

## Prologue

There's no way to mask the fact that people die in hospitals. It happens with a regularity that a disinfectant can't wash away. Souls enter and leave the world in hospitals with such consistency that it's nothing more than another day for the people working there, or passing by on their daily business.

It's different when it's someone you know. It's not just another death. This time, it's Uncle Carson.

Kalea blew out a sigh as she fanned herself in the stifling room. "Why is it so hot in here?"

No reply. Just the hiss of the air conditioner and Uncle Carson's rattled breathing. The same as the last two hours: a machine that wouldn't cool below eighty degrees, and that awful death rattle. The nurse called Aunt Tabitha and her cousin, Avery, out of the room for a "conversation" five minutes ago, leaving her alone to watch Uncle Carson just in case—of what? Maybe he could still hear, but if his demise was inevitable to everybody else, then surely it was inevitable to him. He was the one stuck in the bed. He was the one hooked to machines. He was the one rattling. She heard a muffled sob escape her aunt in the hallway.

"Geeze!" she leaned over to unlatch the thin, stabilizing rubber mesh wrapped around her left foot and ankle. "It's a hundred degrees outside, and this broken foot is so swollen that it's almost the size of the pumpkins you used to grow. Remember the pumpkins?"

No response. So much for reminiscing over the good times.

Kalea leaned back in the chair, propping her foot on the edge of the bed. "I'm sorry, Uncle Carson. I'm sorry the cure came too late." She raised her water bottle in a mock salute. "Here's to the world's best technological advance in the world's worst timing."

Rattling—from the air conditioner and from Uncle Carson.

Kalea sat the bottle on the table and leaned back in the chair. "This is crap," she pressed her hand over her head where she felt a migraine coming on. Great, one more problem. Her uncle was dying because the nanotech that could have reconnected his neural pathways was put on the medical market too late to help him. She was hobbling around on a broken foot because she couldn't afford the same tech that

could have healed it in a matter of hours. And now her head hurt, and her medication was in her office, forgotten in the “your only uncle is dying” haste of picking up Avery at the airport and rushing here, just to sit and wait. She pressed harder, trying to press out pain, the rattle, her aunt’s sobs in the hallway, the deep murmur of Avery’s voice; all of it.

Kalea groaned as she squinted at the late afternoon summer sun streaming through the window. She reminded herself that whatever chaos reigned in here, the world was going on as normal out there, and she’d be part of it again as soon as they got through this. Tomorrow would come and they would make it through that day, and the next, and every day after that, until they faced this moment themselves.

That was the Chaplain’s logic an hour ago.

“Uncle Carson,” she studied his thin face, “Mom and Dad are on the way. Remember that I told you Mom is teaching the advanced physics class in Tennessee for the fall semester? They’re living in the mountain cabin until the semester is over. She’ll sing in the church choir at Christmas. You always enjoyed hearing her sing.”

More rattling. Kalea fanned her shirt, pulling it away from the sweat. “You like *The Canticle of the Turning*. She’ll do it again this year. She’s probably singing it already for Dad. He laughs about how she sings a Christmas song year round.”

Kalea thought she heard him stir, but couldn’t perceive movement. She looked toward the sunlight shifting through the window. “I can’t sing as like she can, but I remember your favorite verse. It’s the third one, isn’t it?” She closed her eyes and sang.

*“From the halls of power to the fortress tower,*

*Not a stone will be left on stone.*

*Let the king beware, for your justice tears*

*Every tyrant from his throne.*

*The hungry, poor shall weep no more,*

*For the food they can never earn;*

*There are tables spread, every mouth be fed,*

*For the world is about to turn.”*

Kalea relaxed, sinking into the chair. Peace seeped into her—a quietness that told her that everything would be all right. Tomorrow wouldn't come for Uncle Carson, but it would for everybody else.

A hand grabbed Kalea's foot. She jumped, her brown eyes widening to see Uncle Carson sitting up on the bed, grasping her broken foot

“Kalea?”

Kalea tried to pull back her foot, but his grip tightened. She whined.

“Kalea, it's going to be all right.”

“What? “

Carson smiled, his own brown eyes glinting. “We've been chosen.”

Kalea stopped fighting his iron grip on her foot. “For what?”

Carson stared at her with a strange glimmer in his eyes. “You're right. The world is about to turn.”

Kalea resumed her struggle, pulling harder on her foot against Uncle Carson's grip. His fingernails pierced into her skin, causing blood to seep from the small piercings in her skin. A shock went through her as she jerked free from his grip, leaped out of the chair, and dashed out of the door. She ran down the hall to the nurse's station where Aunt Tabitha and Avery had retreated with the nurses, her left foot leaving bloody prints on the linoleum. They stopped as they saw her approach, her long, brown hair flying behind her. Avery hurried to meet her, catching her in his arms. “Kalea, what is it?”

Kalea gasped, staring at Avery. “He's awake.”

Aunt Tabitha turned from the nurse she was talking to. “What did you say?”

“Uncle Carson is awake!”

“That's impossible,” the nurse pushed past them. They followed her to Uncle Carson's room, where they found him sitting up and calmly removing the morphine IV from his arm. He smiled at them.

“Hello everybody. Isn’t it a beautiful evening?”

Aunt Tabitha and Avery rushed to Uncle Carson, engulfing him in a hug.

The nurse pushed her hair out of her face, her shaky arm exposing a phoenix tattoo. “I don’t understand.”

Aunt Tabitha looked up from her embrace, tears dripping down her cheek. “It’s a miracle!”

Kalea sagged against the wall, smearing the blood trickling from foot over the floor. “The world is about to turn.”

## Chapter 1

Kalea rushed in the restaurant, pushing down her hair in a futile attempt to smooth out the damage from the hard hat she had to wear on her last job inspection. There's nothing like mid-August heat in Columbia, South Carolina, to undo hair and makeup. She pulled herself as straight as she could at five feet tall as she approached the greeter. "I'm here to meet Avery Kerner."

The greeter stared at Kalea with wide eyes. "You're Kalea Kerner. You're the 'miracle girl!'"

Kalea took a deep breath, trying to keep her face from getting any redder than it already was from the heat. "I think you have me confused with my Uncle Carson. He's the one that came back from the dead."

"But he healed your broken foot, didn't he?"

"Kalea!" Avery's tall, lanky frame swept past the greeter to hug her. "I'm glad you made it. Our table is back here."

Kalea followed Avery to the back of the restaurant, where he led her to a table next to a window. "Thanks for the save."

"Does that happen a lot?" he stared at her with concern in his brown eyes. Everybody swore the "Kerner kids," as they had been called since they were babies, looked alike. Kalea and Avery's fathers were brothers, and all the children in the family had dark brown hair and eyes. Avery was lucky to have some height to him, at six feet tall. Kalea and Annaliese, Avery's sister, were short. They were lucky to grow up together on the two hundred acre family estate that housed their families just outside of Columbia, but jobs had taken Avery and Annaliese out of state.

"It's better than the doomsday crowds. There was a group of them gathered outside the last school I inspected." Kalea shrugged. "I guess it's better to be the 'miracle girl' than the herald of the end times." She sighed as she laid down her menu. "Actually, it's irritating. I'm not the one that came back from the dead."

"He wasn't dead. And you were the one that limped in the room on a broken foot, and ran out healed two hours later."

“I know. Leave it to me to make a bloody dash down the hall of a hospital in plain view of a security camera.” She had been heralded as one of the youngest business owners in the state of South Carolina at age thirty-six, after taking over the Presidency of Kerner Electrical and Mechanical Engineering from her father, who started the firm when she was five years old and retired the previous spring. It had been her claim to fame until that footage of her mad dash down a hospital hall trumped her professional integrity.

Avery waved it off. “They’ll move on soon.”

“I don’t know. I hear there have been more cases like it in the past week. I was the only one stupid enough to get caught on video.”

“You’re also the only one not talking to the media. What gives?”

