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Goddess bless and peace profound.

Sequel to “Dreaming of a Life.”

## **A Different Dream**

I Christie

### **Chapter 1**

“So, what does that mean?” Celine asked exasperated at the cryptic Email message her lover received. The blonde she was sitting next to was busy typing, or more like pounding on the keyboard.

“Hm,” Darcy continued typing, determined to finish her thought before translating the obscure Email for the impatient artist.

Celine sighed heavily, indicating that she agreed to let Darcy finish her internet chat.

“Okay!” Celine declared when the enter key sent the reply.

“Okay,” Darcy agreed and logged off the internet. “This is what I see...your friend Gail has been unknowingly supporting a group of crooks. When she stopped payments they sent an agent to convince her they were worth her support.”

“Darcy, I don’t want the short-hand version.”

Darcy grinned at her, reaching over for Celine’s hand, their fingers intertwining.

“What’s going on?” she asked again, leaning over to place a kiss on Darcy’s cheek, adding in a softer tone, “and I want the details.”

“Okay, a longer version. Gail’s accountant and his boyfriend, her business manager, have been funneling company profits into miscellaneous accounts. Then about two years ago, for reasons she doesn't know, she took on a business partner...Ben number one. He and his accountant began to reward themselves CEO perks. When a company check to an important customer bounced the big NSF, Ben, his accountant, and Gail’s team squared off. Gail was out of town under the guise of a vacation while she was looking to start another business sans business partner and was not aware of what was going on. Whatever the four settled on was never mentioned to Gail, but Ben number two’s rendezvous was the result. Her lawyers have her lying low until they figure out who Ben number two is working with. Those bank robbers that ran you two off the road were just another happening in your lives.”

“Gawds! I’m tired just hearing it. So, that concludes with all past business. No more people looking for me because the FBI has enough evidence without my testifying, and Gail is busy elsewhere and will not be tempted to try to rescue me from a life she would consider boring.”

Darcy laughed and rose from the table, pulling on her cap. She was glad they could finally leave the fear and violence from outside their little haven alone and concentrate on local issues.

“Not *too* boring, huh?”

“Oh, Darcy. I would not call living with you boring.”

“I would. I like the quiet...just minding my own business...working with the kids ...shoveling...”

“...horse shit!” Susan finished for her laughing. “You do not lead a quiet life. Those stories of yours about Crazy Al teaching you about this and that...nahhh. I don’t think so.” Celine picked up one of the boxes with their supplies and Darcy grabbed the dry food for the dogs. They headed out to the jeep where Mandy, Darcy’s German Sheppard was socializing with one of Judith’s dogs; the one that could have doubled for a pony.

As Darcy pulled onto the dusty road towards their home, both women tightened their sunglasses on the bridges of their noses and pulled their caps down tighter on their heads. The ride was not on a well-maintained road.

“So!” Celine started after the first bump, while grabbing onto the dashboard for better balance. “Who is supposed to be teaching me this stuff you guys’ practice?”

Darcy laughed heartily, distracting her from the next hole in the road that had both sitting off center in their seats. Mandy yelped to let Darcy know she was not happy with her momentary lack of attention to the road.

“Anyone and everyone! You never know...it could be Mandy or some lizard you spot in the desert and then in another moment or even the next day...someone or thing... It’s not like we have textbooks and homework...and regular class hours.”

Celine looked towards the be speckled blonde and could feel her heart fill will love for the woman she knew for less than a year. She shook her head to herself, wondering how that could be since she had not been one to believe in such happenings. But then, she didn't believe in her weird watercolor paintings either and yet they were sold as soon as they hit the WEB site of galleries that showed her works. She winced at that sore point in her life.

Celine didn't want to be involved in the cult following that seemed to have formed around her works. Once she finished the paintings she didn't want to see them. Darcy explained that she was channeling them, which was why Celine was not interested in them. To her, they were not painted by her and therefore she felt as if she were stealing from someone else by taking the money she received for them.

However, the money did give her the opportunity to do what she did want to do... nothing. She had no deadlines and didn't feel guilty about sitting and not doing anything more than admiring the sun rise or sun set. Even Darcy made no demands on her time. Though, Darcy’s moods took some getting used to. Darcy liked silence and time spent alone.

Celine pushed the sunglasses back onto the bridge of her nose. She realized they probably got along so well because she had the same needs...solitude. She looked down at her hand suddenly cognizant that Darcy’s fingers were intertwined with hers. They did a lot of that...not realizing that they connected physically until a chance moment when one looked down at her hands.

“Wanna sit in the Jacuzzi tonight?” Celine asked suddenly wanting to stare up at the stars with someone while soaking in warm bubbling water.

“Hmm. Sounds nice,” Darcy squeezed her hand and then released it.

## **Chapter 2**

The next morning.

“Darcy!” Celine called out from the backsteps.

She spotted the tall trainer working with the mare and foal in the corral with Medicine Man, her stallion, watching with interest from his own area. Even the llamas were interested as if Darcy, the dam and her foal were the main attractions, which they were.

Darcy turned to wave at her. She understood Celine to say that breakfast was ready.

Twenty minutes later Mandy happily trotted before her into the mudroom and then into the kitchen where she circled her favorite space and then dropped with a heavy sigh into a tight ball to nap.

“Good morning, hon,” she kissed Celine on the cheek and then on her lips when puckered lips turned towards her. The kiss was slow and sensual; however, Darcy’s growling stomach brought the kiss to a reluctant halt.

“Hmm. Nice,” Celine drew away slowly. “That should hold me until noon,” Celine whispered.

“Nice,” Darcy agreed with her, running her hands over Celine’s back and resting them on her buttocks. “Plan on painting?”

“No. I’ll be doing drawings or sketches today. I want to test out my new easel and chair.” She paused for a moment, thinking about elaborating on what she was really going out there for. “I want to see just what sitting in the middle of nowhere is like.”

Darcy knew exactly what she meant, having gone through that phase herself. “Don’t go anywhere that you don’t feel is right and trust in Mandy’s instincts, okay?”

Celine turned to look at her surprised. “Okay. So, what do you have planned today?”

“Al will stop at the center and pick up our to-do list.” She sniffed at the muffins in the tin without touching them. “Oooh. Banana nut.”

“Well, maybe we can reconnect at noon and have lunch together.”

“Okay. Let me shower and change and I’ll be right back.”

When Celine heard the shower turn on she decided she wouldn’t mind getting a little wet herself and went to join Darcy. Water conservation was big in Last Chance.

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Celine’s wrist was draped over the pommel, with the reins dangling loosely over the creamy yellow neck of Jade, her Arabian mare. The trio, Mandy, Jade and she were enjoying the deserted atmosphere while looking for a place that felt right for her to set up her chair and easel. Occasionally her mind would return to the shower she had earlier shared and when she became too distracted by memories, Jade’s gait would change, bringing her back to the present.

“Now I wonder what that is about?” she muttered. Perched high on Jade’s back she could see a shadow covering the ground with nothing nearby to cause it. She nudged Jade over to the phenomenon, but Jade abruptly sidestepped away from the area.

“Hey, wait a minute!” she grabbed the saddle horn with both hands to keep from losing her seat, dropping the reins on the mare’s neck. When she had her balance back she leaned forward to picking up the reins that somehow managed to work their way up behind Jade’s ears that were laid back. Jade continued to move away, bouncing her uncomfortably in the saddle. Mandy’s nervous trotting back and forth as if herding the mare to move faster away from the area was aggravating Celine. She was the one that should be making the decisions on where to go.

Jade tossed her head and stretched her neck, yanking the reins out of Celine’s fingers.

“Stop it! What’s the matter with you two?”

Finally, the mare stopped her antics and stood still, a good distance from the spot that intrigued Celine. She pulled at the reins to direct Jade back towards the shadow, but the mare remained still as if frozen, her head not even turning when Celine tugged on the reins in frustration.

“Doggone it! I’m the driver!” she declared exasperated. Angry, she slid off the mare’s back and started to walk towards where she thought the shadow was. Shading her eyes, she noticed it was different now that she was on the ground. It was...strange. She moved further away from her companions...and then she felt it strongly. A low growling came from behind her, momentarily distracting her. Turning slightly, expecting to see Mandy, her heart pounded faster when there was no Mandy. There was nothing. Frightened her eyes looked to the right and left for horse and dog. They were further away than what she had thought she had walked and not in the direction she had thought she came from. Mandy looked like she was barking but Celine did not hear her. In fact, sounds were different...and so were the colors.

“Celine!” a familiar voice called.

Celine turned to her right and could see Darcy standing with her hand held out to her.

Lethargy set in, making it difficult to think or move freely. Celine could feel her heart thudding against her chest wall slowly.

“Celine, take my hand. We need to leave. Now,” Darcy commanded.

Celine moved a foot forward and then the other.

“That’s it, Celine. Come this way,” Darcy’s voice encouraged.

Celine paused to catch her breath. Those two steps felt like she had run a great distance.

“You must move out of this place. Keep moving. Now!” Darcy’s voice ordered.

Celine looked for her companions as an anchor and did not see either animal. Alarmed she turned around slowly, looking for anything that was familiar.

*Okay, don’t look for the familiar in the unfamiliar. Like, I don’t think I’m in Kansas anymore*, she told herself mockingly to fight the terror that was trying to translate into numbness.

“Go past your fear! Fear brings confusion...work your way through it. You can create your way,” Darcy’s voice whispered close to her ear.

A bark from somewhere in front of her reminded her of Mandy. Her affection for the German Sheppard changed her mood. The impetus to go past the sluggishness that weighed down on her like a blanket was the image of a hatchet blade smoothly falling;

the sharp edge cutting the gray blanket away. After the fourth footstep the landscape changed as if she walked over an unseen threshold.

Before her the familiar desert spread before her. On shaky legs she sprinted the rest of the distance to Jade and Mandy. She wrapped her arms around the warm neck of Jade and then reached down to curl her fingers in the familiar neck hairs of Mandy, who rewarded her by licking her hand.

Celine's head lifted when it occurred to her that beneath her feet the ground was shaking. From a distance she could see someone riding towards them; a dust cloud behind the figure gave her the idea that the rider was moving fast.

It was Medicine Man with Darcy, leaning forward in the saddle. As he slid to a stop a yard from Celine, Darcy was off his back and beside her, looking concerned. Celine slid into her arms, shaking so much her legs nearly gave out. A dust cloud their arrival caused settled over them. Darcy gave Celine only a few seconds before she half carried and half dragged her further away.

"Are you alright? Didn't you notice the animals don't like it around here? You need to trust them!" Darcy reminded her, stepping over the uneven ground with Celine stumbling to keep up.

Darcy's tone of voice annoyed Celine. She was also irritated because Darcy was right. Celine attempted to pull away from Darcy's support but could not. The fear that had weakened her legs was leaving and Celine's stumbling was now more from Darcy's pulling her along. She dared not stop with the horses trailing so close. They were nearly walking on their heels.

When Darcy finally halted she dropped the reins from Medicine Man and turned to face Celine, finally letting her elbow go. She took an exaggerated deep breath through her nose, and while exhaling her breath through her nose, shook out her hands and flipped her wrists, and then repeated the breath; this time shaking out each leg, and flipping each foot at the ankle. She nodded for Celine to follow her example.

Feeling out of sorts and crabby, and it was not from PMS, Celine grumpily did as she was shown.

"Do it again. Think of moving clean energy into your body and the bad out," Darcy instructed.

Impatiently, Celine did it again, finding it difficult to imagine moving anything. However, after the fourth try she could picture drawing in white energy through her head. With a deep breath, she imagined the light moving down to her dien tien, and then expelling it out through her finger tips, and then shaking them out. She repeated it for each leg, feeling better with each shake.

“Good, now move your head to the left, taking in breath and releasing it as you move to the right. Again...again. How do you feel?” she asked in a soft voice.

Celine stepped into Darcy, who reflexively opened her arms and gave her a heartfelt hug.

“Gawds! I didn’t realize how strange it all was until now,” she groaned with her voice muffled in Darcy’s shirt. Suddenly Celine pulled away, wrinkling her nose. “A mite ripe. What were you doing with Al? Running in the desert?”

“Setting up a wind tower...hanging from it actually.”

Celine’s face shaded red realizing she had not only not paid attention to her surroundings after Darcy had warned her to, but she probably had scared Darcy nearly to death and while she was high up on the tower. “I’m sorry, Darcy. I wasn’t expecting... Hey! How did you know I was in trouble?”

“Tell me what happened.”

“I...just wasn’t paying attention. I mean...” She frowned as she tried to remember just what she was doing. “I was looking for a spot to sit and meditate.” Celine cleared her throat feeling very embarrassed. “Anyway...from on top of Jade’s back I could see this one spot. It was shadowed, yet there was no reason for it to be dark like it was. Oh, gawds!” she groaned. “I really can’t believe I wanted to go and look at it. Me, milkweed, the coward herself.”

“Stop insulting yourself,” Darcy told her softly. “Mount up and let’s get away from here.”

“I hadn’t realized some power spots can move around,” Celine mentioned as she glanced back and could not see anything of what she had seen earlier.

“It’s about noon...unless you want to explore some more...”

Celine shook her head. “I think I’ve had enough of experiencing the mysteries of the desert for one day. Darcy, was that a power place?”



“Not one that I’m familiar with...if it is. I think that was something else.”

“Is Last Chance more than just a place for people dying?”

Darcy gave a short laugh.

“Okay. Let me reframe that. Is the hospice the only thing LC is about?”

“Nope. Each of us came here for different reasons, but we all are staying for similar reasons...we feel comfortable. Take Al... He was riding a dirty bike and ran out of gas. He said when he walked to find someone to give him a lift to get gas...he felt as if he came home. He’s a dowser; he finds energy spots that we haven’t been able to measure but are noticeably there. He’s taught some of us to also feel the difference of these places.” Darcy held her hand out, palm down, “My palm can feel a slight change in the air...it can be a temperature change or something else that my brain just registers as...different.”

“And you’re sure it’s not the power of suggestion.”

Darcy smiled. “I’m not asking you to believe something you don’t want to believe. You have enough on your plate to get used to and learn about. I’m merely introducing you to the idea that there is a lot we don’t know about but is within our grasp to experience.”

“So, just keep a bag packed and be ready, huh?”

“No baggage allowed. Just be ready,” Darcy grinned.

### **Chapter 3**

Two days later Celine finished her painting project and went in search of Darcy. She felt lonely and wanted company for lunch.

Celine could see the kite in the distance and that was where she headed. Jade responded to her body queues to change direction and went into an easy rocking canter. Jade was Celine’s gift to herself when she attended her first horse auction. Celine purchased her because she was being sold to the meat market and though she looked old and beaten on the outside, her eyes showed too much life to have it end there.

Five figures began to take shape as she neared Darcy’s truck. They were measuring wind velocity and temperature at various heights to see how tall the permanent wind tower would be. Right now, they had a micro turbine on the present tower, which

cost the same as a recording anemometer. They were determining that if the small windmill produced enough kilowatts they would consider installing a larger windmill and moving this smaller one to another potential tower spot.

The group looked up when Mandy, who always accompanied Celine, rushed up to Darcy to get a thumping pat on her side. They gave a brief wave to Celine and returned their attention to the laptop that was no doubt doing the most work on figuring out the air density, speed and best power the windmill was churning at. Occasionally they would look up at the kite and the flags that flapped at different heights on the kite string and then compare it with what the windmill was recording.

Celine dismounted from Jade and clipped the lead on her halter and then to the truck's tailgate where James and Jim's mounts were waiting patiently for their owners to finish their work.

"Hi," Celine laid a hand on Darcy's back as she bent over the laptop that James was typing in commands on.

Darcy turned to give her a tender peck on her cheek and then slid an arm around her waist, pulling her closer. Everyone watched as the screen started to fill up with equations and then the translations on the bottom of the screen.

"The stats say here is the best for our buck," James translated for the others.

"Well, next meeting we'll present the information and see what the others think," Morgan, their resident electrician nodded to the others and started to pack up. The others followed suit, dragging the kite down, collecting the measurement devices, chairs and cooler, storing them in the back of Darcy's truck.

"Morgan, where are you headed? Need a lift?" Darcy offered, hoping he would grab a ride back with the twins by way of horseback.

