else – walked towards her. She let go of Genesis’s hand and raced down the beach and into the arms of her waiting mother. Her father threw his arms around his wife and daughter as the family wept with joy.

“How did you survive?” Jadzia finally asked.

Her mother caught a glance from Genesis and answered: “We were rescued a few months ago. Genesis told us everything – and that we could see you today. We couldn’t wait another minute.”

Genesis approached and shook hands with Jadzia’s parents. “You’re timing is perfect. I’m sorry you had to wait so long to see her; I wanted to make sure she was healthy again.”

“I made the most of the time,” Jadzia’s father said as he patted his fattened stomach.

His wife laughed. “We both did.” She patted her slightly pregnant belly.

James and Jacob raced down the beach and greeted Jadzia’s parents. “It’s good to see you again,” James said. “Can you stay for dinner?”

“Of course,” Jadzia’s mother said, she still not letting go of her daughter.

The reunited family returned to the campfire and enjoyed their first family meal together in almost a century. Genesis and James regaled them with tales of their adventures and answered the myriad of questions Jadzia had.

Jacob, meanwhile, sat by quietly, still shy and intimidated by Jadzia’s beauty to speak up. Even her parents wondered to themselves what was wrong.

“Excuse us,” Genesis said to Jadzia and her parents. Then, in English, she said to Jacob: “What’s wrong?”

“I don’t know what to say,” he said.

James cleared his throat. “I think I can help with this.” He took Genesis by the hand and deftly picked her up, throwing her over his shoulder as he raced off for the water; Genesis giggled the whole way.

Jacob laughed at the sight of his parents playing and set his food aside. He wiped the sand from his legs and extended a hand and friendly smile to Jadzia. She took it, smiled back, and headed off down the distant shore with her future husband.

Genesis and James returned from their swim and embraced as they and Jadzia’s parents watched their children walk along the water, the first stirrings of love in their hearts.

“Didn’t I tell you?” Genesis asked. “I knew just the girl for him.” She reached up and tenderly kissed her husband.

“But what about their child?” he wondered.

Genesis leaned into his chest and whispered: “Jadzia had a friend in another life called Kamila. She’s already waiting to meet her future husband – twenty years from now.” She laughed.
As the sun’s final rays cast their light across the beach, the moon steadily rose over the top of the mountain, illuminating the beach below, where the Grant and Konik families rejoiced and embraced the peace and unity around them. After the fear that remained in Jadzia’s heart faded from memory, no one on earth had reason to be afraid ever again.