Kalea paused as the waiter appeared to take their orders. She smiled as he walked away with their menus, hoping the interruption was enough to change the subject. “When do you go back to Houston?”

Avery stared at her. “Tomorrow and you never answered my question. You haven’t been around since Dad recovered a week ago, and you won’t talk about it. What’s going on with you?”

Kalea took a sip of her water. “I’m busy. I’ve missed a lot of work since Uncle Carson went in the home and I broke my foot last month.” Kalea was helping her Uncle Carson in the house after a doctor’s visit on a rainy afternoon in mid-July, and they both slipped on the porch steps. He hit his head on the wall of the house and suffered a subdural hematoma; while she twisted and broke her foot. “You and Annaliese aren’t here, and Mom and Dad have been at the mountain house in Gatlinburg since Mom agreed to teach summer and fall classes at the University of Tennessee. I’ve been the only one here to help out Aunt Tabitha on a regular basis, which has been difficult with a broken foot.”

“I realize that, and I’m grateful. It’s not fair that you have to play the role of the daughter since Annaliese is too sucked in her own little world up there in D.C. She’s married to a

Congressman, for goodness sakes. It seems she would be able to break away for her dying father, especially since it's been hard for you to get around on that foot that's no longer broken."

Kalea pointed at Avery. "But as you just pointed out, he isn't dying anymore, and my foot isn't broken anymore. Don't be so hard on her. I know she's busy with her psychiatry practice."

"But you're a business owner too, and you made time for Dad."

"I've also known the partners my whole life. We have personal connections. Annaliese moved up there with no connections and had to build everything up herself. I had it easy compared to her." Kalea took another drink of water. She was shocked to find her glass empty already. "Those two school inspections this morning must have dehydrated me more than I realized." She raised her hand to motion for the waiter, who nodded and brought a refill.

Avery's brow scrunched. "I thought you weren't doing inspections until your foot fully healed."

She smiled. "It did heal, remember? Everybody that watches any national news stream knows that."

Avery shrugged. "I thought you might take some more time to make sure you're really healed. Don't bones usually take a while to heal?"

"The orthopedic said six weeks in the splint, and three months after that for the bone to set."

"When did you break it?"

"Three weeks ago."

Avery raised an eyebrow. "There's no way you're completely healed."

Kalea sighed. "It hasn't hurt since Uncle Carson grabbed it. I don't know what happened. My doctor thought it might have been adrenaline."

"That's temporary. It doesn't completely heal something that usually takes months to heal without nanotech."

Kalea shrugged. "It isn't even swollen. I'm not asking why. I'm just glad I don't have to struggle to get around anymore, especially in that splint. They're lightweight, but you still can't wear a shoe with them. That's uncomfortable."

“This isn’t like you.”

“What do you mean?”

“You usually like to understand things. Aren’t you curious as to how a broken bone healed instantly? Are you even sure it’s completely healed?”

Kalea looked down. “The doctor did an X-Ray and didn’t see the break anymore. Yes, I’m surprised. But no, I’m not going to beat it to death with questions. Frankly, I’m ready to move on. You weren’t in the room when he grabbed me. Nobody was, and there were no cameras in there. Nobody has any idea what it was like to have a dying person sit up and grab you.”

“I understand you’re traumatized, but don’t you care that Dad recovered?”

“Traumatized?” Kalea said, indignant. She crossed her arms. “I’ve never been so insulted in my life. Of course, I care! I’m the one that’s had a front row seat to watching him slip away with Alzheimer’s for the past seven years while you were at your fancy job with the Space Exploration Society that your larger than life brother-in-law got for you.”

“All right, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to imply that you don’t care.”

“I know you and Annaliese are busy with your jobs and families and lives, but I am too. We’re all busy professionals, but just because I’m not married doesn’t mean that I don’t have a life. I run a business, I’m a sponsored and assistant coach with the archery team at our old high school, and I’m on the property committee at church.” She pointed her fork at Avery. “In fact, I’m surprised you stayed for a week. Elise must be frantic running after a three and five-year-old. How are Skyler and Susanna?”

“Skyler’s starting kindergarten, and Susanna is in pre-school. The neighbors are helping Elise. Stop trying to distract me. It’s no secret that you’ve been avoiding us. I know work is busy, but school’s out so the archery team isn’t an issue and the church just finished their renovations. What gives?”



“You’re imagining things, that’s what gives. I’m not avoiding anybody. Work really is in peak season right now with school renovations. I talk to Mom and Dad at least twice a week, and Annaliese called me last night.”

Avery raised an eyebrow. “What did she say?”

“She’s the only person outside of the media and doomsday hounds that sincerely asked me how I’m doing. It was nice for somebody to care about me for a change, and not a disease or a story.” Kalea stared at Avery. “You haven’t talked to her?”

“Only for five minutes when Dad woke up. Mom’s talked to her a couple of times since then, but never for long. All she says to us is that her schedule is full and she’s trying to clear it so she can come home.”

They sat in silence for a moment, Kalea munching on her salad and Avery cutting his steak. Finally, Kalea spoke up. “I don’t mean to be dismissive, but this is overwhelming. It’s easier for me to dive into my work than to bat off calls and e-mails looking for another sound bite. I’m embarrassed by that video. I hoped I could ignore it and it would go away, but now I’m not so sure. Have you seen these news stories breaking since they started running that video a couple of days ago?”

“I’ve been too busy getting Dad moved back home and settled in to watch the news.” Avery paused. “He wants to see you. One of the national networks is sending a reporter to interview him for a special on Friday, and we hope you’ll come.”

Kalea raised an eyebrow. “Come, as in to watch him do it?”

“You’ll be interviewed with him.”

Kalea laid her fork down and leaned back in her chair. “So that’s why you wanted to take me out to lunch.”

“The family is asking, Kalea. It’s just one interview. Who knows, maybe talking to them will get everybody off your back. You’ll be able to go back to being an engineer and practicing your archery on our old tree houses. Dad does want to see you. He’s asked about you every day since he woke up.”

“I know, and I meant to go by sooner, but you know how it is.” Kalea sighed. “What time on Friday?”

“They’ll be there at six o’clock to set up. Mom has a cleaning service coming to fix up the place. The interview starts at eight.”

Kalea raised an eyebrow. “It’s going to be a live stream?”

“Of course.”

Kalea took another drink of water and wiped her mouth. “Fine, I’ll do it if it’s the only way to put this to rest. I’m ready for life to get easier and go back to being boring again.”

“Thank you, Kalea, and that’s not the only reason I asked you to lunch. I wanted to see you. I’m concerned about you. You’re my cousin and like another sister to me.” He tilted his head. “You never answered my first question. How are you?”

Kalea crumpled her napkin in her hand. “I’m scared.”

“Why?”

She dropped the napkin and sighed, looking at the sweltering summer day outside the window. “I don’t know.”

## Chapter 2

Annaliese Kerner Boyce twisted a strand of her shoulder length, brown hair around her finger as she watched her father and cousin, Kalea, being interviewed about his “resurrection experience” the previous week. “I guess I should have tried harder to get down there.”

Kieran Boyce hugged her and sat on the couch beside her. “You did the best you could. You run a business specializing in mental health. You can’t drop your patients and run whenever you want to leave town. They need you. I’m sure the family understands.”

“Avery’s mad. He said I have partners that can take over the load and thinks I should have been there when the whole thing happened. And I wanted to be there, Kieran. You don’t know how hard it was to know my father was dying, and I was nearly five hundred miles away.” Her eyes welled up with tears. “I envy the freedom he had to jump on an airplane, without worrying about clients, or secret service, or reporters, or any of that stuff.”

Kieran crossed his arms over his medium built frame, his blue eyes dark. “He has that freedom because of the work my committee did to reorganize the entire United States Space Program into the Space Exploration Society. Otherwise, he’d still be at NOAA in Columbia.”

“I know he’s grateful, but this was our father.”