"Gotta go out to Harrington's place. Said they may have had a visit by the vandal. Neither wants to climb up on the pole to have a look at why the blades aren't turning."

"You'll need the grip hoist," Jack mentioned.

"Yep. No doubt," James nodded.

"Where is it now?" Darcy asked, knowing she would have to pick it up.

"Out at Cole's place. He said he was going to replace his damaged one today with his new one. 'Bout time."

“Who will be out there?”

“Ah, I think only Crazy Al. He wanted to check out the place to see if the vandal left any tracks.”

Darcy nodded. Darcy looked over at Celine. “You out for a general ride or need something now?”

“I thought maybe we could have lunch together and then take my paintings over to the store.”

“How many?” James asked curiously. So far Celine had been painting in groups of seven and eleven and since Celine denied that she knew of this consciously both twins were curious about the symbolic use of the numbers.

Celine laughed. “Thirteen. Do you think that means something?”

“Oh, don’t ask those two now. We’ll never get outta here,” Morgan admonished seriously.

“Checking out the turbine will probably take the rest of the day,” Darcy informed her. She was disappointed with the work that was taking her away from her own place. It did not happen often otherwise she would be putting her booted foot down.

“Judith and Ellen were over earlier. Ellen to see if you can come over and fix the hole in their trailer and Judith to check on your kids. She said one of your llama’s is about to have a calf.”

Darcy looked surprised. “Really? That will be a first. I’ve had that pair for three years and they never showed that kind of interest in each other.”

“Well...she has some ideas on that.” She undid Jade’s tie and looped it over her arm as the guys did the same to let Darcy put up her tailgate.

“Okay. Morgan let’s get going. We’ll stop at Cole’s and see if they’re finished with the grip hoist and then we’ll haul it over to Harrington’s.” She paused to give Celine a kiss on her lips and turned back to the truck’s tailgate, locking it in place.

“Can we stop over and see your work?” Jack asked.

“Sure, only you don’t have to tell me what you think,” she hinted.

The twins smiled and mounted their horses, joining Jade and her rider as they headed back towards Darcy’s ranch. Mandy was leading the way in a lope, staying ahead of the dust the horses created.

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It was February and the weather went from hot to cold rapidly as the sun went down. It was still officially winter so not all days were warm and cloudless. However, both the solar and wind provided plenty of energy, that was stored in batteries used for heating, pumping water, and lights. Neither Celine nor Darcy listened to the radio often and Darcy did not have a television...or so Celine thought, so battery energy was not spent on such leisure practices. Darcy did have a nice stereo system, but it was not used often. It was through this silence that Celine learned that there were other sounds and these she found peace in.

As Celine cleaned the last dish from lunch with the twins, Doc Ellen and George, she thought of her visitors. Doc looked tired and George was fussier than he usually was. His mental state was worse than a week ago. She wondered if Doc realized that. However, she reminded herself, James and Jack noted it and would bring it up to Dr. John at the hospice. The community was sensitive to all its members, supporting them physically and in thought.

A pair of truck lights swung into the driveway and rolled into the garage where an old jeep and a dirt bike were also stored. Smiling, Celine wiped her hands on a damp dish towel and ran out to the garage with Mandy trotting happily beside her just as excited to see Darcy.

“Hi!” she greeted the tired looking woman as she slid out of the truck, pulling a box with her.

Darcy leaned down and kissed Celine. “Hi. How’s everyone?” She swung the box out and dumped it on top of her uncluttered workbench.

“We’re happy now that you’re back,” she told her wrapping her arms around Darcy’s waist and hugging her when she turned back from the bench.

Darcy returned the hug holding on tight.

“We’ve got trouble, huh?” Celine asked in a muffled voice. Her nose curled from the ripe smell of Darcy’s clothes. “You have got to change and take a bath before I give ya another big hug. That was just an incentive.”

“Hm. Let me check up on the kids and then I would like nothing better than to shower and soak in a nice hot Jacuzzi with company.”

“I would go and prepare all that...but it’s already done.” She tugged Darcy to walk with her to the barn. “What’s in the box?”

“The remains of Cole’s windmill. Morgan didn’t have room on his work bench for both. I told Crazy Al I would keep Cole’s parts here so when he’s ready he can come over and take a look. One of them looks like the bullet didn’t go out the other side. He and Slinker are out at Cole’s with a metal detector looking for the remains of what went through his.”

The two women and a happy dog walked into the barn. Horses nickered and one of the lamas came over to see Darcy. The light in the barn came on but it was red so as not to kill their night vision and not bright enough to disturb the occupants. Medicine Man did not like to come into the barn unless it was really cold, so they visited him last in the corral. He was given a rub on his neck right where he liked it best before Darcy left.

“So, how was your day?” Darcy asked as they entered the mudroom.

“The twins spared me their psychobabble on the paintings, but I think they were kept busy with George.”

“Not getting any better?”

“From my perspective, no. He spent most of his time standing in front of one of my paintings and just staring. Ellen looked tired. James walked her and George back to their place. He said he would fix the draft Ellen was talking about. When he returned he said it looked like someone...taller than Ellen but about George’s size, punched the hole in the wall with a hammer.”

Darcy frowned. “A hammer.”

“Uh huh. One of those that have both ends rounded...a small one. Which is what the twins are worried about. They’re going to confer with some specialists on dementia or whatever they think George is suffering from and see if Ellen’s safety is something to worry about.”

“He’s suffering?” Darcy asked in surprise.

“No. I think Doc Ellen is suffering.”

“We have a strong community here to support her.”

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Both sank gratefully in the warm bubbling waters of the Jacuzzi that was built into the deck that was outside Darcy's bedroom. Their legs entangled and the sensuousness of the moment built up to a nice buzz in some parts of their bodies. Above them was the night display of stars dramatically spread out above them against a black backdrop. It was breathtaking and erotic in a fashion that Celine could not understand why.

"Would you like a massage?" Celine asked softly, not wanting to break the spell.

"I would love one." Darcy leaned over and cupped Celine's face and kissed her gently at first and then roughly as both responded to the need.

"Come-on," Celine broke the lip lock and tugged at Darcy to get out of the tub. "I want to massage you."

"How about later..."

"No. Do I have to tie you down to get you to let me give you one?" Celine laughed at Darcy's raised eyebrows.

"No, but why can't I first play with you?" she wheedled.

"We'll both fall asleep before it's my turn." She playfully bit Darcy's knuckle and then sucked the mark.

"Ouch, you teaser," she groaned and pulled them into her bedroom.

Celine pulled out the massage oil that was in the side drawer while Darcy went to get the towel. When Darcy flopped herself onto the bed Celine could tell she would probably be asleep before she finished the backs of her legs.

Celine straddled Darcy's back, sitting on her butt and relishing in the heat from her. She almost succumbed to giving her a sensuous massage. Celine watched as her hands moved over the muscular shoulders, smoothing the oil over the scared back. She was careful not to dig too deeply, intending on relaxing and not waking her up.

"Deeper, hon," a muffled voice encouraged.

*Well, there goes my intention to put her to sleep.*

Darcy groaned and made small noises, encouraging Celine to dig her fingers in the sore tight muscles. True to Celine's feel of Darcy's energy level, she fell asleep as she worked on her feet.

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While Darcy slept peacefully Celine could not. A compellation to draw images that had been hazy a few weeks ago had not only increased, but now the images were clear. It was not the same feeling she had when she was in trance doing her watercolors. While in trance she had no idea what she was painting and on completion did not bother to study them too closely. This compellation was an open-eyed need to put images on paper.

All she had to do was draw the images and it would be done.

*Alright!*

Resigned Celine slid out of bed. She looked back at Darcy's slumbering form to be sure she did not wake her and gave tender strokes to the two felines that were awake. In the front room the moon and stars were shining through the window giving her enough light to find her pad and box of pencils. Without turning on a light, Celine sat cross-legged on the couch, opening the pad to a blank page. Just like in her trance she did not need to see what she was drawing; her hand moved over the paper knowingly, transposing images in her thoughts that were like they were from a science fiction movie. She kept reminding herself that Darcy had told her not to reference known experiences to moments like these or she would not be able to experience something new. Or more like what Judith had told her; if you want to meet chaos, you don't bring order.

Celine stopped after the second page was completed. She closed her pad and went back to Darcy's bed to finally get some sleep.

## Chapter 4

“I have no idea!” Crazy Al told her frustrated. “You tell me! Have you ever seen anything like that?”

They both glared at the pictures he had spread out on the work bench of the different holes made in the windmills, but that was not what Al was referring to.

“No,” Darcy told him, but she did not like what he was proposing.

“I tell ya, Slinker seen things like this too. That’s three of us!”

Darcy rubbed her forehead confused. “Listen Al, we all walk the stranger side of strange, and do some real different things than most people...but I...”

“I’m saying it like I believe it to be. This is from another dimension or time or whatever you want to call it but it’s not from here.” Al slammed his open palm on the work bench where one of the pictures lay leaving a palm print on its face. “And it sure as all hell is real!”

“I can’t believe that!” Darcy told him frustrated.

“You couldn’t believe your visions. You couldn’t believe our...”

“Okay!” she told him angrily. “I see your point.” *I can’t believe I’m losing it like I’ve never been through this stuff before.*

Al paced around the workspace wanting more space as he thought about his dream last night. He needed to speak with Celine...“When is Celine getting back?” he asked for the hundredth time.

“I’m back. Hi, Al. Hi, Hon. Did you sleep alright?”

Darcy gave her a hug and a kiss on her cheek. Celine leaned into her and Darcy automatically wrapped her arms around her waist as if to protect her.

“I missed you this morning,” Celine told her in a soft voice.

“Hm. One of these days...you’ll be getting up early too,” Darcy teased.

“We won’t go there. So, what’s going on?” Celine looked at Crazy Al.

“I had this dream last night...about these strange looking people...and you were in it.”

“Strange people...what is strange, Al?” Celine encouraged.



He cleared his throat. "Well, it's nothin' like planet of the apes but...these people don't look like anything I've ever seen."

"Oh," Celine commented in a low voice.

Darcy glared at her, feeling a slight panic, as if nothing she had accomplished for the last four years was remembered. "Oh? Just what is oh and what are you two doing in your dreams?"

"Hon," Celine laughed, "Do you realize how strange that sounds?"

"As strange as you two. What is going on?" she was also referring to herself. She reminded herself to take deep breaths. Step back. Away from the emotional cloud she was engulfed in.

Al patted Darcy on the shoulder. "So, Celine?"

"I didn't have a dream, but I had this...urge to draw and it looked like something out of a science fiction scene."

"Ya drew 'em! Well let's have a see!" Al happily waved at them to head over to the house, too confident that whatever three of them had dreamed Celine had put them down on paper. He certainly could not draw nor describe how frightening they were to him.

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"These are...people?" Darcy asked doubtfully.

"That's how Slinker said they were. Mine were more like lizard people..."

Celine turned the page to the second drawing.

"Yeah! Now that's mine!"

"So, what do you think this all means?" Celine dared to ask.

"Crazy Al...Al, has this idea that they are from another dimension and are sending us messages."

"Something must be happening on their side of the multiverse or dimension and are either warning us or askin' for help," he told the two women.

"You got that in one dream?"

"No. Well...I've been havin' 'em for 'bout a week," Al admitted.

Celine nodded. "Me too. Last night I finally just...did it."

“Uh huh. A week is about when the vandalizing started,” Darcy noted, feeling like the picture was getting bigger.

Al nodded solemnly. “Sounds about right. I think we need to get a meetin’ together and see if anyone else has been gettin’ dreams like ours and when they started.”

“Alright.”

“Don’t forget to bring them pictures!” he hollered before he let the door slam behind him.

“Don’t slam... Damn! He does that on purpose,” Darcy muttered.

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Celine shifted her weight so that Jade would get closer to Ginger Ale that moved into a trot with Ginger’s Pride gamely running beside her dam.

“So...how come you were all calm about my incident in the desert and with this you get freaked out?” Celine asked the silent Darcy.

Darcy watched Ginger’s ears twitch, one in her direction and the other in the direction of Pride. Mandy was running ahead, stopping every now and then to look around her. Darcy knew Mandy felt the new energy too.

“Have you read any of Carlos Castaneda’s books?”

“No. But I did read your Lynn Andrews and Taisha Abelar books. You would think I would have been better prepared.”

“I thought after four years of living here that I was. I used to deny that this stuff exists,” she admitted.

“Yeah?” Celine watched Darcy’s face, pleased that Darcy was finally sharing something from her past. For some reason, Darcy did not speak of her life before LC.

“Uh huh. I joined the military to escape what I was feeling and seeing, only I was moved into special ops because my tests showed I had what they were looking for.”

“And?” Celine encouraged.

“And I got out before I hurt anybody, including myself. Except, I still refused to acknowledge what I dreamed or saw until I ended up in a body cast and a new face...”

“And in Last Chance.”

“Yeah. That certainly helped move me out of my stuck position.” Darcy started to laugh. “I’m still working at it.”

“Are you like a shaman apprentice or something like that?”

Darcy laughed harder this time, causing Ginger Ale to change her gait, almost into a high prance. “Oh, no! Not even. I’m just a student of exploration into whatever this is that I have and to help keep the energy right in LC for the hospice.” She sighed. “I don’t have any words to describe what it is I do.”

Celine watched her brow furrow and then the shrug of her shoulders, imaging what she looked like sitting on a horse naked. Realizing what she thought and the fact that they were talking about something serious almost had her blushing in embarrassment.

Darcy glanced at Celine and grinned as if she knew what Celine was thinking, causing her to blush harder.

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“Well, what do you think? Do we need to get in the circle and visit the garden?”

Celine’s eyebrows went up, wondering if they were referring to ‘her’ garden.

Al shook his head as did Doc Ellen.

“I can feel something is different...and thinking about it, since this vandalizing has been going on. I’m sure that’s what’s affecting George horribly. Until we find out the scope of these energy shifts, I don’t think we should be making any changes with our circles. We don’t know if the energy has to do with people, the circles, or both.”

Al nodded. “Ya got that right. Slinker’s out checking to see just how far this different energy reaches. He’s a good dowser.”

“Okay, that covers what the next question was going to be,” John marked something on his pad. “I would like to add; this energy you all feel is affecting the hospice residents. One of them told Eva the guy wearing the Halloween costume has got to go. Would you mind if I took these pictures over and see if this is what he is seeing?”

“Help yourself,” Celine said.

“What time did he see this apparition?” Jack asked John.

“About ten last night.”

Celine looked surprised because that was about the time she gave in to draw the pictures.

“Yep. That’s about the same time I started my dream,” James told the others.

Al nodded and so did the others. Everyone kept personal diaries with their dreams detailed as much as possible. Dreams were shared at the monthly meetings.

“Okay, we have a time when this aperture between our realities opens,” Darcy spoke, looking around the table for any dissenters.

“What about the messages? Nothing violent or any harm is being shown,” James mentioned.

“Speak for yerself,” Al growled. “I don’t call my dreams of those lizard people friendly ‘howdy dos’.”

“I had one that scared the hell out of me, and it was of the lizard people and bird people, but I don’t remember the details. The ones I do remember are pretty much just interesting slices out of these people’s lives,” Jack reported.

“Think they are just letting us know about them,” Celine asked, looking worried with the oddness of the conversations.

Darcy and Judith were the only two in the group that did not report dreams of lizard or bird people, but both could feel the change in energy around Last Chance.

“What about the vandalism? It’s not cheap to replace what is damaged,” Judith mentioned. “How is that connected?”

“Now that is an interesting point. Has anyone found any strange holes punched into their belongings besides the four windmills?” Darcy asked. “The windmills are all fifty meters high.”

“The trailer keeps getting this hole about two inches in circumference punched right above the northeast corner no matter how many times we plug the darn thing,” Doc Ellen reported exasperated. “I’ll measure the height when we get back.”

“Have you worked out a graph yet of just where all these incidents are occurring?” Darcy asked James.

“The program is chomping on the numbers as we speak,” James nodded.

Everyone got up and walked over to the computer near the entrance to the store. Global positioning equations were running across the screen with some scatters appearing in red, green and yellow.

“The yellow is potential, green is the dreamers, and the red is where the holes are appearing. It’s almost done.”

As he was saying it the program changed to a topographical map of what Celine thought was Last Chance, placing the colored lines that matched the coordinates and then linking them together. It then chugged some more and did a global mapping of probabilities. Finally, the computer stopped.

James sat down and typed in a command. The program went back to the topographical map of LC.

“All of them are part of three hexagons. Almost overlapping but not quite. The vandalism we’ve had reported is along the red hexagon line. Hold on let me find out who is along here.” James typed another command and waited as the other picture was pulled up. He then had the hexagon line run again. “Hm. Looks like two lines on the hexagon for the holes. Doc when you get your height of the damage let me know. By the equations it’s going to be about...one point eighty-eight meters.”

“For you folks still in feet and inches...six feet and a couple of inches,” Jack translated.

“Judith your place runs right there. Did you see any holes in your barn about the height?”

“Nope. But then, I wasn’t looking for something that high.” She shook her head with a look of vexation. “We did plan out the town, so it ran on energy lines we felt were ‘right’ and for twelve years we haven’t had any problems. Maybe it’s time to change our alignments.” She shook her head. “Gossmer was right. We should be getting mobile homes.”

The others shook their heads. “Not made of the right material and besides, mobile homes are not really mobile,” Megan spoke up. “Maybe it’s because we have more people with buildings near these lines than what we originally had. Or maybe it’s always been there but we are only now noticing it.”

“Okay, then. Let’s figure out what we did that may have changed what we’re seeing. Let’s start back three weeks ago,” John suggested.

“Okay everyone, I want a diary starting from three weeks ago. You have two days to prepare it,” James told everyone. “And may I remind you, if you were keeping daily journals, you would not have to be doing all this catching up.”

“Gawds, I hate doing those,” Judith complained, as she rose from her chair.

“Anyone need a pad?” She left to go to the stationary section of the store.

“Anything else to discuss?” John asked as he made a notation in his notebook.

“Yeah. What are we gonna do about the dreams if they get violent?” Al asked.

“Maybe you’re having different dreams because you’re a soldier at heart, Al,” suggested Darcy.

“How come you’re not and Celine is?” Al countered.

“I’m not having dreams...I can’t sleep. Also, we’re not in any of the hexagon lines. Not even in yellow. Darcy, how come you settled away from the energy lines?” Celine asked curiously.

Everyone started to laugh and chuckle. “It makes her more wired than a pot of java. You don’t want her on any energy line. If she needs to she can sit up on the numerous rocks we have set up at the various bisecting lines of energy.”

“Is that what those stone circles are about?” Celine asked excitedly.

“Yep.”

“Well, anything else anyone thinks we need to focus on?”

“I think we need to figure out why some people have pleasant experiences and some not. It’s not arbitrary, I’m sure,” Darcy reminded the group. “So, think about what mood you’re in before you go to sleep...do you do protection spells or not...are the women menstruating are the men feeling more aggressive that day. You all got the picture? We’ve got a mystery here and its group effort that will find answers. No going off by yourselves,” she warned.

“Here, here,” other voices echoed as if from experience.

“Al?” Darcy asked.

“What?” he asked crankily.

“You and Slinker are not to be going on recon missions without letting us know first and I don’t have to remind you of what happened to the last member that did not heed the rules of caution, eh?” James reminded him firmly.

“Well, I can’t be speaking for Slinker, now can I?”

“He’s trying to make contact,” Darcy spoke up and the rest echoed the sentiment of what they thought about a loner messing up their town’s mission.

“Well...I’m not sure. He just said he’s going out to check the place out and maybe...take advantage of what he finds.”

“Slinker hasn’t been reviewed by this group!” Judith objected upset. “We don’t know anything about him except he’s someone you know and seems to know too much about Last Chance.”

“Well...ya got that right...he knows about this place. Said he did an air view of LC and thought we had our circles off,” Al admitted. “But he’s been into this stuff since he was a kid...I can’t exactly lie to him. What good would that do?”

“He was in the seals with you?” Darcy asked.

“Well, no. He was in another special ops group. He hooked up with my group for two different operations, but he had another assignment and each time disappeared once we landed. He would always be waiting for us at the rendezvous point. That’s how he got his name, Slinker.”

Darcy did not like Slinker, but it was not from getting bad feelings off him or anything like that. She just did not like him.

“We need to do some cleaning up and strengthen our energy,” Judith told the others firmly.

“Hm. Al, get a hold of Malcom and ask him to take a pass over LC. I want to know if any of the circles have been moved or any added. Have him send them via Email. Guys if anything’s changed, give two chimes. I’m gonna go and meditate away from any energy sources. I suggest we all stay away from that until we find out if anything has changed. Ellen, why don’t you and George stay at my place until we get more information?” Darcy’s military and police training kicked in. She was concerned about the possibility of a loose cannon...Slinker.

Celine was always confused by this group because there never seemed to be a leader and she never knew where the conversations would go, but then, she was still new.

“Yes. I agree with you on that. Let me go pack and George and I will be over in time for dinner.” Doc looked over at her husband who was sitting in his chair not doing

much of anything else. John had given him a checkup but could not add anything to what Doc Ellen already knew.

Everyone rose to go, picking up their mugs of tea, coffee and water to leave in the dishwasher.

## **Chapter 5**

“They can sleep in my room,” Celine offered, hoping Darcy would not insist on opening the second floor. It meant more cleaning and hearing footsteps above her head. It would be too much like living in the city.

“Let’s see how much privacy they want,” Darcy prodded Ginger Ale into a fast trot not intending on keeping it up for long since the filly had a lot of exercise already.

“I hate the trot. Can’t we do a fast walk?” Celine objected.

Obediently, Darcy signaled Ginger into a fast walk. “Sorry. I’m worried about Doc and George. I would rather be helping them move their stuff.” She pulled out a cell phone she seldom used. “Jack...No, I was just thinking, do you think one of you can go help Ellen pack? I’m not feeling right about her being alone in her trailer....okay. Thanks.” She snapped the lid down and buttoned it back in her coat pocket.

“Al will go over and help them. He’s going to measure the height of the hole and get the GP,” she informed Celine.

For the rest of the ride, they were silent. Celine admired the stars that were beginning to show and snuggled deeper into the folds of her coat.

Darcy was sensing the atmosphere around them. Something had altered the energy flow. She turned to look towards Celine but instead she was distracted by seeing wispy images of things she normally had to meditate to see.

By the time they returned from settling the horses down, Doc Ellen had dinner for them. George had retired to the second floor.

“It’s just about one point eighty-eight meters. Not much bigger than what hit the windmills,” Al reported to the others, taking quick bites of food between pauses.

“We need to check the circles out tonight,” Darcy decided.



“The very thing we told the others not to do,” Doc sighed. “I want to go out and check some of the circles myself,” Doc lamented, “But I don’t want to leave George, and I can’t take him with me either.”

Al and Darcy nodded.

“I can take the three between here and Gus and Peggy’s place,” Darcy offered.

“I’ll look at the four towards my place,” he looked at the women and leaned forward. “We need to get it done before ten tonight.”

“Yeah. If that’s the peak time when everyone gets these messages...I don’t want to find myself getting in the way of something I don’t understand.”

“It’s dark out there,” Celine pointed out the obvious. “How are you going to find your stone circles?”

“By feel,” Doc said simply and the other two nodded.

“Did you feel anything different on the ride back?” Darcy asked patiently.

“No. Well, yeah, the hairs on my arms stood up a few times and sometimes I was getting goose bumps.”

“Ah! There ya go! Go with it!” Al encouraged his student.

“That’s something? I thought it was because it was cold.”

“Well, while you’re thinking about it, I’m going to get ready. Al, you be careful and don’t be stepping in any circles that don’t feel right,” Darcy told him as she scraped her leftovers into the composter. She dropped her plate in the dishwasher.

“Don’t worry about me. I can take care of myself,” he reassured her.

“That, dear friend is what I’m afraid is going to get you into something way over your head,” Ellen told him sternly. “You’ve got a lot of students not ready to be on their own.”

“Alright, alright. Listen, I’ve been in some real sticky places...”

“This is not *Stargate* or some other Sci-Fi show where in the next episode you’re back looking none the worse for wear,” Darcy disagreed. “You are good...but that is what can be your blind side.”

“Alright I said. Women and their damn caution,” he muttered as rose to leave.

“We women don’t have testosterone that makes us see ourselves larger than we are,” Darcy remarked with a grin.

Celine and Doc laughed.

“No, we got something better. Hormones that muddle our cognitive functioning when it’s at its peak performance level, so we have to rely on our static intuition.”

Al harrumphed and waved good night.

“Darcy, I’m going too,” Celine said as she followed Darcy into her room.

Darcy picked up her gloves, warm coat and hat. “Well then, get dressed into something warm.”

Celine met her out in the barn where she was saddling the stallion, Medicine Man. Celine quickly moved into Jade’s stall hoping she was not too tired. Without thinking she tied her saddle bags onto the saddle, thinking the snacks she usually had in them may come in handy, if it took a while.

Mandy insisted on coming, which Celine thought must be tired, because she was and she was not doing as much work as her and Jade, trotting or running from one place to another.

“Darcy,” she asked softly, “where is the first one?”

“Just relax. Don’t concentrate and don’t think. Just relax. You’ll feel it,” she told her confidently.

Jade’s behavior was what gave her an idea they must be near something. Her gait became choppy.

“Darcy?”

“Yeah. I can feel it. Hold up.”

Celine could see Darcy’s dark form dismounted Medicine Man who was behaving well. She felt Darcy hand her the reins.

Darcy was gone for about ten minutes and was back, nearly scaring the bejebees out of Celine because she was staring in one direction and her dark figure appeared somewhere else.

“Come-on. Let’s go to the next,” she told her softly.

“Darcy? Why are we whispering?”

“I don’t want to let anyone know we’re here. Someone had changed the pattern and placed some stones I didn’t recognize in place of what we normally have there.”

“So...what took so long?”

“I was looking for our stones to put them back.”

“You found them...in the dark?” she whispered incredulously.

“I told you...it’s all energy. Now, be still. I need to relax.” Darcy was having second thoughts about letting Celine come along; however, the need to relax pushed any further doubts from her thoughts.

The third circle took longer for Darcy to do whatever she was doing, and Celine was about ready to dismount and go look for her when she could hear uneven footsteps heading off to the left of her. She was about to call out when Mandy’s growl had Celine swallowing her hail.

The night wind was blowing against her ears, sometimes hiding the sounds of approaching steps. They started again, now to the right of her. Mandy whirled around now growling loudly. Medicine Man was siding against Jade and Jade gave him a nip, which seemed to stop his pushing against them, but Celine was frightened. She leaned over her saddle and whispered to Mandy.

“Go find Darcy.”

“Why?”

Celine nearly screamed and Jade would have bolted from the sudden squeeze around her midriff had not a gloved hand gentled her, and at the same time, taking Medicine Man’s reins.

“Let’s go. Follow me and don’t get lost,” Darcy’s voice ordered. “Mandy, home.”

“Darcy,” Celine whispered. “I heard footsteps on both sides of us.”

Darcy did not reply but headed her stallion homeward. The chills running up Celine’s arms stopped. Frightened, Celine clung to her saddle, happy that Jade was content to follow Darcy and the stallion.

By the time they reached the barn, Celine’s hands were shaking and when she dismounted her knees buckled. Darcy quickly helped her to a haystack and returned to the horses. It was too late to brush them down but tomorrow was another day.

“Can you walk?” Darcy asked.

Celine looked at her and nodded.

“Come-on, then.” Darcy offered her a hand, pleased the trembling in Celine’s hands had stopped.

Ellen was waiting for them in the front room. George was sitting in a chair staring at the fire that was merrily burning.

“Good, you’re back. It’s almost ten. Celine, hon, you look pale. Darcy, girl, so do you. What happened?”

“How’s George?”

“Restless. If I didn’t know better I would say he’s near death’s door with all the blasted pacing he’s been doing. He finally quieted down about five minutes ago and just stares in the fireplace so I lit a fire.”

“I’ll be right back,” Darcy told them and in about ten minutes returned with a pottery dish that was shallow and contained sand. She placed it in front of the fireplace and then started to pull misshapen objects out of her pocket.

“Is that what you found in the circles?” Celine asked.

“Yeah. They were changing the feel of the circles as well as the patterns. Someone had changed our circles and lines into wavy lines and squares. These were placed between the wavy lines. They also were pointed north and south instead of east and west.”

“What did you do to the circles?”

“I put one of those protection lines around each stone circle within the circle. Someone was out there watching us. I should have brought my NV goggles.”

“No. This is not the place for their use,” Ellen told her firmly. “So, what happened?”

“Nothing until the third. When I attempted to step into the circle it was like running into a stone wall. I bounced back and onto my butt. So, I crawled around it until I found a way in.” Darcy closed her eyes for a moment thinking that had she been having this conversation a few years ago, she would have thought she lost it...well, actually she would have not. She would just have worried that someone would hear her talking about it.

“So...what about the footsteps I heard? They were to the right and left of me,” Celine asked, worried at what she could not see.

“I don’t know...I think something was trying to cross over...maybe using our circles for gates.”

Celine's eyes grew big when she thought about the creatures she drew.

"I didn't feel anything malevolent, Celine," Darcy hastened to say.

"What we're doing is slowing whatever is happening down until we know what is going on," Ellen explained.

Celine rubbed her face with her hands, feeling very tired.

George perked up and looked straight at the strange stones in the sand dish. He mumbled something none of them understood or could hear distinctly. He gestured as if speaking to someone and then two minutes later he leaned back into the chair to sleep...snoring loudly.

Celine shook her head at the two women who looked toward her. "I...don't feel any need to draw like I have been. Maybe because I already did what I was asked." Celine placed a hand over her mouth.

"Asked?" three voices spoke in unison.

"Wow," Celine continued. "I never thought about what it was...but, yeah. I can say it was like I was being asked to draw the pictures."

"Well...we're back to this idea of the twins that it isn't anything threatening us. Even the holes are above all our heads."

"You know...in Feng Shui they use mirrors to redirect energy," Darcy mentioned. "We have to be careful where we are redirecting it but...it would be interesting to see if it's possible."

"Hm. There's that rock that George has been wanting removed. If we can, why not direct it to the rock."

Celine giggled. "I'm not up on all this strange energy stuff, but besides nothing happening, what if it's not like a laser and the mirror shatters...then you risk seven years of bad luck." Celine broke into giggles again and had to work on not sounding crazy because she really thought she was amongst crazies and she one of them.

"Everything sounds crazy when it's first thought of." Darcy glanced at George. "You sleep with that racket?"

"It's not always that loud. If it's bothersome I just get up and sleep in another room...as far away as possible. It's easier than waking him and he just gets cranky if I keep waking him...and so do I for being kept awake."

“Ah. Well, I’m beat.” Darcy rose and Celine followed.

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“Darcy?” Celine murmured early in the predawn hours, knowing both could not sleep.

Darcy had finally settled on her side looking out the window that the cat pole in the shape of a carpet covered tree stood near. The moon’s light showed a restless bushy tail draped over one of the scooped perches, flickering with predictable twitches. Even one of the felines could not sleep.

“Um.”

“The other day I was reading the Hopi story of how the people came from cities under the ground...”

She waited as Darcy shifted so she was turned towards her.

“And it reminded you of what?” she prompted.

“Barbara Hand Clow’s book on *Catastophobia*.”

“Ah.”

“The supernova that was responsible for knocking earth off its vertical axis...9500 BCE...the people on earth knew of it’s coming and had dug underground cities for those who wanted to survive the changes that would take place above ground...I think those were the people the Hopi’s were talking about.”

“And...”

“I also remembered that there are portals that shamans can step through that will take them to other planets or dimensions...”

“Where did you hear that?”

“When I was in Sedona, about ten years ago. I met a guy who was looking for one. It was out in the desert...but anyway...what if these people knew of those portals also and some people left through them?”

“Are you getting around to saying you think all this stuff we’re experiencing here has to do with these people that left earth before the effects of the supernova hit this planet?”

“Uh huh. Is that too great a leap of the imagination?”

“You’re not going to get me to say that. This place is a leap beyond the imagination. What difference does it matter who they are or if they were once from here?”

“Probably none. But my brain won’t stop putting together this and that and it makes me want to draw things!”

“Well...you are a painter and art is what connects us to things outside of what we know.”