“He’s still your father,” Kieran pointed to the screen over the fireplace at the streaming webcast. “There he is; alive and well.”

“I should be seeing it from that living room in South Carolina, not a townhouse next to Capitol Hill.”

Kieran frowned, running his hand through his short, dark hair. “Do you regret marrying a politician?”

Annaliese stared at Kieran. “Absolutely not! I’m happy with my life here. It’s been tough knowing that Dad was slipping away and I wasn’t there to help.” She looked down. “Kalea’s done more for him than I have.”

Kieran leaned back, studying the screen. “Kalea looks scared. I don’t think I’ve ever seen her frightened. I always thought that girl could slay a dragon.”

Annaliese laughed as she stared at her cousin’s wide eyes staring into the camera, talking about how Uncle Carson grabbed her foot while she was lying in a chair. “It sounds like it was quite a shock for her.” She broke off as the reporter played back the footage of Kalea running down the hall. He stopped to zoom in and point out dark spots on the floor, asking what they were.

“That’s blood,” Kalea said. “The place where grabbed my foot left a scar.”

“Can we see it?” the anchor asked.

The camera focus dropped as Kalea removed her sandal to reveal four half-moon gashes on the top of her foot. She turned the foot to show the scar of his thumbnail on the bottom of her foot. Annaliese leaned forward, studying the scar.

“Is it infected?” the reporter asked.

The camera pulled back up to focus on Kalea, whose eyes flashed a sliver glint in the camera. “No, it’s fine.”

“It looks infected,” the reporter protested. “Have you had it checked out? Are you sure you’re healed?”

Kalea smiled, but it looked forced. “Yes, I’m fine,” she said, as Uncle Carson leaned over to hug her. “We both are. It’s a miracle. He’s cured, and so am I. I’m thankful to be back on my feet again.” She laughed. “It’s good to be back on my feet, and even better to have my uncle back.”

Uncle Carson leaned over and kissed Kalea on the cheek. “I’m thankful little Kalea and I are both back.”

Annaliese turned to look at Kieran. “Can you get me a flight back home?”

“When?”

“As soon as possible. I’ll take a red-eye if they can get me on one.”

“What’s wrong?” Kieran asked.

“We’ve talked and messaged. She sent me before and after pictures of her foot on Monday, and there was no scar. She hated that miracle talk, too. That doesn’t sound like her.” Annaliese leaned back, shaking her head. “It doesn’t look like her, either. She’s done plenty of local interviews for her work with Uncle Gerald, and she never got camera fright or laughed. She was always professional and pulled together on camera. That’s not the Kalea that I know. Something isn’t right. It’s time that someone who knows what they’re doing talked to both of them about what happened in that hospital room that day.”

Kieran picked up his phone. “Do you want me to come with you?”

Annaliese stared at her cousin’s face on the screen. “No, she needs a doctor, and I intend to do things right this time.”

### Chapter 3

Annaliese scanned the pickup line outside of Columbia Metropolitan Airport, searching for her cousin's car. She checked her watch. Four o'clock on Monday afternoon, right on time. Kieran tried to get Annaliese a flight on Saturday, but the President and Vice-President were traveling over the weekend, so it was easier for her to wait until they returned on Monday to get flight privileges. She fanned herself in the sticky summer air. Kalea may not have seemed like herself on the webcast Friday night, but she still had a bad habit of running late. Then again, Annaliese should have known better than to wear a black pantsuit and two-inch high-heeled sandals on the flight. Congressman's wife or not, southeastern summers are too brutal for formal dress.

Kalea finally pulled up five minutes late in her metallic blue luxury car. Annaliese raised an eyebrow, thinking that her cousin was taking well to her role as a successful business owner, until Kalea stepped out of the car in light blue jeans, a pink shirt, and slip-on walking shoes.

"I'm sorry I'm late," Kalea hugged Annaliese. Annaliese stooped slightly into the hug. She was five feet five inches, but the heels made it awkward. "I just got finished with a school inspection, and they ran late."

"They make you do that in this heat? I'm surprised your foot isn't swollen. You just healed a broken bone."

Kalea held up her left foot. "No pain, no swelling, just a few small scars. I'm fine, Annaliese." She hit the button on her key fob, popping the trunk. "Work doesn't wait or take a break. School starts Monday. We have to make sure it's safe for the kids to walk in the building by the time the first bell rings."

Annaliese stashed her bag in the trunk and ducked in the car, where the air conditioner blew her dark brown, shoulder length curls. She knew the flat iron would be pointless in this humidity, so she left it at home, envying Kalea's long, straight hair hanging obediently down her back in a neat braid.

“Other than the foot, how are you?” she asked as Kalea pulled away from the curb.

“Busy, but I think that will settle down over the next few weeks. I’ve had a lot of catching up to do from the time I missed with the broken foot and helping with Uncle Carson over the past few weeks. They had me home with the foot for a week, and by that time, things were rolling with Uncle Carson. He was in the hospital, had surgery, and then went in the nursing home. They decided to skip the rehab facility since the nursing home had the people and equipment they needed to do it with his dementia. It’s been a whirlwind.”

Annaliese drew a sharp breath. “I’m sorry I didn’t come sooner. I wanted to, and I feel guilty about you having to play my role in this, especially since you were dealing with an injury you got while helping him.”

Kalea waved it off. “I’m right there. Our houses are within a few acres of one another. It didn’t make sense for you to come down here when I can do it. We are family, after all.”

Annaliese stared at the passing scenery. “It’s crazy up in D.C. between my practice and Kieran fighting to fund his projects with the Commerce, Science and Transportation committee. As chair, a lot of the burden falls on him. The President is still threatening to discontinue the Space Exploration Society. Kieran is fighting to keep it alive.”

“What’s the President’s problem with it?” Kalea asked. “Kieran’s committee worked tirelessly to reorganize it into everything the Cabinet required to save the program. Then they developed the nanotech and revolutionized the medical industry. Why would you destroy the entity that brought you humanity’s biggest achievement?”

“It’s ironic,” Annaliese said. “Kieran did everything they asked, the Space Society produced something that’s saving millions of lives, and Congress is still threatening to pull the plug on the Society.”

Kalea snorted. “I thought President Hastings’s tirade would end after the controversy over his comment on wasting resources on empty space.”

“The President’s supporters on cutting the program claim that the funding would be better spent on building up our military. The unrest in the Middle East is building to proportions we haven’t seen since World War II.”

“How will funding our military help? The United States stopped getting involved in national matters five years ago when Communist and the Middle Eastern Sectors started butting heads.”

“That whole side of the world is at war, and it’s spreading. The United States is under pressure from most of Western Europe and Australia to support the cause for democracy.”

“I didn’t know democracy was under attack. I thought it was this battle of theocracy and communism in that region.”

“It isn’t now, but no matter what the outcome is, it’s not favorable for democratic governments,” Annaliese said. “A lot of people believe we’re on the brink of World War III.”

“This is why I don’t watch the news.” Kalea laughed. “Of course, if they cut the Space Exploration Society and an asteroid smacks the planet, all bets are off. Then everybody will be arguing over why we didn’t keep our eyes on the skies.”

Annaliese returned the laugh. “The things that undo us usually hit where we aren’t looking.” She looked down, studying her two-carat diamond ring and gold, diamond studded wedding band. “I try to help Kieran as much as I can. Some of my clients are well-connected, and if I help them personally, then they’re gracious with helping politically. Kieran needs all the support he can get to keep the Space Exploration Society alive. Most of our technological advances have come through it.”

Kalea held up a hand. “You know politics blow up my brain, so you don’t need to explain. I trust that you’re both busy with matters of National importance.”

“Family is more important than anything. I should have been here for Dad. There’s no excuse for that.” Annaliese paused. “I’m a psychiatrist, and I couldn’t help my own father.”



“There’s nothing you could have done. His Alzheimer’s was too advanced by the time the nanotech was released to the public.” She paused. “He’s fine now, so it doesn’t matter.”