Celine buried her head in Darcy’s shoulder. “I don’t want to get up and draw. I want to sleep.”

“Turn around then. Let me rub your back. From my own experience...it’s great for turning off the mind.”

Celine and Darcy laughed.

*Right*, they both thought.

## **Chapter 6**

Celine was sitting out in the middle of somewhere, but it could be called nowhere, when she noticed that she could actually feel the approach of a horse or maybe horses. Of course, Mandy was looking more alert, and Jade had been watching the road as if expecting someone, so it was not a surprise. But it was a surprise. What came thundering up to them was...

Celine sat up abruptly, panting with fear. It was still dark and her sudden waking sent one of the cats off the bed and onto the cat pole, where there was less chance of him or her getting knocked around. Celine turned to her bed mate, patting around but not finding Darcy. Her side of the bed was cool.

Celine used the bathroom, brushed her teeth, put a robe on and then stumbled towards the kitchen. As she passed the stairs down to the exercise room, she could hear the rope slap the floorboards as Darcy did her rope drills.

Grumbling to herself, she stumbled around Mandy who was happy to see someone else awake. Above her she could hear someone moving around. Coffee was prepared and then she began to make toast. Lately, breakfast was not of interest. She was

finding a large lunch and light dinner was all she was interested in. Even her consumption of coffee had dropped.

Celine could hear Ellen's voice as she coaxed George to do something. Her laugh was tender and Celine felt embarrassed at over hearing something so personal. She moved back into her own room and took a quick shower and dressed.

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"So, what are we going to be doing today," Ellen asked.

"We are going to take a ride out to that circle near your place," Darcy told her.

"I want to come along," Ellen told her firmly.

"Alright," Darcy replied slowly. "What about George?"

"He's not an invalid. We'll drive over. I talked to him about it this morning...I think it would help him."

"Okay. But he hates the jeep," she reminded Ellen.

"We'll take my car. No big deal. I'll make some sandwiches in case we stay there a while. Give me forty-five minutes to get things ready."

Darcy nodded. What they were going to do was sit in a circle and wait. Four directions and four of them. She just was not sure what George would do if... If what, she thought impatiently. She was beginning to let what the others were talking about get to her. She already knew she was not going over whatever the threshold was. She was strictly an observer. Al and people like him were the daring ones. She was grateful that Celine also was not interested in stepping into places like twilight zones.

"Why don't we meet you there? The horses need exercise and I want to have a look around."

"Okay. Don't do anything rash," Doc cautioned.

Darcy laughed. "I'm a watcher not an adventurer."

"Uh huh. But you keep looking at spaces that are different," Doc Ellen reminded her.

"That's not the same," Darcy disagreed.



“Really? Well, we’re going to have to talk about that. I have to get going right now...but don’t think this subject is finished young lady,” Doc warned with a tight lipped smile.

“Yes, mother,” Darcy muttered humorously.

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“Darcy,” Celine called to her frowning companion.

“Hm?”

“You’re not thinking of...walking into one of those places, are you?”

“Oooh, no. You said you were a chicken about situations that promised to be violent .... well I’m not ready to meet one of those aliens you drew.”

Celine laughed unbelievably. “What about all this shamanistic stuff you do?”

“You keep using that as a measuring device,” Darcy complained.

“Well, I don’t have anything else! I can’t exactly say you’re a mystic or religious right!”

“Celine, what will hold you back is attaching a name on whatever you are experiencing, thus limiting your experience of it.”

“What’s wrong with that? Maybe I want to slow things down?”

Darcy turned her head to look at Celine, and then she returned her eyes to the road.

“I didn’t quite mean it that way,” Celine told her regretting the tone she used. “I hate being labeled a witch or psychic painter and finding that my sketches of a tree suddenly ‘have’ to be prophetic because of my label.” She smiled over at Darcy whose brow was creased into a frown. “I’ll get over it. So, what are you looking for? Maybe I can help.”

“Anything,” Darcy shrugged, not wanting to influence Celine’s search.

“Ellen told me Al’s friend disappeared,” Celine offered, not feeling she was any help since she was no more willing to end up somewhere she did not recognize than Darcy.

“Yeah. He hasn’t shown up at their usual place for keeping in touch. Those two have me itching, but I would rather they take the chances than me. If they want to jump into those energy rings, I say let *them*...if it must be done.”

“*Stargate* here they come,” Celine muttered. “The twins want a try at it too. They flipped for who would go over. They think since they have this twin connection...” she trailed off.

“Yeah, yeah,” Darcy waved a hand. “They’ve been arguing about that connection for I don’t know how long.”

“Do you and Della have it?”

Darcy glanced at Celine and nodded. “Yeah. No big deal,” she drawled.

“We have it too, don’t we?”

Darcy nodded, and added grinning, “You’re lucky we do.”

Celine nodded. “I am. I don’t know where I was the other day...but...good thing my cavalry came on time.”

“Don’t depend on it working every time,” Darcy muttered. “See that slight rise over there? That’s where the circle is. We’re going to make a circle around it. You, Jade and Mandy go that way and Medicine Man, and I will move this way.” She looked at Celine hard, not wanting to harp on her message to listen to her companions’ warnings.

Celine gave her a nod, not having to hear what Darcy left unsaid. “I hear ya. Anything looking like...hey, what do I do if I find something...off key?”

“Whistle.”

Celine knew she meant the whistle she carried with her because she could not whistle any other way. “Okay. Two long means all is clear and I’m moving along and two short means I’m in trouble.”

Darcy smiled. “Okay, one short I’m in trouble and one long I’m fine.”

“Every minute?”

“It should only be five minutes to circle the circle. We’ll meet back here. Don’t rush it, Celine.”

She nodded and both turned their mounts to begin the search pattern.

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There was no warning, not even Mandy picked it up. One moment she was looking around her suspecting a lurking alien behind any small desert plant and the next moment she was surrounded by creatures from her drawing, bigger in real life. Before she could raise her arms to indicate she was no threat she was hit on the chest with some unseen force that lifted her up and off Jade's back, landing her on her back on the hard ground. Unable to move but conscious of what was going on around her, while her thoughts whirled around, her lungs heaved for air.

The large, scaled creatures quickly bound her and unceremoniously tossed into the back of a vehicle she did not recognize. Her heart went out to Jade and Mandy and in despair reached out for Darcy.

She blew it. Then her world went black.

## **Chapter 7**

Darcy was leading Medicine Man, intent on studying tracks she did not recognize around the south side of their vortex energy wheel when suddenly she was walking through knee high grasses with Medicine tugging on the reins to grab a mouthful. Disorientated, Medicine Man's head nearly pulled the reins out of her hands, redirecting her attention to him, feeling his fear of a strange dusky odor.

"It's alright, big guy, calm down. I know we aren't exactly home...come-on, down. That's it...steady there," she soothed as she stroked his twitching neck. Her own nostrils flared as she sensed they were not alone. "Oh, shit," she muttered as a gust of wind was followed by figures dropping all around her.

She faced a group of bird people, just like Celine had drawn them.

*Great! And I did not want to go traveling.*

*Yet you did.*

Darcy took a deep breath, and it seemed Medicine Man did too because his exhalation of air hit the back of her neck, causing her to jump.

One of the bird people moved forward.

*Why are you here?*

*I...ah, don't know. I was visiting our circle and...why are we not talking?*

The laugh was like a squawk, a strangled bird sound at that.

*Oh. How do I get back...I know I just arrived but...I don't belong here.*

*Don't you know how?*

*Walk back? Alright....*

*NO!*

Darcy stopped in her step back that was pushing against Medicine Man's chest to get him to back up.

*You cannot go that way. It is only for entrances.*

*Why were you waiting here?* Darcy asked suspiciously.

*Like you, we are watchers. We have seen you watching from your landhouse.*

The leader's head swiveled towards one of its companions, its feathers ruffling in the breeze. The other feathered person, taller than he carried on a short twittering and cawing conversation. The feathered head turned back towards Darcy, dark eyes shining in the sunlight.

*My second will take you to our leaders. They will determine how to get you both to the other point.*

*Okay. How do we get there?* Since they had flown in she was curious if they would allow her and Medicine to travel on the ground.

*Do either of you have wings?*

There was no mistaking the humor in the question.

*No.*

Medicine Man stretched his neck as the taller bird person stepped over to them and used her head to indicate what direction they were to walk. What could have been a smile on the beaked face, stretched the corners of her mouth and a feathered arm reached out to touch Medicine's ears and then brushed down to his nose. A noise that could be delight came from her throat, causing the feathers on her throat to vibrate. Darcy was startled when she felt Medicine's delight in the tickling sensation.

*I am Silvermoon, what are your names?*

*Greetings Silvermoon, I'm Darcy and this is Medicine Man.*

They began to walk up a slope that was not in the flat desert she had left.

*His thoughts are different than yours.*

*He's a horse, a different species with different needs and interests.* That struck Darcy as odd since it was so obvious, but she did not pursue it as her thoughts were on handling the strangeness of where she was. To recenter herself, she thought about Celine and how she was going to be worried, and Mandy was going to be fretting...boy did she leave behind a lot of worried people. Then, there were chores piling up...it was laundry day too.

Darcy pulled her hat off and scratched the top of her head and was about to put it on when her bird companion squawked and jumped away from her. This caused nervous Medicine Man to jump also.

*Darn, Medicine, stop this nonsense!* And to her astonishment he did.

*You lifted your head,* Silvermoon gestured with her wing.

Darcy chuckled and lifted her hat off her head to show it was not actually her head.

*It's a hat, like these are clothes...it's to keep the sun out of my face and the clothes ...weather protectors and because it's traditional to wear clothes.*

Silvermoon nodded her head and then pointed at the horse. *Wears clothes too but not everywhere.*

*Oh. That's a saddle so I can ride him without falling off.* She mounted Medicine Man to demonstrate.

*Why do you ride him?*

*To travel faster. He's a lot faster than I.*

*Good. I do not like moving on the ground this slow when the Pirts are nearby.* She gestured to the sky. *I will fly overhead to make sure we do not have any of their scouting parties near.*

While Darcy rode she tried not to think too much, remaining in the moment. She was sure if she did think about it she would be scared half to death and not able to function. It took them what she would have thought was half a day to get to Silvermoon's city. As she got closer she could see details of building structures carved into the cliff face rather than erected on a cliff shelf.

*Medicine, we're not in Kansas anymore. Hell, we're not in LC either. There isn't any cliffs like this back home.*

She felt like she was looking at an old cliff dwelling village except bird-people were flying in and out of the city.

“I sure hope they don’t intend on us going up there,” Darcy mentioned to Medicine Man, not realizing she was speaking. For some reason she felt Medicine understood her and was also worried about being transported up the cliff face.

*We have baskets that can carry you to the top,* Silvermoon reassured her, as she settled on the ground next to them.

Darcy dismounted to walk beside Silvermoon, shaking her head not at all pleased at the idea of being lifted to that height, especially with an edgy stallion. Darcy glanced at the gray head that was bobbing near her. He agreed.

*Well then, you will have to stay in the guard shack which will make whoever is on duty very happy because no one likes to be dirtbound alone. However, one of you will have to meet with our leaders. We have not had one of your kind visit and they will have a lot of questions.*

Darcy glanced at her, guessing there was a lot she left unsaid. Darcy grinned, and then remembered birds may not like to see teeth. *Take Medicine Man then. I’m sure he can tell you all about us.* Darcy leaned down to pet his neck when he snorted and sidestepped giving Darcy an unsteady seat. If she were less skilled of a rider, she would have been on the ground.

“Hey!”

*He does not agree with your assessment,* Silvermoon twittered.

Medicine Man’s grunt seemed to agree with birdwoman.

*Can he understand me?* Darcy asked, already knowing the answer.

Silvermoon twittered again. *You do not hear him? He talks more than you.*

*Great. What secrets are you telling her, big guy?* she asked nervously.

Darcy received a gust of warm air from Medicine as the saddle creaked from his movement. It was as if he just laughed.

Silvermoon flew up to the city while Darcy, remounting, continued on a small animal trail that did not directly take them to the base of the cliff but wandered towards it. What the animal trail wound around were trees heavy with fruit of all kinds, growing in total disarray as if they grew wherever a seed dropped. There was also vegetable plants

scattered about as if they also grew wild. There were spots that looked like someone was pulling and picking what they needed as they needed it.

“I don’t know Medicine, but it looks like they don’t have to worry about food. Some of this stuff looks like it’s been growing here for a long time. And look at those pumpkins! They must be using some fancy fertilizer.” She laughed thinking of where Last Chance got their fertilizer.

Medicine Man was enjoying himself, by pulling mouthfuls of grass and grains growing along the side of the path. Normally Darcy would not allow him to eat while he worked, but just as she made that observation and concession, his thoughts on that subject were plain to her. Darcy quickly guessed that this was a place where she and Medicine were going to get to know each other rather well.

As they drew closer to the cliff face she had to crane her neck to see what was going on above her. She was hoping they were more courteous than park pigeons and did not do anything above her that was going to be embarrassing.

When she reached the small building with perches on the roof, loud flaps and the rush of wind had Medicine Man dancing in place as Darcy reined him in to prevent him from bolting off. Five bird people dropped, two on the roof, one on either side of her and before her. Silvermoon, or who she thought was Silvermoon was waiting in front of the building.

*Greetings, Darcy and Medicine Man. Do not be afraid. These are guards that must first be sure neither of you are carrying something that will hurt any of us.*

Darcy snorted. *The only thing I would be carrying is some kind of virus you don’t have here and for that matter, the same goes for Medicine Man. All I want is to get back. It’s not like I came here purposely.*

*You stepped through the gate, one of the other bird people pointed out.*

*I was investigating strange happenings around our sacred circles. Many of them have been altered. Would you know of this?*

*We are aware of changes that are also affecting this side of the portal. Salde shall begin the inspection.*

It was rather scary to be frozen in place while they examined her, only it was not one of the ‘police frisks’ she expected. It was all mental.

## Chapter 8

Celine awoke slowly as if from a deep sleep, however the reality of the unfamiliar ground she was lying on had her quickly rolling to sit up. She was in a circular glass-like container, six feet in circumference. She could see Mandy and Jade in a similar enclosure; their prison fitted to their size. There was no place for privacy; no place to relieve herself; and no water. The closed space increased her awareness of her soiled clothing and her thirst. Firmly she turned her thoughts to Mandy and Jade, whom she knew were miserable as well; however, to her surprise she felt a connection with them that told her they were just as worried about her.

Celine stepped to the wall to communicate with the four lizard people that were staring at her. They appeared to be anticipating her to communicate with them, so she pressed her fingertips to the glass and was promptly knocked back into the wall behind her and bounced back, but the first impact knocked her unconscious.

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A roaring in Celine's ears subsided as she became more conscious, but the headache that pounded behind her eyes like a migraine made her wish she was still unconscious. Her stomach heaved but there was nothing to bring up, not even moisture. Weakly she remained lying on the hard floor until she felt well enough to sit up.

Celine did not bother to look out of her prison, knowing the lizard people were there watching her. Deciding to do something for herself, she pushed herself into a sitting position and assumed a meditative pose. Letting her thoughts dwell on her fear and what could happen, or trying to figure out where she was, was too much to deal with right now. First she needed to find a quiet place within herself before she figured out if this was a bazaar nightmare or a weird reality. It took three deep breaths for the headache to recede and her awareness of how miserable she felt.

*It is time.*

Startled Celine's eyes blinked open. Three lizards turned to greet a fourth, bowing slightly in deference to the new arrival. None of them wore clothing that looked familiar to her. Celine wished she could have a drink and a chance to clean up. Abruptly she was



lifted and dumped on the floor outside of her enclosure. Her headache returned, beating against her skull, and rattling her eyes in their sockets. Gritting her teeth, she sucked in a deep breath, glad for the fresher air.

Guards with sticks pointed them at her in a threatening manner. Getting to her feet slowly, she joined Mandy and Jade who also were escorted forward.

*Poor baby's. We really walked into it this time, she thought consolingly.*

*Until you are spoken to, you will be silent!*

A painful poke in her ribs had her falling sideways and into one of her guards, who roughly pushed her back into the first guard that had hit her. He brought his stick up to hit her, and she could hear it whistling down towards her; however, it was stopped by another and the noise of the two sticks hitting had her rolling onto her back in panic with her hands crossed above her head.

*Get up. Do not fear us. C'ar reacted too quickly.*

Celine watched as the lizard that hit her, hissed and then departed down another hallway.

*Get up!* the order was repeated impatiently.

Celine rose to her feet holding the rib that was bruised. It hurt to breathe. Studying the lizard that stood before her, she trusted this one less than the one that hit her.

*So, you can hear us. Good. What are you and your companions doing here?*

*We were taking a walk in the desert and ended up here. We would like to go back.*

*We are to take you to S'l, our Ka leader. It will be his decision.*

*Before we do, can we clean ourselves, get something to drink, eat and relieve ourselves...?*

The lizard features of the one speaking to her seemed to be amused. Liquid refreshment was supplied. They were then shown to an outside area that was bathed in sun. Many of these creatures were lying about on flat surfaces, soaking up the sun with nothing on. In a short time, the area was emptied of her capturers.

*Wash here, dry yourself there.* She pointed at Celine's clothing and Jade's tack.  
*You may clean your coverings over there.*

Celine quickly stripped Jade's tack off and gave her a quick pat on her shoulders. Celine then removed her clothing, at this stage not caring if any of them were looking and stood under the flowing water. Even without soap, just the relief of cleaning herself was helpful for her state of mind. She then picked up her clothes and rinsed them. To dry them, she stretched them out on top of the warm slabs of rock. For herself, she sat under the shade of a tree not wanting a sunburn to contend with. She closed her eyes for a moment, taking both a mental as well as a physical break from her situation.

Mandy woke her with a cold nose against her ear. Celine jumped from the touch, and she could swear Mandy was laughing at her. Celine found her clothes were dry, so she quickly dressed, also happy that her ribs and head were ache free.

She rebridled and resaddled Jade. She was tightening the girth when the same lizard person that had allowed her the time to clean up returned with differently dressed guards. She nodded approvingly at Celine and her companions and then gestured for them to follow her. The guards flanked them, pointing their weapons at them in case they forgot they were considered a threat.

Celine, Mandy and Jade were led into another type of vehicle, larger than the first one. It drove until they passed by an area that was thick with vines and fruit bearing trees, growing in wild abandon. The vehicle came to a halt and the three were motioned to find what they needed. The guards also ate, but Celine knew running away was not an option. Jade was pulling up mouthfuls of grass and grains, putting out feelings of contentment. Mandy seemed to know this was all the food she was going to be able to eat and dug up a carrot. Nothing around them looked purposely cultivated.

By the time the sun set, they had reached their destination. They were escorted to a room where the three of them were to be locked in. She was at first grateful they were together, and not in a glass enclosure, but it still was not something that was accommodating to any of their species. The passage of time was difficult to measure in the dark room. Mandy's head was resting on her knee when they all heard something heading their way. Whatever it was, was in a hurry. The lights came up. Six lizards arrived.

*Come. The Ka S'l wishes to speak with you.*

They were marched into a garden that was lit with something that was not the sun. A few lizards were draped languidly over rocks that were under the artificial light. Celine easily figured out who the Ka was. There was a wide flat rock with three lizards lying on it. As they approached all but one left.

*Greetings....*

It sounded polite but she felt he saw her no more than she saw an ant at a picnic.

*Greetings...*

*You and your companions used a passage that has not been open for travel in a long time. Why?*

*It was not done intentionally. Maybe someone on your side did something to open it and we just happened to be in the right place at the wrong time,* she responded defensively.

There were hisses behind her, but she kept her attention on the Ka. The tip of his tongue fluttered, but otherwise he appeared calm, as he waited for the noises behind her subside.

*Perhaps. It is understandable that you wish to return; therefore, a group of my aids shall accompany you. I don't wish for you to get lost.*

Celine nodded, relieved. *When?*

*You do not want to rest?*

*We prefer starting back now.*

*My aids are not prepared to move at this time.*

A chilling thought from the KA reminded her that it would be through their auspices that she and her companions would be able to get back to wherever she had come from.

*So when will we be leaving?*

*Tomorrow. Your guards will take you back to your holding pen until departure.*

The three were shown into a larger holding area where there was a space for refreshment and bathing. However, she could not figure out where she was to relieve herself and there was no privacy from the onlookers that ringed the top of their holding pen.

Finding a place that felt right she sat with the intention of just sitting in silence, as Darcy described it. Not quite settled and not wanting to give into despair she imagined Darcy, mindful that her thoughts would be picked up by her jailers. With the image came a connection from Mandy and from there it was like an explosion of feeling from Darcy... or so she believed; and then it was gone.

*What was that all about?*

A crunch from her left, had her looking at Mandy who was chewing on some kind of plant that they left. Mandy's expression was that she wished it was meat. Sighing softly Celine glanced at Jade who was lipping grass that had been gathered for her. At least they were getting something to eat.

What may have been hours or maybe a day later the three of them were herded into another type of transportation. Their escort changed. Celine had unpleasant goose bumps on her arms, and Mandy's hackles all the way down to her tail stood up, making her look comical. Celine would have laughed if it was not so serious. And even Jade's hairs were looking stiff along her back.

The vehicle lifted instead of taking a ground route. The acceleration and quick maneuvering unsettled her stomach as it did Mandy and Jade. Both had droopy ears and splayed legs, looking unhappy as they all fought to keep their balance.

When the dipping and veering from one side to another, stopped, Celine's stomach settled...and then their vehicle made a sudden nosedive with Celine immediately thinking of Jade's safety. She did not have as much room to maneuver around to change her balance. Their pilot must have been skilled because they did not crash land, but as soon as they were on solid ground the exit hatches popped open. Celine sprinted out, knowing that her companions were following.

Outside there were a lot of flashes of light and explosions which popped in her ears from the concussions. She headed to what looked like water, thinking they could always swim for it.

Jade and Mandy ran by her probably with the same intention; however an arch away from the water formed and a crocodile emerged from the waters.

“Celine!” a familiar voice called through the booming noises, though it was not so much as a verbal call but a thought. The three of them halted their run and turned to look behind them.

Darcy on Medicine Man was racing towards them. Celine quickly mounted Jade and turned her face to the nearing duo. However, Darcy waved at them frantically to go in another direction. Jade knew and sprinted away, racing alongside the river with Medicine and Darcy joining them. Mandy gallantly kept up, stretching her body into a flat run.

When the noise was further behind them, Darcy gestured towards a barge further up the river.

“We need to get to the other side!” Darcy shouted over the pounding hooves. The horses slid down the embankment and onto the barge with their hooves making thundering noises. Darcy slipped off Medicine and was pulling the ropes that held the barge to the dock loose. Celine slid off Jade and pulled off the rope on the other end. Whatever propelled the craft, Darcy seemed to know how to use it because suddenly they were moving across the river but not to the dock on the other side. Darcy kept the barge in the center of the river where the speed suddenly increased until they were above the water, skimming over the surface. Celine’s eyes opened wide as she spotted some of the creatures that in her books were labeled prehistoric, rearing their heads from the waters, craning their heads to watch them cruise by. The barge easily avoided any obstacles in its path.

Celine stood next to Darcy, wishing she could envelope her in a big hug, but Darcy was concentrating on whatever she was doing to get the craft to work.

“Where are we going?” Celine asked finally, not able to wait any longer. She rested a hand on Darcy’s shoulder.

“To a vortex that will let us enter our own dimension. You remember you were talking about alternative realities that were a result of the supernova around 95000 BCE?”

“Yeah!”

“Well, from what I understand from the bird people, the brizons, this is not one of them.” Darcy chuckled at Celine’s expression. “But they monitor numerous dimensions

that were opened as a result of it. The lizard people, the pirts that captured you, are aggressive and like to stir up turmoil and anguish in species in these other dimensions. The two groups clash a lot, though not like a physical battle. It's more like an ideological battle."

"What about all the prehistoric creatures that are going to be thinking we're tasty morsels?"

"They won't harm us. Here there is a harmony between higher functioning creatures and lower ones. The higher levels are all vegetarian. Food is abundant. Have you noticed there is no cultivation of fields yet plenty of fruit and vegetables?"

"Yeah...but I haven't noticed any large dinosaur footprints."

"This is not their territory, but we will be heading that way. Creatures here respect each other's living space...if you can believe that. See that? We're being followed."

Lizard people were moving along the river heading to the dock the five could see from their boat. Bird people were circling above. Darcy increased their crafts speed, leaving the group behind.

"Neither group, the brizons or pirts know where the exact entrance is back to where our dimension is. They know of two points where they can view us but never has anyone crossed over. We're the first."

Darcy looked at Celine who was holding onto her arm tightly. The shivers that were trembling through her hands had subsided. Darcy leaned over and kissed her forehead.

"The brizons were amazed that Medicine Man and I came through. They believe the pirts are trying to cross to our side and that there is someone or a group that is helping them. They don't know who, what or from where this help is coming from."

They were quiet for a while with the intent on studying the riverbed, looking for a safe place to land.

"I guess you've found out that Mandy and Jade know what you're thinking," Darcy mentioned.

"That's not good," Celine pressed her forehead against Darcy's arm.

"Why?"

"I just don't feel comfortable with...can you read my mind?"

“Not unless you direct it to me. I heard you loud and clear hours back. That’s what brought us here. I thought I was the only one that ended up in Ca’sion until I heard you call me. Even the brizons heard you. We also could feel the pirts group dismay, with your mental call to me.”

All five pairs of eyes continued to scan both sides of the riverbed, the waters, and the air above them, not sure what they were looking for, but still looking. Mandy spotted the dock hidden among the rushes, and Darcy made a smooth U-turn in the river and back tracked, gliding up against the dock. Both horses gingerly stepped out of the boat and waited patiently for Darcy and Celine to hide the boat further into the greenery that nearly overgrew the structure, effectively hiding it from a casual glance.

“We stay on the animal trails,” Darcy explained to Celine in a soft voice.

Mandy did not run very far ahead but rather trotted within visual distance, sniffing and moving her head back and forth.

“Darcy, don’t you think it is kind of odd that we haven’t seen any dinosaurs yet?”

“Why do you want to see one?”

“I don’t. They may squish me because they can’t see me. What’s that?”

Sounds of the brush moving not far from behind them had the five hurrying faster along the path. Mandy was the one that chose the right side when their path forked. The noises grew louder behind them, and Celine was getting suspicious they were being herded in this direction. What confirmed her suspicions was the cave that loomed before them.

“Darcy!”

“I see it! Dismount! We’re going to have to walk!”

“Darcy! Don’t...”

But sticks started to bounce off the rock face, and Celine fled behind Darcy into the dark cave using the sound of Medicine Man’s hooves on the stone ground to guide her forward. Medicine’s flicking tail gave her an idea just how close she was to his hindquarters, which made her rather nervous. The sounds of their pursuers no longer echoed in the tunnels.

“Darcy. Stop for a moment!” Celine whispered urgently.

“What? What’s wrong?”

“This whole thing is wrong. And now we’re stumbling along in the dark with only the sides of the caves, conveniently just the right width for us to use to move along...”

“Would you like to go back?”

“No! But I think we need...”

Indistinguishable noises echoed from behind them.

“Damn! See what I mean?”

“No! Come-on...no wait.” Celine heard some movement and then, “Okay. I’ve tied a rope around Mandy, so she doesn’t get lost. Hold on to Medicine Man’s tail so I don’t lose you.”

The sounds behind them sounded closer.

Celine did find Medicine’s tail as it flicked her way, and she held on as their column moved on as fast as Mandy led them. Meanwhile, Celine was mentally picking out all sorts of things about this situation that did not ring right. The fact that Darcy, who she had thought was normally quick and picked up odd things out of place, was missing them all. She began to wonder if it was Darcy. Then she noticed that Medicine’s tail flickered at regular intervals...too regular.

Celine was about to drop her hold on Medicine’s tail, but her concern went to Mandy. Whatever appeared, Darcy had Mandy and she was not going to leave Mandy behind. In her mind’s eyes she reviewed all that she had experienced so far, and aside from humiliation of soiling her clothing, a migraine and bruised ribs... Celine breathed in and then realized she felt fine.

All of this did not feel right. It had to be a weird dream. However, she could not bring herself to just stop and go back out the way they came because there was enough of a real feeling to all of this, for her to not risk Jade and Mandy’s life.

*I think I’m going crazy.*

*Well, you’re not alone. This tunnel stinks and I’m getting tired,* an unfamiliar thought returned.

“Darcy,” she whispered, not sure why she was even talking to this ‘apparition’ that was acting like Darcy.



“What...and don’t tell me that we are imagining this and all we must do is imagine us out of here. I’ve already tried and it got me a bruise for not ducking when I should have.”

“Well, that’s how I do feel. Darcy, none of this feels right.”

“Why should it, Alice?” Darcy asked her softly. “We fell into a rabbit hole and it’s not ours.”

“That’s it exactly, only, I feel like Dorothy,” Celine muttered as her hearing caught the sound change from the horses’ hooves. She did not feel the terrain change beneath her own feet, so the sound change was puzzling.

“Stay in the moment. Whatever all this is about...hold!”

In Celine’s mind she heard a ‘stop’ from what she was recognizing as coming from Mandy.

“Water,” Darcy muttered.

Celine squeezed her way past the horses and by feel she knelt where she could hear water moving.

“Is that a light?” she whispered.

“Uh, huh. It’s not moving... Was it morning or afternoon?”

Celine was surprised. “I don’t remember...oh, morning. Darcy, that doesn’t make sense. We had been traveling for a while in daylight.”

“Don’t try to make sense of it...”

“Live in the moment,” Celine mimicked. Surprising herself, she leaned over to Darcy and kissed her cheek.

Suddenly her world tilted and both she and Darcy were in cold water, splashing to keep their heads above the water. Celine could not touch the bottom and for a moment entertained the idea of finding out just how deep the water was, but it felt like the water flow was quickly moving them away from the companions. She could hear splashes behind them and was hoping that it was their companions jumping in and not something that would find them tasty. The only bright spot was the light at the end of the tunnel that was growing larger. Celine looked back and could see Darcy without her hat, a yard behind her.

“Make it to land quickly!” Darcy instructed her.

Celine agreed silently. No telling what was in the water. Her feet touched the slippery river bottom. She decided that crawling to the bank was a better idea since she would not have far to fall.

“Come on, come on! Don’t rest. We need to get under the trees so we can’t be seen!” Darcy looked back to make sure the horses and Mandy were close behind them. They were having problems with the slippery river bottom too.

“Go! They’ll make it. Go!” Darcy encouraged her, tugging at her elbow to follow her. Once they were hidden in the forest, Darcy stopped pushing them.

Celine was going to sink to the forest floor, using the nearby tree, however Darcy halted her.

“Don’t lean against any of the trees. There is either something in them, on them or above them that will make your short life miserable. Let’s go over this way.” Darcy gestured to her right and tiredly headed in that direction. It was a very bedraggled line of followers that quietly fell in behind her.

“Darcy!” Celine called looking down at Mandy’s neck ruff that was standing up.

“Yeah. It’s energy. We must be near something.”

“Listen, Darcy. I’m not comfortable with this situation.”

Darcy looked at her with a frown, “I’m listening.”

Celine became annoyed. “Exactly,” she muttered under her breath. “For one, we’ve been herded in this direction. Two, who the hell are you?” she finished stopping in her tracks and glaring at the apparition of Darcy.

“Whatever you have to say, we need to keep moving. We must find this place before it gets dark.”

“Why?” Celine did not budge. However, horses, Mandy and Darcy continued walking at a fast pace down a path Celine could not see.

Celine decided she was not going to move just to see what was going to be created to ‘make’ her move. A snake dangled in front of her, and she acted unimpressed until it twisted it’s face so that it was very close to her and she could see how large its eyes were.

“Alright...I’m impressed...but until you tell me what is happening...I am staying right here, and I will die if necessary!”

The snake had a friend, and it dropped on top of Celine, causing her to scream but she was determined that she was going to get the truth without giving in. She began to have second thoughts on this approach, when her body was squeezed and she could feel her breath being expelled from her. She blacked out.

When she came to, she was bouncing around on Jade's back, and it was not comfortable. She had a headache and her ribs hurt.