“I still should have been here more. You’re stronger than I am. I couldn’t face seeing my father slip away.”

Kalea smiled. “I’m an engineer. I don’t have feelings. I’m all logic and function, remember?”

Annaliese returned the smile. “So are shrinks, but I didn’t pull it off this time. My baby cousin showed me up.”

“I think six months hardly makes me a baby,” Kalea said. “Did Avery give you a hard time? He hasn’t been around a lot either. It’s ironic that he was fussing about you not being here last week, but before Uncle Carson took that bad turn it had been,” she paused, thinking. “Easter. He brought Elise and the twins for a long weekend at Easter.”

“He did nag me, but I passed it off as his emotions getting the better of him. He just turned thirty. He has yet to gain our perspective.”

Kalea smiled. “Give him six more years to grow up, eh?”

“He did make a point. I felt guilty about not being around since Dad fell three weeks ago. He went downhill fast.”

“He had been going downhill before that. Aunt Tabitha was just trying to ignore it and hope it went away.”

“As if that ever worked,” Annaliese grumbled.

“The problem is that it usually grows and smacks you in the face. Or in this case, Uncle Carson’s head and my foot.” Kalea released a short laugh. “But maybe she was onto something, because it did go away.”

“It’s still so strange. There have been a few more cases like that over the past couple of weeks. How is Dad? Had he had a physical to see if the dementia is really gone?”

Kalea shook her head. “They did a scan and full check-up before they released him last week and it was gone. In fact, he’s the picture of health. Uncle Carson is the man you remember again; mostly.”

“What does that mean?”

“He seems different.”

“How?” Annaliese asked.

“I don’t know, its little things. Sometimes he looks at me like he can see right through me, or like he sees something that nobody else can. And he says strange things like he’ll be watching the news and he’ll blurt out ‘what a waste of energy when there are worse things coming.’ Then when you ask what that means, he either passes it off as a joke, or he doesn’t remember saying it.”

“I imagine coming back from the brink of death has shifted his paradigm. Didn’t the nurses say he only had hours left just before he woke up?”

Kalea nodded.

“When you fight the reaper and win, then I imagine a lot of what we worry about seems silly.”

“I suppose so. You can talk to him and decide for yourself.”

“I will,” Annaliese paused again. “I saw your interview Friday night. It was good.”

“I shouldn’t have done that,” Kalea said sharply.

Annaliese stared at Kalea, shocked at the bitterness in her voice. “Why not?”

“I made a fool of myself. I looked as bad as those people proclaiming that we’re living in the end times.”

“No, you didn’t. I thought it was a great interview. But there was a point where you didn’t seem like yourself. It’s when the reporter asked about your scar.”

“I don’t know what came over me or why I said that,” Kalea said, “and I don’t know why that scar flared up right before the interview. It had been faint until that day, and once they turn on the cameras its neon red.”

“Does it hurt?”

“No.”

“Have you had it checked?” Annaliese asked.

“I did this morning. They scanned it again and said it’s cosmetic. They offered me nanotech to fade it, but I said no.”

“Why?”

“It’s expensive, and avoiding a scar isn’t worth it, especially if there’s no medical reason for it,” Kalea said, “and I don’t like the idea of robots doing stuff in my body.”

“You’re one of those types that don’t believe in mixing biology and technology.”

“I don’t believe in doing it indiscriminately, especially for something that isn’t life-threatening. Nanotech is too new and too expensive, especially for something as small as a few pricks in my foot. I thought you of all people would understand that.”

“I do,” Annaliese said.

“The body has a remarkable capacity to heal. Just look at Uncle Carson. He recovered completely without nanotech.” Kalea smiled mischievously. “You can’t let robots perform all the miracles, can you?”

Annaliese stared at Kalea, surprised by the out of place comment. “Do you believe what happened to Dad was a miracle?”

Kalea thought. “I’m not sure what it was, but I’m certain we’ll find out soon enough.” She turned on the gravel driveway mostly hidden from the main road. “Welcome back to The Kerner Complex. Do you want me to take you to my house, your house, or your parent’s house?”

Annaliese thought as Kalea wound through the road leading to the houses spread out on their family land. “Take me home. I’d like to unpack and change into cooler clothes. I’m supposed to go to Mom and Dad’s for dinner. Will you join us?”

Kalea shook her head. “Thanks, but I have to pass. I have some work to do from home tonight. Maybe another time.”

“Maybe,” Annaliese said softly, still staring at Kalea.

“You enjoy some time with them,” Kalea’s eyes sparkled in a shaft of afternoon sunlight streaming through the trees. “I’m sure you’ll be amazed at what you find at home.”

## Chapter 4

Kalea sat in the bay window in Uncle Carson and Aunt Tabitha's kitchen with a glass of red wine, watching storm clouds gather overhead away from the music, chatter, and laughter coming from the den.

"Hiding out?" Annaliese sat next to Kalea.

"Those clouds are charged," Kalea said.

Annaliese wrinkled her brow. "What?"

"All of this heat has the atmosphere electrified. We're going to have a storm soon."

Annaliese sipped her own wine. "You're never off work, are you?"

Kalea turned and stared at Annaliese. "I'm sorry, did you say something?"

"Yes, you need a vacation. That's what I said!" Annaliese poked Kalea. "This is a party. You're supposed to be celebrating!"

"I'm sorry," Kalea finished her wine and sat the glass on the oak kitchen table. "You know I'm not fond of crowds."

"Neither am I, but I suck it up every now and then."

"You have to do it more often than I do."

"That's true," Annaliese finished her own wine and sat her glass next to Kalea's. "I've hardly seen you these past few days. You're working too hard."

"I know," Kalea said. "I'm still freaked out by what happened in that hospital a couple of weeks ago. I can't seem to shake this anxiety that something else is going to happen." She paused, staring at the darkening sky. "How does Uncle Carson seem to you?"

"Remarkably recovered, but you're right. Something's off. I can't put my finger on it." Annaliese turned to the window and followed Kalea's stare. "Well, maybe I can. I asked Dad if I could see his neurological scans from when he was discharged, and he said no."

Kalea stared at Annaliese. "Why?"

“I don’t know. He said he’s fine, and he doesn’t want anybody prodding him anymore. He said he’s had enough of that.”

Kalea turned her stare back outside. “He had nurses and doctors coming and going all the time the past few weeks. I imagine he wants peace and quiet.”

Annaliese shook her head. “He never refused to give me access to his medical files before. This is strange. It seems he’d want me to look at them to confirm everything’s all right.”

“He’s scheduled for a follow-up on Monday, isn’t he?” Kalea asked.

“He is, but he doesn’t want to go. What worries me is that Mom is fine with it. She said he’s had enough, and if he doesn’t want to see any more doctors, that’s his right.”

“It’s his right, but is it wise?”

“My point exactly,” Annaliese said. “Nobody knows what happened. The doctors need to keep an eye on him to figure out what’s happening. We need to make sure he’s alright. We need to make sure—“

“That it isn’t coming undone,” Kalea interrupted.

Annaliese paused. “Yes, that it isn’t coming undone.” She picked the wine bottle up from the counter and refilled her glass. “Do you want another glass?”

“No thanks,” Kalea said. “Do you have any idea how he could have gone from stage seven dementia to completely cured in seconds?”

“Not without nanotech and that doesn’t work beyond stage two of cancer and stage four of dementia,” Annaliese tapped her fingernail on her glass. “I’m glad he’s better. He’s alive for the first time in years, and I couldn’t be more grateful. It’s just that what happened to him is medically impossible.”

Kalea looked at Annaliese. “You don’t believe it’s a miracle like everybody says it is?”

Annaliese sighed. “I’m not counting it out, but I’m not counting it in, either. My gut is telling me something more is going on.” She stared out the window. “There have been other cases.”

“I know. I saw an article before I came over. There are five cases of sudden recovery from stage seven dementia and sixteen cases of it from stage four cancers in the past two weeks.” Kalea paused. “It

started around the time this happened with Uncle Carson.” She stared at Annaliese, tilting her head. “Is that why you came? To figure out what’s happening?”

Annaliese returned the stare. “I came because my father recovered from his deathbed, and I wanted to see him. But yes, I wonder if it fits in with these other cases.”

“It’s been striking me as odd ever since he grabbed my foot and sat up from his deathbed.”

“I know,” Annaliese reached over and patted Kalea on the hand. “I’m sorry that happened to you. I know everybody is saying it’s wonderful that you witnessed a miracle, but I know that was a shock for you. Nobody realizes how traumatic it is to have something like that happen.”

Kalea forced a smile. “Thank you. You’re the first person to realize how startling that was. I wish it had been anybody but me.” She looked away. “I have nightmares about it.”

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s not that I wish he died. I’m glad he didn’t. It was just so unnatural. “

Annaliese lowered her head, trying to force Kalea to meet her stare. “I’m here if you need to talk.”

Kalea looked up. “I know, and I appreciate it.” She stood up and stretched. “Maybe you’re right. Maybe I should take some time off over Labor Day weekend. The summer has flown by with work, Uncle Carson being sick, and the broken foot. Maybe I can go up to Mom and Dad’s mountain cabin. It would be good for me to get away.”

“What’s that?” a voice said from the kitchen door. They turned to see Uncle Carson standing in the doorway, looking puzzled.

Annaliese stood to meet him, taking his arm. “Dad? What’s wrong?”

“I heard voices,” he said.

“Kalea and I were talking.”

“Okay,” he stared at Kalea. “A storm’s coming.”

“I know,” Kalea said. “It looks like a bad one. Do you want me to get the generator?”

“Generator?” he asked.

“It’s all right,” Annaliese stood and guided him toward the den. “Come on, Dad, you’re missing your party. Let’s go back in here with your friends.”

Thunder clapped. The lights flickered, and then went out. Kalea hit a button on her phone to activate the flashlight. “I’ll go in the basement to flip the fuse box and fire up the generator.”

“Dad, go back in the den with Mom. I’ll help her,” Annaliese followed Kalea down the staircase to the basement. She was amazed at how fast Kalea got down there, but then again she did have a head start. Kalea flipped open the fuse box and touched the main switch. A blue spark touched her finger, causing her to yelp. Annaliese rushed to Kalea’s side.

“Are you all right?” Annaliese asked.

Kalea stared around, her brown eyes wide with shock. “What happened?”

“You got shocked flipping the switch. I don’t know how that happened.”

Kalea stood up and walked back to the fuse box, flipping the switch off and then back on again. A hum filled the room as the power flowed back through the house.

“Hmm,” Kalea studied the box for a moment, and then closed the door to the fuse box. “I guess it needed a reset.”

“Are you sure you’re all right? That shock should have knocked you out!” Annaliese said.

Kalea waved it off. “I’m fine. I work with electricity all the time and have been shocked worse than that. Come on, we need to get back to the party.” They mounted the stairs and returned to the den, where the party was back in full swing. Aunt Tabitha hugged Kalea.

“Thanks for hooking up the generator, sweetheart. I’m amazed you got it done so fast!”

Kalea stared at Aunt Tabitha. “It was just a blown fuse. I rebooted it. The power’s back on.”

Aunt Tabitha laughed. “That’s impossible,” she said, pointing to the screen over the fireplace showing the newscast where a red warning ran across the bottom of the screen. “They say the power is out in the entire city and will be for the rest of the night.”

Annaliese stared at the red warning scrolling across the screen. “How is that possible?”

Kalea looked up, first at Annaliese, and then at Uncle Carson, who stared at her in confusion. "I don't know."



## Chapter 5

“Welcome back!” Jenna Monroe, the short, perky receptionist chirped as Annaliese walked in the door. “How was your trip?”

“It was good to see the family again. That trip was long overdue,” she flipped through the mail in her inbox.

“How’s your father?”

Annaliese stopped and stared at the receptionist, who was staring at her intently with wide eyes. “He’s fine,” she rubbed her head. “They were right. He recovered. He gets confused every now and then, but I believe that’s normal for somebody in his situation.”

“To the brink and back, eh?”

Annaliese stared at Jenna, who flushed red and looked away. “I’m sorry. That was a ridiculous thing to say.”

Annaliese dropped her mail, which was advertisements and fliers for upcoming conferences, in the trash can. “No, it wasn’t. It’s strange. I’m glad he’s all right, but there’s something about the whole thing that seems off.”

“You aren’t the only one that feels that way,” Jenna tapped at her computer. “You got a ton of messages while you were out.”

Annaliese raised an eyebrow. “I didn’t see any when I checked my messages from home.”

“They weren’t your clients. They were other people, and they all came through my desk.” She tapped a key. “I just forwarded them to you.” She nodded to a young woman sitting in the reception area, beyond the closed glass partition. “That lady is also here to see you. Her name is Sidney Sinclair. She drove up from Raleigh to speak with you. I hope you don’t mind that I told her to come in. You don’t have any routine appointments until ten o’clock, and she said she’s in town for a conference that starts at noon.”

Annaliese studied the woman sitting on the couch. Straight, chin length brown hair framed her oval face. She was fidgeting with a gold cross necklace and staring out the large window in the reception area with wide, green eyes. “Has she filled out the preliminary paperwork?”

“It’s in the system.”

“Give me a minute to get settled in. I’ll call when I’m ready for her.”

“Right, boss,” Jenna said as Annaliese walked to her office in the back corner of the building.

“What are these messages about?” Annaliese mumbled as she put her computer in her desk workstation and booted it up. She opened the vertical blinds to her back wall, which was a window overlooking the downtown D.C. area. Sunlight flooded across her desk as the messages popped up. Annaliese scrolled through them, studying the summary statements from other doctors she knew through her professional association asking about her findings with her father and cousin on her trip. She doubted they were asking from any concern, and her experiences hadn’t shed any light on the recent “resurrections and miracle healings,” as the media called them. More likely, they just wanted gossip. She snorted. “Nosy Nellies,” she mumbled, disconnecting the computer from the workstation and activating her notepad app in Sidney’s file. She called Jenna and asked that Sidney be sent back. Jenna escorted the nervous woman in a moment later.

Annaliese rolled her chair in front of the couch across from the window. “Mrs. Sinclair, my name is Annaliese Kerner Boyce. How can I help you this morning?” She realized as soon as she said it that she didn’t read Sidney’s preliminary file.

Sidney shook Annaliese’s hand weakly and took a seat on the couch, huddling in the corner. “Thanks for seeing me on short notice. I know you were out of town last week and hated to crash in on you like this. I thought you would be the best person to help me.”

“I appreciate that. I know there are many fine doctors in Raleigh, so what brings you to D.C.?”

Sidney fiddled with the necklace again. "It was the media reports regarding your father and cousin. My situation is unique."

"Who's your doctor back home?"

"Olivia Werner."

Annaliese nodded. "I went to school with her." She leaned back in her chair. "You said your situation is unique. How so?"

Sidney looked in her lap. "I'm one of those miracle cases that they're referring to. My father-in-law was dying of cancer three weeks ago. It's like your cousin's situation. The nurse called the family outside and I stayed in the room with him." She rubbed her neck. "I had an asthma attack while I was sitting by his bed. I was reaching in my purse for my rescue inhaler when he sat up and grabbed my neck."

"What did you do?"

"I screamed and tried to pull it away, but he grabbed it tighter. You can see a scar where he grabbed me," she held up her head to show Annaliese red scars on her neck. Annaliese leaned forward and studied the half-moon nail streaks in her neck that were nearly identical to the scars on Kalea's foot.

"Have the scars been there since he grabbed you?"

"No, that's the strange thing. They showed up a week later. My doctor looked at it, but said it was cosmetic and it would fade."