*Damn! They still did not answer my question!*

*What is that?*

*Who the hell is responsible for this farce! This isn't real. It's some figment of my imagination and when it gets to a point that I'm losing...I faint. How convenient for them!*

"You dumb stubborn idiot!" Darcy's voice said near her. Celine was roughly pulled off Jade's back, and she found herself stumbling to keep her balance. "Walk! You nearly got us all killed because you have some crazy idea that whatever is happening here doesn't fit your idea of 'reality' so it's not real. Well, gee Celine, whatever made you think we were in Kansas?" Darcy's fury had her face red, though her voice was not loud. "The dangers here are real in that you can die and I can and so can the rest of our friends here! You have no right to endanger us because you are not getting someone to sit down with you and explain in some language you can understand what is happening!"

"Well, you should have just let me die back there if you feel that way!"

"We came in together and we are leaving together. Get your shit together and stop thinking about yourself! None of us like feeling we are being led, guided or herded in a direction but maybe it's for our benefit. So far, in case you've missed it, we have not received debilitating injuries, nor have we suffered anything we have not recovered from. So, we will move on until we get to where we are being guided to and go from there. You will not do something that stupid again!"

Mandy whined her agreement, and it was embarrassing to feel Jade and Medicine Man agreeing with their snorts. The five continued on, stepping over forest debris and looking all around them for anything that may drop in on them.

"I'm sorry, Darcy," Celine said softly. "But none of this is real to me and it's a stupid and scary dream!"

“Whether it’s a dream or not...we are all in it and experiencing it as our own,” she told Celine still feeling angry at what she had to do to get the snake off Celine. She was terrified of snakes, and this one was not only bigger than her, but had completely covered Celine within it’s coils. The only reason she knew Celine was it’s prey was Mandy’s barking at the snake. Darcy had to knock the snake out, fearing that if she killed anything wherever they were, it would change everything.

“Whoa! Yuuck!” Celine shuddered and would have screamed if her throat muscles were not frozen at what she walked into. She was stuck in what she was afraid of was a spider web. She hated spiders.

“Don’t wiggle! Just relax. Shit, Celine. This is not the way I want to relive boredom,” Darcy muttered as she slowly pulled her knife across the sticky line that Celine had walked face first into.

Mandy was growling near them. Celine’s head was freed and then her left side. She could feel something quivering along the web that she was still attached to. She pulled herself from the rest as Darcy cut and then the three of them backed up looking around for any more of the web.

“Isn’t there another way?”

“I’m just going by feel. Can’t you feel it?” Darcy asked exasperated with being the only one that could feel the energy vortex. Mandy and Jade agreed that they felt something...just a little. Medicine was too jumpy like Celine to concentrate on feeling for a vortex of energy that may be their doorway back.

“No! Does that mean we won’t get back?”

Darcy grabbed her hand, hoping to give her some sense of courage. Celine’s anxiety was so strong she was giving Darcy a belly ache.

“Darcy, what’s...what’s wrong?”

“You’re...” Darcy gulped back the sudden escalation of the belly ache to gaseousness.

“I...oh...gawds, Darcy!” Celine realized immediately what she was doing. She gripped Darcy’s arm firmly. She pictured a nature scene, not at all like the desert, a garden that was wild with flowers and in the center her guardian sat, waiting for her.

Celine blinked for a few moments, delighted that her visualization was so well done. Then suddenly she felt something pull at her and had to spread her legs to balance herself as it felt she was atop a fast-moving train. Abruptly it stopped. Frightened she looked around her. She was not in her garden. She was now in...she was standing in the desert. Alone. As she turned around there was absolutely nothing around her.

“Darcy!” she shouted at the top of her lungs.

“Nurse! Marti, it’s okay. It’s okay, hon. Nurse!” a familiar voice above her hollered as two hands held her down.

She panicked and frantically grabbed at the hands pulling them off her, blinking in confusion at Gail’s frightened face looking down at her. She felt the rush of air as if someone had opened a door and then...darkness.

## **Chapter 9**

Celine’s mouth was dry and so was her throat. A cough, the sound rough to her ears, brought her closer to consciousness. Her eyes felt heavy. She tried to raise her arm, but found it was too heavy to get more than an inch off the bed.

“Marti?” a soft voice called to her.

Her first attempt to speak was not translatable, but the effort was rewarded with a straw pressed against her lips. The energy expended to draw in liquid was too much and she sank back into a deep sleep.

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Her third waking was sudden, and it had her trying to sit up. However, she was tied up with tubes and more tubes and with only rising a foot, she managed to pull a lot of them askew.

“Marti, hon. You’ve got to wake up with less vigor. You have a lot of stuff still attached.” Gail’s cool hand rested on her forehead. “Hi,” she greeted the reddened eyes with relief.

“Gail,” Marti answered bewildered. “Where am I?”

“A hospital in the middle of nowhere.”

“Last Chance?”

“Last chance? For what? Girl, we were in a car accident. I was lucky because I had the air bag. I...bought a new car and this time the passenger side has an air bag too,” she told her solemnly and then started to cry. “Oooh, Marti I was so frightened for you!” she wailed. “I am soooo sorry. I didn’t intentionally choose not to not have an air bag on your side. It just came that way...I’m...”

“Gail, what the hell are you talking about?” wheezed Marti.

Gail plucked a tissue from the box near the hospital bed and blew her nose.

“I...what do you last remember?”

Marti looked at her doubtfully. There was no way she was going to tell her about Last Chance and being caught in an alternate world.

“Yeah. You remember nothing. That’s what the doctor said,” Gail admitted sadly. Gail settled in the chair picking up a Starbucks paper cup. She sucked on it for a while. “I badgered you to take off a week...at least...to go on a trip with me up to...”

“Lake Tahoe...” Marti contributed.

“No,” Gail told her firmly. “Santa Barbara...where on earth is Tahoe?” She shook her head. “Anyway, we got tail ended by some drunks and my car spun out of control and we both ended up in a ditch. I was in the hospital for about a week and you...” she took a deep breath.

“Yeah?” Marti asked feeling like this was a nightmare.

“Nearly a year,” she told her quietly.

“A...year?” she whispered unbelievably.

Gail nodded and started to tear up again. “I’m so sorry,” she apologized again.

“Gail, stop blaming yourself. You just said we were tail ended.” Marti’s thoughts were going off in different directions, scaring her to near panic. She tried to lift her arm to remove the tubes, but she found she was too weak to do much.

“It’s all taken care of...your bills and all. My insurance and yours...it’s...”

“Insurance?” Marti looked at her not understanding her.

“Your employer, McKee’s Software and Technology Design. The place you worked at during your internship, and they hired you after your graduated? Remember any of that?”

“Yes, I remember that!” she told her impatiently...*Except, I quit them and lived on the street for a few years. Then we headed to Lake Tahoe and we were in a car accident before we got there. What is going on!?*

The beeping of the machine next to her had Gail looking anxious. “Marti...calm down. I don’t know what you remember and what you don’t.”

A nurse interrupted the conversation.

## **Chapter 10**

Marti puffed, sweat soaking in her T-shirt and yet, she still had four yards to go on the hand rail.

“One step at a time...” her physical therapist encouraged quietly.

Marti shoved her foot ahead, feeling her legs shake so hard she did not think she could support her weight. It did not help that her arms, that were supporting the weight her legs could not hold, were shaking just as much.

Arms reached around her and eased her into the chair. Marti was angry that she did not make it to the end, although the therapist did not expect her to yet. Too soon she had been told.

Margi couldn't understand how in less than a year her body deteriorated so much. While she retreated within herself, she was rolled back to her room. Her hands dangled limply into her lap as her arms shook with exertion. She was assisted with her shower, something else she closed out and just went through the motions. Her heart and mind returned to a life she thought she lived...with Darcy. She was afraid.

Weeks turned into a month, with three changes in her living arrangements: from the hospice to a recovery facility and then to Gail’s condo. Gail had packed up her apartment and put everything into storage, not knowing for how long her friend would be in a coma. Margi had no family.

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“Where’re you going?” Gail asked.

Marti picked up a bottle of water from the kitchen. “Out. I’m going nuts hanging around here and doing nothing.”

“Maybe you need to get back to work...it helps me,” she smiled. Gail leaned back from the dining room table that was hidden under laptop, printer, scanner, camera and neatly stacked papers and books she was using for her current research. Gail always researched before starting her next business venture.

In the months that Marti lived with her she got used to seeing her friend sitting at her dining room table with laptop opened, surrounded by equipment and papers, and a brown bag next to her that she tossed her empty plastic water bottles into. Gail preferred working here, to her study or library. Marti could understand, as she admired the nature scene the bay window looked out at.

Gail sipped from her water bottle as she watched her friend whose radical behavior change since the accident had her worried and vigilant.

“Gail, you’re a work alcoholic,” Marti snorted in disbelief.

“And you’re not?” Gail returned. “Hell, to get you to take that vacation that had disastrous results, I had to promise you I would help you track down IYD.”

“What!? What did you say?” Marti stepped over to Gail and nearly grabbed her by her shoulders.

“Hey! Take it easy. What’s wrong?”

“IYD, In Your Dreams...you said you can find her?”

“I thought you said you weren’t interested,” she told her slowly, wondering what was going on with Marti. “I...what do you remember?” she asked cautiously. Due to Marti’s complete change of character after the accident she had gone to a psychologist to see what she should do about it.

“I...she turns up in our chat room every now and then...” *Geeze! Why didn’t I think of that? I could...what would I say? Shit! I...I know I didn’t imagine it because I’m not wearing glasses. I know I was blind as a bat before I had laser surgery in my other life. Even Gail noticed that I didn’t need glasses after all this time, and she said my desire to always work is not the same. That’s exactly how I was before I quit McKees!*

“Right,” Gail said slowly. “And...I had told you I had a detective that works for me that could locate anyone...”



“Joe. So...?” she hinted for her to go on.

“I was going to do that when we got back from our vacation...but other things happened. You haven’t been hitting the chat room since your accident. You know, every now and then some people ask about you. IYD still shows up...she once asked about where you were.”

“Did you tell her?” she asked breathlessly.

“You were in a coma then. I just said you were sick,” her voice softened. “I did tell CD, California Dreaming when you were on the road to recovery,” she added.

“Oh,” Marti played with the water bottle for a few moments, while she tried to remember what days Darcy signed on. Wednesday evening. “What day is today?”

Gail shook her head. “It’s Monday and too early for the crowd you usually chatted with. They would be happy to hear from you again,” she said again.

Margi nodded. She knew Darcy’s Email...but what would she say? She knew she did not dream or imagine another life...she lived it! Would this Darcy return her inquiry?

“Do you mind if I sign on?”

“No. Anytime you want. You know where the PC is...down the hall in the library I never use.” Gail smiled and watched as Marti turned and headed towards one of the bedrooms that had been morphed into a library which was also to serve as an office. However, she found she liked looking out her bay window while working and abandoned the library/office.

Margi entered the darkened room that lit up the moment it detected her movement. She settled comfortably in the office chair. While she waited for the PC to boot up, she looked around the room. The three months she lived here she had not entered this room, not wanting to invade all of Gail’s spaces. Gail’s bookcases were more for holding statues and vases than books. Whereas, in her bedroom, books that she had been purchasing were stacked all around her bed. Celine was sure the maid was going crazy with trying to vacuum around the stacks. The books were on subjects she remembered Darcy had in her bookshelves.

Turning back to the PC that was ready, she quickly clicked on the internet ICON and moved to her Yahoo account. Pursing her lips, she realized that she was going to have to delete a history of her internet movements.

She sent an Email carefully worded to Darcy, wondering what would happen. She then logged onto the chat room she had long ago favored. The names had changed, but some did not. When she signed up as Dreamer it was only five minutes before she was greeted by many of the names she once knew well. She was hoping IYD was going to sign on, but Darcy did not sign on the internet very often. But Jack did. What did he sign on as? She logged out and opened up her mail again. She fired off an inquiry to the Last Chance group mail, wondering if such a mail address existed. She went back to the chat room and chatted a bit. Many wanted to know where she had been and she told them, Dreaming. Finally, she signed off.

It was still light out so she took the walk she was originally going to take. By the time she returned, Gail was microwaving dinner.

“Hey, girl. Did you work up an appetite?”

“Yeah. What can I do?”

“Salad. How was the walk?”

Marti knew she was asking about her strength. “I walked until I was at Hayswoods and then jogged up to the top of the slope...and then slipped and fell on my butt on the way down,” she chuckled. “Wet grass.”

“Hm. One day the slope will be your midpoint,” she told her as she spooned the rice and mixed vegetables on two plates.

“Ehhh. Running to run is your thing. I’m doing it to not feel so damn weak.”

“Well running with a buddy doesn’t mean you chit chat,” she remarked, knowing Marti preferred solitude.

“How’s your business going?”

“Good. I’m getting ready to sell my interests in this one. This is the last time I go into partnership with someone,” she shook her head.

“Hm. Taking CEO perks off the top, is he?”

Gail looked up at her startled. “What?”

Marti shrugged her shoulders. “You know in the movies, they have everyone taking from the goose and leaving... What’s wrong?”

“I hadn’t realized I spoke with you about my suspicion about Bennie.” She knew she did not because Marti was unconscious when she took Bennie on. She was distracted by Marti’s condition and in a weak moment let someone wheedle his way into her business affairs, she thought disgustedly. She was determined she would not blame it on Marti.

“Bennie?” *Oh, shit. Now what. This isn’t right. The timing is off. Nothing is right in this world! I didn’t quit my job and live on the streets for two years... I lived in an apartment and rented out my condo because I couldn’t stand my neighbors...and here, Gail and I got together weekly.*

“Yeah. Not tall, dark and handsome, but a smooth talker he is. Besides becoming my partner, he’s also talked me into keeping the business longer than I’m interested in.” She frowned at this then waved it off. “Said he wanted to learn the business of starting a business and then selling it when it reaches a certain peak.”

“But you always sell a year or so later. You just like to start them. You hate sharing power and develop companies and good management...that means more than one at the top.”

“Right. That’s where everyone on the management team wants to have a say in how and where the company is going and then take the next step and get to Wall Street. Not for me,” she agreed.

“Remember that account we opened for your first business?”

“Yeah. I got two credit cards on it yesterday. That’s a damn coincidence that you remembered it when I was reminded of it just the other day,” Gail marveled.

“Hm. I just remembered...and with a guilty conscious. I was supposed to close it and I forgot. Speaking of your business reminded me of it. If you want, we can close it tomorrow, since I’m here.”

“Uh huh. Usually, my business mail goes to Emile’s office but he and Tom just broke up so their addresses are changing. I found that not only do we have the account open, but it’s got over seven thousand dollars in it. Must have been accumulating interest. But it’s all yours. I withdrew my business funds from it when I sold that business. I must

speak with Emile...Geeze. My business manager and accountant are now going to be taking snippy shots at each other at our business meetings,” she whined.

Marti laughed at Gail’s exaggerated face. “Well, let’s go over to the bank and close it out. One less account to worry about.”

“Yeah. Listen, talking about business...your supervisor called. I think they want to fire you, but you have to come in to work for them to do that.”

Marti nodded. “I need to get out of that business anyway. Too stressful. I’ll send a ‘I quit’ letter to McKee. I know you’ve been taking care of my finances Gail, and I appreciate it. I know I need to sit down and go over them with you, but...can we give it some more time?”

“Hey, don’t worry about it! We’re friends. It’s not like you have some strange money flow problems...” Gail laughed. “Like I said, the insurance has been picking up your tab. Until the doctor gives you a clean bill of health...”

She watched Marti as the woman shifted to her other foot, as if she was uncomfortable about something. “I thought you liked working at McKees what with all the deadlines and pressure to produce creative stuff.”

“People change...” she took a deep breath of relief to end that type of pressure, hoping that the other Marti would forgive her.

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Later she signed onto the internet to see if she got any replies to her inquiries. Two undeliverable. Darcy’s mail and Last Chances group account came back.

She signed onto the chat room. She needed some cheering up. Halfheartedly she teased CD that for someone stuck in Chicago that she may have to change the name to Chicago Dread, and then IYD signed on. Margi’s heartbeat furiously as she answered the teasing come-on IYD had for her. She remembered they played sexual word games...she was frightened that maybe she imaged it or in this life...they did not have that type of a relationship. She shook her head frustrated. Of course they did. She did it with the others so why not with IYD and Gail said she was interested in IYD enough to look for her.

To test IYD she wrote:

*Dreaming: Been thinking of retiring to the desert and starting my own Findhorn garden.*

IYD did not type an answer right away but the other responses were a mixture of sexual innuendos, as most were, and a question or two about what was a Findhorn garden.

*IYD: Personally, I like playing in gardens that are not desert dry but moist. As for finding a horn...*

Oh, joy. That started a load of remarks. IYD's sign off was sandwiched between the rolling remarks.

Marti sighed. Now was the waiting game. After dutifully staying to send some of her own remarks back on how the challenge of working in dry gardens was good for her libido and that she had a fine horn, thank you, she signed off. She needed to look at a map of California. Darcy had told her that Last Chance was too small to be on the map, but the freeway was a few hours from it...that she knew. She just needed to figure out what the off-ramp was. The name was missing from the freeway overheads, she remembered that. Now that she was thinking of that. It seemed odd. Usually, off-ramps were announced about three times. Shaking her head she returned her attention to her present search, pulling out an Atlas Road map from the bookcase, she spread it out on the carpeted floor. Sliding her finger down the page she looked for a name and could not find any she recognized. She moved to the coast and looked for Santa Monica or even Long Beach. Nothing. Cursing under her breath she paged over to the index. P42L. Thumbing through the map book she found Long Beach...it was in Northern California.

*What the hell...*

Marti went through the index for other cities she knew and found they either were not there or...they were moved...in fact...looking closer at the map...California was not looking like the California she knew looked. It was cut in half.

Marti sat back on her heels dumbfounded. *Shit! Shit! Shit!* It was a mixture of elation and uncertainty because now for sure she knew she was not where she felt she belonged. It made sense. If she could visit that dimension where lizards and bird people existed, then why not another reality. But that meant...she rubbed her head ruefully. This was worse than Alice in Wonderland, Wizard of Oz or even Jack and the Bean Stock.

Marti rubbed her face tiredly. She needed to focus on a new priority. Her first had been to walk again. Now she had a new one...to get back to the desert.

She didn't have a car. She was not strong enough to drive, and it was only tantalizing to her with its presence so Gail helped her sell it. She groaned to herself. She just sold someone else's car. Her eyes blinked open. *Damn! I wonder what she's doing in my place...or where she ended up...with MY Darcy!*

Maybe she could talk Gail into a weekend trip somewhere. Getting up she went in search of Gail in the dining room area but Gail had gone to bed. Her laptop was closed and books neatly stacked with the recyclables disposed of.

*Maybe if I sleep on this...it will be different tomorrow... I don't want it different...I want to be back with Darcy.*

## Chapter 11

Darcy's heart was racing when she ended up back at the place she stepped over the threshold. Her eyes and equilibrium struggled to make sense of the distorted world before her. She turned around startled. Where was she? No Medicine Man. No Celine, Mandy or Jade.

*Damn! Where did everyone go?*

Darcy squinted as a shape approached her, growing into something recognizable as it neared. *Shit! Whatever it was it walked like her. What happens if I meet myself in a parallel world? Damn, damn. Okay, lot's of sci-fi buffs write about it all the time. Let's see...ohhh. I think I'll take G.L. Dartt's versions. People don't die.*

"What the hell! What are you?" the voice from her other self-demanded.

"Someone in trouble. We're either in a bad dream or it could be a good one," Darcy offered. If this person studied the same subjects as she did, she would know what that meant.

A smile curled the corners of the lips of her look-alike. "Well, if it's my choice, you would be better looking and not wearing my face."

"Are we in a desert?" Darcy asked.

"More like a man-made waste of dirt and other shit," her double returned disgusted.

“What do you mean?”

“This wasteland around us was the result of a toxic waste site gone bad. A group of us have been cleaning it up...unknown to our government. We don't want to let them know until the anti-nuclear energy bill is passed, with all its waste banned, and use of anything that produces unrenewable byproducts.”

“Wow. That covers a lot of big companies. In my world they picked Nevada's desert for the dump site and Nevada is fighting it.”

“Here too. But there was an explosion underground and it contaminated ley lines thus affecting other states...and though moving slowly, it is progressing into the other states.”

“What year is this?”

“4699 the year of the Black Horse,” she replied promptly. “What year is it on your side?”

“2003 BCE.”

The other looked surprised. “What's BCE?”

“Before Christian Era.”

She laughed. “Bloody hell, but those cretins certainly are arrogant where you're from. Ours are a lot humbler.”

“My name's Darcy,” Darcy offered.

“Big D or just Darc,” her counter-part returned. “So, what are you doing here?”

“Trying to find my way back. In my dimension, I live near a portal so I can see what is going on somewhere, but I don't know where.”

Darc snorted. “So, you don't have the adventurous genes either, huh?”

“I'm here, aren't I?” Darcy returned defensively. And then laughed with Darc joining her.

“Yeah, but like me, I bet it was by a big accident in your life.”

“Yeah. Well...I want to get back. Around my house in the desert are energy vortexes of different types. I was walking around one of them with Celine and we ended up in another dimension that had lizard and bird-type people living with dinosaurs and the likes.”

“Holy angles,” the other said.

“That was no holy encounter. Anyway, we were being chased by something and got split up. Here I am without my horse, dog or lover.”

“What? You have animals still? And a lover?”

“You don’t have animals?”

“No. Over population of our species and the contamination of the land killed off everything that took up human space. The choice was sharing the earth by reducing our birth rates or kill off anything that took up space we could use. The religious right killed off all animals they felt would infringe upon a human’s right to exist...including what they found in the zoos. The government was suspiciously slow to prevent the slaughter. The diseases the carcasses brought wiped out so many of those creeps I think someone got their revenge...however, the contamination from waste dump sites is interfering with reproduction of all the species. People these days don’t readily identify themselves with any of those old established religions.”

“How do you eat?”

“Well, it’s not meat. Goretec and Fasotech became the biggest bioengineering companies in the world and started production of uncontaminated food in space.” She pointed to the sky above her.

“Wow.”

“It is wow. Their subsidiary, Larmont Fuel and Toxic Waste Disposal was responsible for the shoddy storage of the toxic waste in Nevada.”

“And no one did anything?”

“Politics. Everyone is sleeping with everyone at the top. A regular orgy.”

“You don’t sound down about it.”

“Like you said...we create our own reality and there is a group of us that is fighting the collective image some are directing the masses to have of this world.”

“Do you know how I can get back to where I need to be?”

Darc laughed again. “Where you need to be? Since you’re here...I would say that this is it. So, we need to figure out why you are here. We must have something you need, or you have something we need.”

“You don’t have animals? Maybe that’s it. I have dog hairs, llama, chicken feathers, horse hairs...things you can take DNA from to recreate what you’re missing.”



“You always carry stuff like that around?”

“It’s on my clothes,” she told her patiently.

“Well, maybe that’s it. All our scientists come up with is damaged DNA.” Darc grinned. “Well, I gotta say, prayers work. We’ve been chanting for some help on our next phase, and I guess the shirt off your back will do.” She took the shirt she was handing, feeling eerie touching her double.

Darcy thought the pockets probably having a lot of chicken stuff because she had used the pockets to carry eggs that morning and the two eggs did have feathers stuck to them.

“So, now....” before she finished her sentence she was moving elsewhere, except her feet were not moving but firmly planted on the ground beneath her.

Standing before her was another her. And she looked like she was waiting impatiently. This person was dressed in shorts, hiking boots and had two water bottles hanging from her fanny pack.

Both stared at each other for a few moments.

“I’m Darcy,” she began.

The other nodded watching her warily.

“You don’t believe me. Ask me something about my life and we can see how close we are.” She offered but only because she was wondering about this dimension. So far, both Darcy’s she met had the same face change. That worried her to some extent.

The other still said nothing.

“Okay. Let me tell you about mine.” Darcy gave a quick bio on herself, and even went into her online entertainment, trying to find something that would change the hard face before her. She felt like she was facing herself when she went into the military. She wondered when this person had changed her face.

It was at the mention of her internet chat name that a flicker of interest showed.

“You got internet in this dimension?”

“You know, I don’t believe in half the shit you told me,” the other said. “But you sure have an imagination.”

“Really? Then why the hell are you out here in the desert? And...you have the same face as me.”

“This isn’t a desert. It’s a private preserve. I’m the new patrol officer just checking out the spots that are off limits to any visitors.”

“What the hell is this place?” Darcy demanded, suddenly worried about her counterpart.

“It’s like I said...closed to visitors.”

Darcy then noticed she was carrying a shoulder holster, and she had a badge sewed on her shirt’s shoulder.

“You stayed in the military...probably in special ops. Damn, Darcy you need to get out of that group. I did. Took me a while but...”

“I don’t know who you are...but wherever you came from you can leave and don’t come back. I’m going to mark this spot for difusement.”

“You’re warning me. That’s nice. But if you damage something in your dimension...it may affect others.”

“That kind of talk will attract the Enforcers, so I don’t want to hear it.”

Darcy took a deep breath. She had to be here for a reason. Well, maybe her showing up was enough to plant a seed of dissention in the Enforcers power. It sounded to Darcy like this dimension was peopled by a closed-minded group...yet, they hired her counterpart and that meant they used people who had the ability to see more than what the large masses saw to keep it under control.

Time to move on, she thought.

“Well, I would like to move on...just remember, you create your own reality.”

And Darcy moved on. That must have been the message.

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“Look, I’m telling ya, I’m being moved from dimension to dimension or place to place and I just say what comes out of my mouth and poof! I’m off to another place. I’m getting tired and my patience and politeness are gone. I don’t care if you don’t believe a word I say. I’m just a messenger...who doesn’t know what the hell my message is about. I just told you all I know!”

She waited impatiently for her to be propelled forward but she went nowhere. This person had her old face, so she obviously did not share the same experiences. It was a real pain to convince this Darcy who she was...and she knew she still had not.

Both stood regarding the other for what could have been up to ten minutes silently. Darcy was afraid to move out of the energy she felt running up and down her body and the other Darcy was just standing where she was not moving either.

“I got an Email inquiry from ‘a Celine’...” the woman finally said.

“You did! When!”

“Yesterday. I also chatted with this ‘Dreaming’ person. You say they're the same person?”

“Yes! Yes! She must be trapped here like me if she knows your Email! Unless you gave it to her?”

“No. It’s a private mail address and I sent it back as undeliverable. I’ve been chatting with Dreaming every now and then... She’s been off the chats for about seven months...until yesterday. Said she was in a car accident, and it took her a while to recover.”

“Geeze! We met...I...I had picked her up in a rainstorm...we later figured out she was in a car accident and had wandered from it. She had temporary amnesia. So, in this dimension we didn’t meet, but...”

“So, you say you’re lovers?” the lips curled up into a slow smile.

“Yes and friends,” Darcy smiled.

“Why do you think she’s your Celine?”

“Because Celine or Marti...she goes by Marti too...why else would she have sent you a personal Email? I can’t figure out why I’m here because...you have the same stuff here as we have...”

“Wait! Hold on. You’re speaking of really ‘out there’. How do you know about me...if you don’t even look like me?”

“I told you how I came here...to Last Chance. Do you call your town Last Chance?”

“That’s not something I can talk about.”

“Look, I’m clairvoyant...I can see things around people like a story or images that play out like a movie as I’m talking to them. It doesn’t happen all the time...but I can see why you escaped the car accident that I was caught in. You saw it happening before the sequence started so you had the car towed when you had the chance and quit the PD to avoid getting caught up in their sicko game. You came to LC because you saw it...like an oasis in the middle of a desert. You accepted your talent while I fought mine.”

“Shit!”

“See, it happens to you too,” Darcy finished triumphantly.

“So, you live in a desert community that takes care of energy reservoirs?”

“Something like that. We call them vortexes. We’re observing and in my case, somehow I ended up stepping over some kind of threshold...”

“Yeah, you said that. So, what do you want me to do with this Celine?”

“Bring her here! She’s got to get back over the threshold!”

“This is going to be interesting,” the other remarked dryly.

“Yeah,” Darcy laughed happily. “If it’s the right Celine she’ll know. Gawds. An accident. I hope she’s okay.”

“So, what....”

Darcy felt herself drop to the ground as if a great weight lay on top of her, pushing her down...

*Like I’m in a damn plane taking off at high g’s!*

## **Chapter 12**

“Gail! Just humor me! You’re not doing anything right now are you?”

“No,” she admitted resignedly and then added quickly, “but this is in the middle of...” she looked at the map again.

“It’s an adventure. You need a vacation. You’ve been fretting about the investigation into your finances, so this is a good time to get a break from the stress. You don’t have to report to anyone where you’re going do you?”

“Why?” Gail asked suspiciously.

“Because I don’t want another one of those rear end engagements by someone trying to knock you off for your business,” she told her mockingly.

“Oh, gawds you have an imagination,” Gail laughed and then glanced at the drawing pad on the table. In all their years together that started in college, she never knew Marti to leave a drawing pad around. It was like her diary. She was tempted to look at it but refrained. Trust was at issue here, and after all she tipped her off to her business associates stealing money from her businesses, though Gail was not sure if she did it intentionally or not. Maybe that was why she got along with Marti so well. When she offered her some information, she was always right. Something she did not do often.

“Okay. So...tell me...are you sure this is IYD and not someone giving you a line? And how do you know this is not some guy waiting to knock you off?”

*More like my socks!* Marti thought humorously. “‘Cause I just know,” she returned with certainty. “I won’t just go off somewhere without investigating it. You’re not the only one that can research. Come on, let’s get some clothes together and start off. We can find a place to sleep when you get tired.”

“Okay, okay. Let me let my neighbor know I’ll be taking a trip to Northern Cal. Gawds, but some people hate those people,” she frowned. “Maybe I should just tell them I’m heading up to Santa Barbara.”

Marti nodded already stuffing her pad in a backpack along with bottles of water. She added only one day’s change of clothing. She knew the bait of meeting IYD would be too much for Gail to resist. She had the hots for her just by the conversations over the internet. Marti wondered how she would look. For a few moments she looked at herself in the mirror. She did not have the same face she was familiar with and that had taken some getting used to. When she had first seen herself in the mirror and freaked, Gail had told her the change had saved her life and that was all. Marti’s assumption was that it was due to the accident. She had not thought to ask Gail why this face. Maybe on their trip.

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It was an hour later, and Gail’s roadster was ready to go. The tolls were prepaid and since they were taking the cheaper route, which happened to go near their rendezvous, it would take a little longer to get to Gail’s logged final destination, Santa Barbara.

Santa Barbara, from what Marti's research found, bordered the Northern Cal lands. Santa Barbara supported all the things Northern Cal and Southern Cal differed on. Like concerts that usually left the environment injured with their pyrotechnics and outlandish antics of their attendees that burned anything in the area, to offshore over fishing, dumping and oil pumping. Southern Cal, she learned, was the poorer half of a once large state, and wanted to sell its soul to oil and large self-interest-corporations while Northern Cal was interested in saving its natural resources and finding other ways to survive the great depression. After a bloody war that was like a gang war, the Federal Government, who loved the South for their potential market, separated the two powers into different states. The two states hated the other. Any sport games between the two rivals were closed to public attendance due to the riots that always broke out between the spectators.

"All right, strap in, and gimme a bottle of water. Just thinking about the rest stops already has me wanting to get my money's worth," Gail told her humorously.

That was another thing that was different in this dimension. Not only did you pay in advance for the use of the roads, but you paid for each rest stop you passed just in case you were going to use it and after a certain number of miles, the owner was mandated to have the vehicle checked out. Marti suspected that not only was the government keeping track of citizens this way, but corporate United Citizens of America also made sure that their coffers were kept filled with all the fees they collected.

Marti leaned back after making sure they both had water and refreshments close at hand. She closed her eyes and pictured the Darcy she knew. Smiling she hugged herself.

"Hm. Already getting your panties in a wad are ya?"

Marti giggled. "Uh huh. Gail, can I ask you a personal question?"

Gail laughed. "Geeze, since when was anything between us too personal?"

Marti did not answer that question, not knowing just how close the Marti of this dimension was to her. "Okay. Why do I have someone else's face?"

Gail blinked surprised. "It's what you asked for, I guess. What does it matter? You couldn't have your old face back," she reasoned.