"Have you had any asthma attacks since this incident?"

"No," Sidney said. "I'd had it my whole life until he grabbed me. I quit taking my regular medication a few days later." She paused, looking out of the window. "I know nanotech could cure it, but my husband and I couldn't afford it."

Annaliese nodded. "Just like Kalea. Her foot completely healed."

Sidney scrunched her eyebrows. "I saw the interview. It's the same thing that happened to me."

Annaliese shook her head. "I'm sorry; I didn't mean to say that out loud. Let's get back on topic. What brings you here?"

“Two things. The first is that I wanted to warn you. My father-in-law is dying, again. His cancer came back. He’s stage three.” She swiped a tear from her eye. “I don’t know if you’ve been keeping up with the news reports, but that started happening with the cancer ‘miracles’ a week after they came back. The tumors grew back. Most of them are at stage three already.”

Annaliese paled. “I didn’t keep up with the news reports while I was out. I’ll check into it.”

“They say he doesn’t qualify for nanotech because it’s considered a relapse of the original condition, so they can’t do it. There’s nothing that can be done for my father-in-law. He’s terminal, and I don’t know if there’s enough miracle to go around twice. I wanted you to know. I told your assistant, but she said she felt I needed to tell you this myself.”

Annaliese tapped notes in her computer. “What was the other thing that brought you here?”

“It’s about me,” she pointed to Annaliese’s left foot. “Does your foot hurt when you get up in the morning, and when you get up after sitting for a while?”

Annaliese thought. “Actually, it does. How do you know?”

“You have plantar fascia. I can see the tear in your ligament. You might want to get out of those high-heeled shoes before you make it worse.”

Annaliese stared at Sidney. “You can see the tear inside of my foot?”

Sidney nodded. “Your receptionist is getting an ear infection, too. I told her to call her doctor. I hope she does.”

Annaliese gaped. “You can see inside our bodies and know something is wrong?”

Sidney nodded.

“How is that possible?”

Sidney shrugged. “I don’t know. It started last week. I’m a medical technician, so I work with a lot of sick people, files, and scans. Now I don’t need the machines. I can see the bones and

muscles and tendons and ligaments. It's like I'm a walking scanning machine. I see inside you and what's right—or wrong." She rubbed her eyes. "Am I going crazy, Dr. Boyce?"

Annaliese leaned back in the chair, thinking.

About her father's sudden confusion.

About Kalea restoring the electricity in an entire house by touching the fuse.

About the scars.

About the messages.

She sighed. "No, Sidney, you aren't crazy. I think we're dealing with something new."

Sidney leaned forward. "What is it?"

Annaliese leaned back. "I don't know."

## Chapter 6

Kalea sat in a chair on the stage of the high school auditorium, surveying the area with Darren Henson, the school principal a stern, graying man with a perpetual scowl.

“It needs something more,” he grumped.

Kalea took a deep breath, reminding herself that the school district brought several million dollars to the company every year, so telling him to jump in the lake would be detrimental not only to her career, but her financial well-being as well. Plus, she was here for an interview with a major magazine about the project. This would eventually get national coverage, and anything that took the focus off her bloody hospital dash was a good thing.

“You have the most state of the art theater in the region. Relax, they’ll love it. They wouldn’t be coming if they weren’t impressed.” Kalea swiped her brow and shifted in her stuffy gray and pink pantsuit. She wasn’t used to dressing formally, and it was still too hot for this in mid-September.

“I wish they would have come this spring when we had a production, and when we’ve had more time to tweak it.”

“Mr. Henson, I can’t tweak it anymore. I’ve given you all the power that the grid can give you. It passed inspection. It’s fine.” She paused. “They might come back to cover that spring production if this goes well.”

He grunted and checked his smartwatch as the first students trickled into the auditorium. Since there wasn’t a production ready to showcase the renovated theater, they arranged to have the interview filmed onstage with the student body as the audience. Kalea was nervous about that aspect of it. She was used to speaking to small groups, and even on camera regarding larger projects, but the concept of questions from strangers that knew little or nothing about the finer points of engineering made her stomach flip. This wasn’t stuff you could “dummy down” to an audience. When it comes to technical engineering concepts, you get it or you don’t. No amount of explaining changes it.

Mr. Henson glanced at Kalea. "You'll do fine."

Kalea smiled weakly. "Is it that obvious that I'm nervous?"

"Yes, but it's all right. You get used to this." He cracked a rare smile. "Besides, you've done a nationally broadcast interview. This should be a piece of cake."

Kalea grunted away the cliché as the volume of murmuring voices grew with more students filling in the auditorium. She fanned herself with her computer, which held a memo with her talking points and notes. "Maybe I should get our mechanical engineer to see about adjusting the HVAC system in here. These lights get hot."

"I already asked. He said he's done all he can," Mr. Henson said. "We'll have to sweat it out."

"I'm getting used to that," Kalea mumbled as the magazine interviewer, a tall, thin woman with short, dark hair and striking blue eyes, breezed on the stage. Kalea and Mr. Henson shook her hand.

"Kalea, so glad to meet you!" she bubbled, shaking Kalea's hand so vigorously that Kalea's black cameo earrings swung. "I'm Anna Eddings. It's a pleasure to meet you and cover what other miracles you're capable of in Modern Design Magazine!"

Kalea blushed. "I'm glad for the coverage, both for the firm and for the school." She gestured to Mr. Henson. "This is Darren Hensen, the school principal."

Anna shook Mr. Hensen's hand and they took their seats. "Thanks for letting me record the interview with the equipment in here. I understand this is the first time cameras on wires have been used in an indoor facility that wasn't specialized for sporting events."

"Just in the state of South Carolina," Kalea said, "and it did require a radical redesign of this entire quadrant of the school. The hope is that it will give better quality recordings by capturing a number of angles that haven't been available at the high school level before. The first official use will be the Christmas program, but the big thing will be the school's production of Annie Get Your Gun in April. Today's interview will be the first live test on all the equipment, and how well it airs on public access stations."

Anna raised an eyebrow. "We'll have a television audience too?"

“No, it’s being recorded for playback on the local access webcast,” Mr. Henson said. “Obviously, we’ll do some editing and production work to clean it up before releasing for wider distribution. We want to show the public the best work we can do.”

“Of course,” Anna said, straightening her skirt as she settled in the chair. “Let’s go over my plan for today’s interview. I’d like to start with the camera system and how Kalea took arena camera systems to a theatrical venue. Then I’d like to move on to the wireless control of lighting and stage effects systems. After that, I’ll move on to Mr. Henson’s vision for how this applies to theater productions, and an open conversation on how this has the potential to revolutionize theater design in the future.”

“I’m not sure about revolutionizing design,” Kalea said. “More work needs to be done before it goes large-scale.”

Anna laughed. “You’re so modest! Kalea, I’m here to show how you’ve revolutionized design for live action productions.”

Kalea flushed and reached down to scratch her foot. Suddenly, it was itching.

“We’re ready to go in two minutes!” the head of the stage crew, a blonde teen with glasses, said.

Mr. Henson nodded. “Time to rock and roll.”

Kalea rolled her eyes. Was he going to ruin the interview with these stupid Earth clichés?

What? She thought. She shook off the unbidden thought and adjusted the microphone headset while Anna gathered her notes and the cameraman flashed his fingers showing the final countdown to recording.

Anna smiled brightly and stared into the center camera. “Good morning South Carolina, and welcome to Modern Design Magazine Chat Hour. I’m your host, Anna Eddings. Today, we’re talking to Kalea Kerner and Darren Henson regarding the revolutionary upgrades they made to the Forestbrook High School auditorium in Columbia, South Carolina.” Anna turned to Kalea. “Miss Kerner, I’d like to open with talking about the camera system you designed for this



space. It implements stadium style cameras on revolving wires similar to the camera systems that are used in sporting arenas. How difficult was it to take a design for outdoor use into a limited space like this?"

Kalea took a sip of water and leaned forward. "The design wasn't difficult with the system they already had in place." She gestured to Mr. Hensen. "We always start with asking Principal Hensen and the leaders on the drama team what their vision is for the auditorium. They're the ones that use it regularly, so it has to be a system that they can operate and can run off the power available to the school without taking from other areas. Principal Hensen told me the primary goal was to be able to get better recordings of productions for broadcast on local access websites, streaming video reproductions, and acting samples for students that need it for a portfolio to colleges where they plan to study theater in the future. Our goal is to design a system that --"

"Is all the better to see you with," a voice said from the audience. Everybody turned to stare at the voice coming from a stocky, red-headed man in the center of the auditorium. He stood and pushed his way to the aisle. "That's what we really wanted, isn't it? We wanted people to see us better; to get more public recognition for the school; to show everybody how wonderful we are."

"Who is that kid?" Kalea squinted in the lights to focus on the person approaching the stage. She noticed that his right hand was in his pocket and he was fiddling with something.

"That's not a kid," Mr. Hensen said, "that's Dale Zeigler. He's the drama coach."

"He's kind of young for a drama coach, isn't he?" Anna asked.

Mr. Hensen shrugged. "He's been here for three years." He pointed to Dale. "Mr. Zeigler, did you have a question for me or Miss Kerner?"

Dale laughed, his body shuddering. "I certainly do. The question is, was all of this worth selling your soul?"

Mr. Hensen's eyes narrowed. "I beg your pardon?"

"All this technology! All of this money you spent to show everybody that we're the best school in the state. All of these reasons why you couldn't afford to give hardworking teachers and staff members a decent raise this year."

Mr. Hensen stood and pointed at Darren. “Mr. Zeigler, that’s enough. I’m sorry you don’t agree with these changes, but we have to take a long-term approach to improving the school. You know salaries come from a different budget. This year, the school board decided to upgrade facilities. I assure you that it will lead to better compensation for employees and staff in the future. You have to be patient.”

“Be patient!” Dale laughed. “I have to be patient. I have to be patient while my bank account is empty. I have to be patient while I struggle to put food on the table for my kids. I have to be patient while the bank threatens to foreclose on my house. I have to be patient while my wife has an affair with an architect that flatters her with a lifestyle I can only dream of.”

Kalea’s eyes narrowed. “I work with many architects in the area. This isn’t an appropriate time or place for this discussion.”

Dale stared at Kalea with hard, green eyes. “Of course, it isn’t. It never is, but it doesn’t matter. Nothing does anymore.”

Kalea leaned back in her chair. So much for not making a fool of herself again.

“Where’s the resource officer?” Mr. Hensen’s eyes darted around the auditorium. “This man needs to be escorted off the property. He’s threatening the safety of the children.”

“The resource officer is indisposed, just like all of you will be soon,” Dale pulled a gun out of his pocket and fired a shot into the ceiling. Screams filled the room as students ducked on the floor. Dale jumped on the stage, directly in front of Kalea.

“Don’t believe the lies they tell you!” he fired a bullet directly into one of the revolving cameras, causing it to shatter on the floor in the front row. “They say it’s for the greater good? No, it’s to build the right reputations and feed the right egos.” He waved the gun toward Kalea and Mr. Hensen. “These two will get rich while we rot at their bidding! There’s nothing in any of this for us. They don’t care about us. All they care about is keeping us under their feet so they can step on us on their way to the top. Well, no more!” He turned, pointing the gun, a chrome .380, in Kalea’s face. “Say good-bye to all your fame and fortune.”

Kalea's hand shot up and grabbed the muzzle of the gun, which sparked at her touch. Dale screamed as an electric current ran up his arm, driving him to his knees. Kalea stood up slowly, her eyes boring into Dale. "This vessel is broken. It must be purged." Her eyes glowed silver as she bent to touch a red scar on Dale's hand.

"No!" he screamed, grabbing Kalea's ankle. A blue spark shot through him, knocking him off the stage and onto the front row floor. Kalea collapsed into her chair, breathing heavily. She gulped and pulled herself up straight in the chair, looking at the audience staring at her in terror.

"What happened?" she asked, and passed out.

## Chapter 7

“You don’t remember anything?” the doctor shined a light in Kalea’s right eye.

“No,” Kalea said. “I’m fine. Can I go home?”

“Absolutely not. You sent enough electricity through Mr. Zeigler to kill a horse. That both of you are still living, breathing, walking, and talking means something isn’t right. We need to find out what happened.”

“Maybe it was the microphone.”

“Maybe it was magic or another one of these mystery miracles” the doctor picked up his computer. “The preliminary results on your scans say you’re fine. In fact, you’re better than fine.” He tapped the screen. “Your broken foot healed instantaneously, even though it should have taken another three to four months for it to be like it is now without nanotech. All of your allergies are gone, and that scar from the collapsed lung when you had pneumonia as a toddler has vanished.”

Kalea whistled. “I hadn’t noticed.”

The doctor raised an eyebrow. “You hadn’t noticed that your allergies aren’t bothering you at the peak of weed pollen season, or that a scar disappeared?”

Kalea shrugged. “I guess I’ve been busy. But how would I know the scar is gone? It’s on my back and I live alone.”

The doctor laid down his computer. “I’d swear you’d had nanotech, but the scans confirm that you don’t. Have you had any other incidents conducting electricity?”

Kalea thought about the fuse box at her Aunt and Uncle’s house two weeks ago. “No, not like that.”

“Have you been exposed to radiation lately?”

“No, why do you ask?”

“That scars on your foot have a faint radiation signature emitting from them.”

Kalea’s eyes widened. “How is that possible?”

The doctor shrugged. “Heck if I know. That’s why I asked you. Is that where you uncle grabbed you last month, and you got the scar a week later?”

Kalea nodded.

“Has the scar faded since it showed up?”

Kalea looked at her ankle. “No, but I saw my regular doctor right after it showed up, and she said it’s cosmetic. She didn’t say anything about radiation.”

“She probably didn’t do a detailed enough scan to pick it up,” the doctor picked up his computer and pecked at it. “Its low level and not a threat to your overall well-being, so I’m not acting on it now. I’m sending this to your primary care physician and want you to follow-up on it in a week. If it doesn’t go away on its own, you may need medication to treat you for possible poisoning.”

“Poisoning?”

The doctor peered at her. “Like I said, it’s not a big deal now, but it needs to be monitored. Think about where you might have come in contact with radiation.”

“Could it have happened here when my uncle almost died?”

“It shouldn’t have, but I’ll find out what equipment they had on him.” The doctor paused. “How is he? I saw him a couple of times while he was here in July and August.”

“I haven’t seen him in a couple of weeks,” Kalea said as her smartwatch buzzed. She glanced at it. “That’s my cousin from D.C. Am I free to take the call?”

The doctor waved her off. “I’ve done all I can. I’ll get your discharge orders.” He walked out of the room as Kalea hit the answer button. Annaliese didn’t wait for a proper greeting.

“Kalea, I’ve had the strangest day. I think something weird is going on.”

Kalea sighed, sinking into her chair. “Tell me about it.”