Marti turned her head to look at Gail. “What...why couldn’t I have my old face back?” she asked softly.

“You sure have some weird blank memory spots,” Gail marveled, not understanding it at all. Her research on memory loss never mentioned blank spots like Marti was having.

“Please, Gail. Just tell me,” she insisted.

“You witnessed an assassination and the people behind it would recognize your face. You were put under a witness protection plan but...”

“Wait a minute! When did this happen?”

“In your senior year of high school. For your testimony you were given a new identity and went to a prestigious college that you would not have been able to have done. You know how people with old money are about sharing their colleges with those who don’t belong to their club,” Gail laughed easily. “And, that’s where we met.”

“Oh.” *Gawds, but the differences are strange. What choices in high school did I make that led me in a different direction? In high school I was still drawing those weird pictures of the future... I’ll bet that is the difference. I stopped after one really scared me. I burned my pads. Granny was disappointed in me. She wanted me to hone my ability...our only disagreement.*

“Hey! Yooohoo,” Gail said.

“Oh, sorry. I was thinking.”

“Yep. We’re coming to the first rest stop. We get one sweet drink each and a Nabisco snack. Pick whatever. We’ll toss them at the next trash can.”

Marti did not want to show her surprise, but this whole trip was weird. Forced car maintenance checks and the purchase of refreshments. Traveling was expensive. However, why did Gail not want to try the refreshments?

Once settled back in the car, Marti opened one of the bottles of sweet drink, while Gail looked at her like she was crazy. After the first sip she knew why Gail was looking at her incredulously. She decided she would not try the small bag of oatmeal cookies; however, she did open the pack and found what was on the wrapper was not what was in the bag.

“I can’t believe you still believe what they tell you on the advertisements,” Gail told her. “You used to do their ads so you should know better.”

“Someone needs to end this type of shit we have to put up with,” Marti told her disgustedly.

“Well,” Gail looked at her hesitantly and then shrugged her shoulders, “the international news said the Alliance of Old Europe is going to vote against the United Citizens of Americas and if they do...the corporate structure will be dismantled and they will send AOE people over to act as an interim government until we get our new government together.”

Marti’s eyebrows rose before she could censor her reaction. “Isn’t the UCA going to fight it?” Marti was surprised the acronym came out so easily.

“They have been for fourteen years and while they do, they’ve been taking over everything and stripping every natural and publicly owned resource.” Gail shook her head at her friend’s lack of memory. Marti had been an active underground activists, just like her, which was why she was assigned to keep an eye on Marti after her recovery from this accident. The UCA agents had not expected her to live, but considered their warning taken seriously so they did not pursue her; which was also why she was suspicious of IYD and had investigated whoever was on the other side of the mysterious URL. Her network recognized IYD to belong to a similar group though there was not much information on them. That was why she was surprised the meet was agreed on.

They were three hours driving along one stretch of road noticing that there were a lot of red and white law enforcement vehicles passing them both ways. It gave both women goose bumps. A red light on her dash flashed every time one passed by. Neither women spoke, but they wondered if it would be wise to follow the plan IYD set up.

The flat tire occurred exactly where IYD said it would happen. It scared both women as the car fishtailed around before Gail got control of the vehicle and pulled over to the side of the road. The moment the car stopped, a red and white pulled up behind them. A tall women climbed out while Gail sat still to get her pounding heart to slow down.

A hand gestured for Gail to roll her window down.

“Hi. You two okay?”



They both nodded.

“Good.” She stepped back and looked over the car. “Looks like a couple of days in the repair shop and you should be road safe.” She waited politely for Gail to tell her that was bullshit and a rip off...however, Gail did not say anything.

The woman turned slightly, not enough to let them out of her peripheral. “There’s your ride now. I don’t want you to be inconvenienced so Dee will take you to the nearest board and breakfast. You’ll be notified when your car’s ready.” She handed Gail a token that would get her car back.

Their ride was an old beat-up jeep. Just like Darcy’s! Marti nearly ran to the jeep, slinging her pack over her shoulder. Gail followed a little slower, waiting for someone to step out of the jeep.

Marti pulled the jeep passenger door open with excitement. The face she was staring at was Della’s. “Della, where’s Darcy?” she asked without thinking. She had been sure it would be Darcy.

The eyebrows behind the dark glasses rose. “What makes you think I’m not Darcy?”

The voice was Darcy’s.

*Gawds you have got to shut up, Marti. This Darcy probably didn’t have the run in...*

“Sorry. I...”

“That’s okay. Your Darcy told me. Get in. We gotta get outta here.”

Marti’s face broke out into a big smile as she hopped in, tossing her backpack at her feet. “Come on Gail!” she encouraged her slower moving friend.

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Darcy said nothing as she drove them over a bumpy road for the next two hours. Marti was tired and cat napped as best as she could. Her dreams were strange, overlapping what she thought may be the other Marti’s memories. This Marti never gave up drawing her prophetic scenes. She used them to help bring down a conglomerate that was attempting to run a continent as their private business. It was not the UCA government that had rescued her with the face change, but Interpol that was working with

an organization her granny introduced her to that was against the corporatism of the Americas.

Now she understood her relationship with Gail. She had been her contact with the organization since her identity change. Her ability to start businesses and sell them at a profit was something that corporate UCA liked since it brought more tax revenues in, and small business were no threat to them especially since they controlled parts and equipment any business needed. It also helped that Gail was from old money.

Marti sat up in her seat excited at the change she could feel around her.

“So...you can feel it,” Darcy’s voice quietly observed.

“You taught me,” she returned just as quietly.

“So...are either of you going to tell me what is going on?” Gail’s impatient voice yawned.

“No,” Darcy said.

“Yeah, but not right now,” Marti told her. “You can trust her,” she told the Darcy from this dimension and then sighed. Actually, she did not have the right to make that offer.

“Sorry,” she told Darcy. “It is your decision.”

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The jeep came to a stop in the middle of nowhere. Then it started to descend.

“Oh, wow. We don’t have this,” Marti muttered.

Once the elevator stopped a red light came on, giving them enough light to see a tunnel before them. Darcy got out and waited, expecting them to follow.

“So,” Marti began.

Darcy shushed her and walked faster taking them further downward. They were finally shown into another elevator. This went even further down into the earth. When it came to a stop it opened into a room that Marti recognized as Last Chance’s general store. A group of people, some she recognized and some she did not, were waiting for them.

Darcy waved them forward.

It took about ten seconds before Doc Ellen nodded. “Clear.”

The others nodded their agreement.

“Have a seat. Care for something to drink?”

“Water,” Gail said.

“Okay, so what is going on?” Marti asked sitting with her hands on the table.

“May I?” Jack asked indicating her backpack.

“Looking for pictures, Jack?” she teased.

Jack looked startled and then chuckled. “Yeah.”

Darcy studied Marti and then glanced over at Gail.

“So, as Marti asked...what’s going on?” Gail asked.

Darcy smiled. “Well, I can see why you’re asking...but Celine here, I think she knows and the less spoken of it...the better it is.” She looked at Celine/Marti and got a nod from her.

“Celine?” a worried Gail asked.

“It’s a long story, Gail. Let me tell you what I can that will not put these people in danger.” She pursed her lips and thought. “I am not from this dimension or reality.” She watched Gail’s face expecting a laugh of disbelief.

“What exactly does that mean?” Gail asked carefully.

“I’m not your Marti.” She leaned forward looking deeply into Gail’s eyes. She saw a look of relief. “You knew?”

“I...you’re just too different after the accident. I thought maybe the UCA agent’s got to you.”

“No. The only accident I remember was being tail ended on a freeway, but you were the only one that required hospital care. A short one or two week stay,” she added when Gail looked worried. “My reality isn’t quite like this one...though it has its similarities. The government is IOU’d to corporations but there is a lot of denial, and we still have parks and we only have a few toll roads in California. We also are not divided into North and South with a boundary of demarcation. Your geography is also different.” She looked up at Darcy who stood to receive the bottles of water John brought her. She felt like she was being examined thoroughly.

“Also, Last Chance is above ground. Your hospice, John, is known by word of mouth and just busy enough for the co-opt to handle comfortably.”

John eyed her critically. "So...I have a counterpart in your dimension." After a few heart beats he asked, "Is she...?"

"Hasn't had the surgery. John believes he was born the way he was to try to find a balance within. But as he says, everyone is different and has different challenges...so I would image yours is different."

He merely nodded and looked over at James and Ellen. He then left the room.

"So...how can I get back to where I belong?" Marti asked.

"Well...your Darcy has..."

## **Chapter 13**

"Marti, is it?" Darcy asked hesitantly.

According to John, this woman appeared outside of the circle the group was chanting around before she did and had not recognized any of them. They had coaxed her to the hospice for a checkup, and she had freaked out when she saw herself in the mirror.

Marti's eyes looked reddened. She pushed her glasses back on her face and sat up in her chair, taking the box of tissue Darcy handed to her. They were in the hospice sitting in one of the rooms that had a nice view of the indoor arboretum. The book she was reading was turned face down so Darcy could not read the title.

"John said he explained to you about our believing you came from another dimension."

She nodded.

"Hard to believe?"

"No. Not really," she sniffed. She took a deep breath and pulled out the pad she had under her blanket. Jack and James suggested she be given a pad and pencils to see if she would draw.

"Ah. Our Celine or Marti, draws too," Darcy told her smiling fondly at her memory of the sketches of the horses.

She turned the pages that Marti had offered her. Her breath caught as she drew the lizard and bird people. As Darcy turned the pages she realized Marti drew a diary of the fives adventure. She paused at the picture of Marti in the hospital.

"So...do you go into trance to draw these?"

Marti shook her head. “When I was younger I did. Now, I just open myself and I can see what I’m going to draw.” Marti touched her face. “I...always wondered what I would look like if I had not had my face altered.”

“Why did you have it changed?”

Marti sighed. “I’m a social conscious activist...I work against the corporations that have taken over our lives, giving us no choice but to live their way which shortens our lives and in some cases gives us diseases we must pay exorbitant prices to cure or extend our lives. They had a hit on me when I was in high school because I witnessed something I should not have and made it public in one of my drawings... The Freedom Fighters is my group, and we posted it on the internet.” She gave a small laugh. “Did it rattle those at the top of UCA! It gave Interpol the faces and names they needed, and they’ve been gathering evidence since. The European powers are a few days away from getting rid of corporate UCA through the international courts. Of course, UCA does not indorse them but it does not matter. Anyway, as the whistle blower...I had to take on a whole new identity.” She rubbed her forehead. “The last I remember...Gail and I were headed to Santa Barbara to meet up with some of our Northern Cal members when...we were hit from behind. We thought they were UCA agents. Bloody moon, but I hope Gail’s all right.”

“Well, we’re working on getting you back. My Marti or Celine is where you were. If all goes well...you’ll be returned to your world, and Celine will be back here.”

“You love her,” Marti observed.

“In your dreams,” Darcy snorted. And then nodded. “Very much, Dreaming.”

Marti’s eyes opened wide. “You’re...are you...?”

“TYD. Yeah. Amazing how life is. Don’t you think?”

Marti nodded. “Will...will we meet over there? I mean...does this mean I’ll meet you...or...”

“My counter-part? I believe so. She is the one that is bringing Celine to the spot that we believe will allow us to exchange you.” *Gawds but this better work! Faith, little grasshopper*, she parodied nervously, and then firmly reminded herself that this was mind over matter.

“Well, when does all this happen?” a more animated Marti asked.

Darcy grinned. “In four days. At half-moon. Come on. I’ll introduce you to the others that will be supporting the cross-over. And...maybe you’ll want to get rid of the glasses?”

Marti pushed her glasses back on her nose. She nodded. “John...she or he told me about the surgery I can have.” She looked up at Darcy hopefully. “I’ve never had the time.”

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Doc Ellen looked up from the herb wreathes she and George were weaving together that would surround the circle they were going to use to open further an already existing aperture between dimensions. They were all sure it was the right dimension for the switch of the two Martis. Darcy walked in with the Marti that had appeared near the circle moments after a nervous dog and horses appeared.

Ellen had been on her way to the circle when George, who was quietly riding next to her in their car, suddenly shouted something. It scared the hell out of her. But George was shouting at her to hurry to get them. After it was all sorted out it turned out that George’s consciousness had been in a place that overlapped two dimensions and had seen the lizards attempting to cross over to this side to do harm. He could also see the bird people hovering nearby doing nothing but watch, just like him. Helpless of getting out of the place he was in, all he could do was watch for weeks. When the lizard people were ready to force the aperture, instead of their agent, Darcy and Celine with their companions crossed over and spit off. The bird people’s intervention had caused the split off.

The community gathered around the circle, attempting to do what a revived George suggested had to be done to get them back safely. To everyone’s surprise, the animals came back first. They then concentrated on Celine and what came through was a startled Celine that turned out to not be her at all. Darcy was the next they had found and pulled back.

Darcy was able to figure out what happened and easily talked the others into trying again. They had to wait, though, when the planets and moon were right as well as they had to get Celine to the vortex. Then, there was Marti to consider. John worked with

the traumatized woman, not wanting to rush her into another terrifying experience, regardless of the fact that she needed to return to her reality and Celine was wanted back.

Doc's eyes knowingly studied her, noting the return of color to her cheeks and the fact that her eyes had lost that haunted look. Doc nodded at Darcy and smiled at Marti.

"You're looking a lot better. How do you feel?"

Marti smiled and nodded. "Fine, Doc. How are you doing?"

"Good. Are you ready?"

Marti grinned. "Sure am." She took a deep breath and let it out nervously.

"Marti, this is my husband, George, this is Jack; you've already met James, his twin...this is Ruth...she's going to guide you over. We've got about three to four days to prepare. We don't want the moon's pull to be too strong, so we'll wait for that to evolve and you need to be comfortable with all of this."

Marti nodded and sat in the chair presented to her.

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Marti was looking over the group that she had worked with for four days. Her glasses were gone, though the habit of pushing them up her nose was still there. These people were a strange group, but so were her revolutionary friends. During her time in Last Chance, she learned as much as she could to take back with her. Gail was going to be surprised...if she was still alive. She shook her head to lose that thought. What she learned here was thoughts were real.

Everyone became comfortable and began to meditate before they would start out to the circle.

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The vehicles stopped ten yards from the circle. Everyone quietly piled out and moved in the darkness, letting the half-moon's illumination be their only source of light.

Drumming for mood was started but it did not take long for the vibrations to heighten and the burning herbs to tighten the circle's protection.

Both Marti's stepped into the center, trying to remember not to hold their breaths. A clear image of the desert she knew, Celine held firmly in her minds' eyes as her destination. She then pictured where she was for the benefit of her counter-part.

"Home," Celine muttered.

Nothing.

Celine opened an eye and then another. A dog barked from somewhere in the darkness. "Mandy!" she shouted, remembering too late to find out if this Darcy had a dog.

Celine cocked her head to one side...it was their Mandy! Celine turned to look behind her, and she could barely see a shadow and then a face turned towards her...it was the face she had worn in the alternate reality. She smiled and waved. A wave was returned and then...

Marti turned and hesitantly waved back at the woman whose face she had worn for months. Taking a deep breath, she moved out of the circle, her heart beating rapidly in anticipation of seeing IYD...Darcy... She knew this woman would not have the same face as the Darcy she had met first...but...

She blinked a few times and out of the darkness appeared Gail smiling. Marti laughed because she could see the tears running down her cheeks. Gail was going to be really surprised with her because she did not need glasses anymore. Her eyes moved to the woman that was next to her, whose eyes she recognized.

"Darcy," she whispered. The woman smiled.

"Welcome back, Marti," Gail told her before grabbing her and giving her a big hug.

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Celine laughed with the others and sipped the warm tea, hoping it would stop the cold shivers that were inside of her. Darcy leaned over and kissed her on her forehead, feeling the disconnection Celine was feeling. Mandy would not leave the two women, resting her jaw on Darcy's foot and moving her eyes when Celine moved.

"It is so good to be with you," Celine whispered fervently.



“Gods, but I missed you. Let’s take tomorrow off and decompress in the hot tub,”  
Darcy suggested.

“Sounds good. It isn’t on any vortex, is it?”

Darcy looked at her alarmed and then laughed. “No,” she answered firmly.

THE END