## Chapter 8

*Kalea breathed in the cool, fall air as she held up her bow, lining up a shot against the oak tree with the remains of the old tree house. It had recently rained, leaving behind a fresh, earthy smell in the foliage surrounding her. The sky glistened a deep, sapphire blue that you only see during the best days of fall. She loosed the arrow, the arrow slicing through the humid air and hitting dead center of the target. An excellent shot! Granddaddy would be proud to see her continuing with something they both loved. She was glad she didn't get too rusty while she was down with the broken foot. The archery team has a good chance at the state championship this year.*

*She held her face up, letting the sunlight streaming through the trees warm her face. Raindrops clinging to the leaves above glistened in the light, producing a shimmer in the woods like she had never seen before. Amazing, it was so bright out here, so alive. Even in the silence of the woods, it seemed like the Earth hummed with life.*

*Kalea inhaled deeply and looked around. The silence was unusual. Normally, the chatter of birds and the scampering of ground critters accompanied her late afternoon and early evening target practice sessions. Her stomach tightened at the absence of sound. This kind of quiet was one that she usually only heard in the winter, when things were in hibernation, but not even a breeze stirred the trees around her. And come to think of it, it was unseasonably cool for mid-September. She was lining up another shot when a tremor ran through her, causing her to drop her bow. She leaned against a tree and checked her vital signs on her watch. Her eyes widened at the readings. Her pulse rate spiked and her blood pressure was 160/100. That was extremely high for her. She usually had low blood pressure. She took several deep breaths, trying to lower her heart rate. This wasn't right. She was calmly lining up her shots. What caused the tremor, and the racing heartbeat?*

*A few deep breaths settled her pounding heart, but the tightness in her stomach had moved up to her chest, and her head throbbed along with the blood pumping through her veins. No, not another migraine! She hadn't had one since --*

*Kalea suddenly felt uncomfortable and exposed, despite the familiar tree canopy above her. She picked up her bow, retrieved her quarrels, and started hiking back toward the house. She slowed even more as she approached a clearing and the sunlight rose to an unnatural high for so late in the day. The glare of the raindrops glistening on the trees blinded her. She stopped, shading her eyes and wondering if she should go off path to escape this assault of light.*

*She didn't have time. The light rose, surrounding her. She yelled unable to move, but it was pointless as the sound was swallowed by an invisible presence surrounding her. She couldn't even raise a normal speaking voice, and nobody could hear her because the light swallowed up everything around her.*

*"Gather the selected ones," a voice whispered in her left ear.*

*"What?" she muttered.*

*"Some were chosen that aren't worthy. A relapse will purge them. You are to lead the ones that are strong enough to survive."*

*"Survive what?" Kalea asked.*

*"What comes next," the voice whispered as the light receded and released her from its grip.*

Kalea screamed, bolting upright in bed. She looked around, wiping her eyes. It was full dark and her clock read midnight. Was it a dream? How did she get here? Kalea clearly remembered changing into her shorts and T-shirt, setting up her targets, several good shots, the light -- and now she was here. She didn't remember coming home, showering, doing her evening reading, or going to bed. She jumped again as she realized that her cell phone ringing was what woke her up. She jerked it off her bedside table, knocking over her compound bow leaning against it.

Why is my bow there? I usually hang it in the garage.

The phone rang again, causing her to jolt one more time.

“Hello?”

“Kalea, it’s Aunt Tabitha. I’m sorry, did I wake you? I don’t know what time you go to bed on Fridays.”

“No, I’m okay,” she said, swiping her nose. She was surprised to find a small streak of blood on her hand. “What’s up?”

“It’s your uncle. He fell again. He’s on the way to the hospital.”

Kalea swung her legs over the bed. She gripped the bedside table with her free hand as her head spun from the sudden movement. “What happened?”

Aunt Tabitha choked back a sob. “He hasn’t been himself the past couple of weeks. I think he’s relapsed.”

The tightness returned to Kalea’s stomach.

“I didn’t want to say anything because I wasn’t sure, but his symptoms have been returning, just like the cancer patients they talked about on the news. You know most of those people died in the past week?”

Kalea sat a moment, trying to process her aunt’s sudden change of subject. Then again, that was like Aunt Tabitha. She struggled to keep a train of thought when she was stressed, and would often babble about unrelated nonsense. She’d seen plenty of that in the past few weeks, and wasn’t pleased to see it again. Kalea swallowed past the lump in her throat. “I thought Uncle Carson was better.”

“So did I, sweetheart,” Aunt Tabitha said.

“Are you at the hospital?”

“Yes. We’re in the same room as before.”

“I’ll be right there. Have you called Annaliese and Avery?”

“Annaliese is coming in the morning, and Avery is trying to get things arranged. Something happened at his work. They got something, picked up something, I don’t know. Something to do with satellite transmissions he needs to research. He’s trying to see if he can



come here and do his work remotely.” Aunt Tabitha paused. “I hate for you to come after all you went through earlier this week with that crazy man ruining your interview, and you’ve been too uncomfortable to leave home and work with the footage being played everywhere. Why don’t you stay home? I can call you and let you know what happens.”

“I need to be there. I need to figure out what’s going on.”

“We all do, sweetheart.”

## Chapter 9

“He’s relapsed to Stage Five dementia,” the nurse said. Kalea remembered the nurse. She was the one with the phoenix tattoo on her arm that witnessed the miracle of his recovery, and now she was telling them that it was coming undone.

“How is that possible?” Aunt Tabitha dabbed at her eyes with a tissue.

The nurse shrugged. “The doctor will be in later to talk to you about that. We won’t be able to give you many answers because Mr. Carson refused to come in for his weekly check-ins after his recovery. It would have been better to track this if we could have monitored his brain activity through those scans.””

“The neural damage was gone when you ran the scans a few hours after he woke up,” Aunt Tabitha said.

“Again, it would be easier to give you answers if he came in for his weekly checkups like he was supposed to.” The nurse tilted her head and stared at Tabitha. “Why didn’t you bring him in? Surely, you knew his recovery wasn’t typical, especially after the media coverage from other cases.”

“He didn’t want to do it, and I didn’t want to make him. He had been poked and prodded and scanned so much over the past few years that I thought it was enough, and just wanted to give him a normal life.” Aunt Tabitha looked at the floor. “I had my husband back fully and completely, for the first time in nearly seven years. I wanted for us to have our life together back.”

“We thought he was better,” Kalea said softly.

The nurse nodded sympathetically. “He was, but he isn’t anymore.” She paused, laying the computer back on the workstation. “There’s nothing more I can tell you now. I called Mr. Carson’s doctor. There’s been word of other similar cases across the country, and he’s trying to get data from them to help. He should be in tonight. In the meantime, he suggested that you make arrangements for Mr. Carson to transfer back to nursing care once he’s released from here.”

“Nursing care!” Aunt Tabitha shouted. “But he’s fine. He’s recovered.”

Kalea put her hand over Aunt Tabitha’s. “I’m sorry Aunt Tabitha, but you heard her. He isn’t recovered. Not anymore.”

Aunt Tabitha stood and walked away, sobbing. Kalea leaned back in her chair, crossing her arms. “I knew he missed that first scan, but I didn’t know he missed all of them.” She blew out a long sigh. “What do you think? Is this a relapse, or something else?”

The nurse threw up her hands. “I don’t know. Everything is crazy with his case. I really wish he had come in for those scans. It would have taken less than fifteen minutes.”

Kalea rubbed her head. “Now what do we do?”

The nurse shrugged. “Wait and see.”

## Chapter 10

“Psychiatric care!” Annaliese snapped at the doctor, a middle age man with blonde hair and blue eyes. “He’s not crazy!”

Dr. Raymond Mercer rubbed his weary eyes. It was eleven o’clock Friday evening and he had been poring over scans, studies, messages, and notes for nearly thirteen hours. “I’m not saying he’s crazy, Dr. Boyce, and you know that. This is a highly unusual case, and after studying the material and speaking to the people at the nursing facility, we feel that a psychiatric institution is better suited to attend to your father’s needs. They have the resources and equipment Mr. Carson needs to study his case properly.”

Annaliese leaned back, crossing her legs. “You’ll drug him into a coma until the dementia kills him. That’s all they do for senior citizens.”

“That’s not true,” Dr. Mercer said. “If anything, they’re in a position to get better information and treatment options than a nursing home would.” He looked at Annaliese sympathetically. “We all want the best for your father and your entire family. In fact,” he tapped his computer. “I’d also like to suggest that your cousin, Kalea, be under psychiatric care. As an outpatient, of course.”

Annaliese stared at the doctor coldly. “What’s she done?”

“She was in here less than a week ago after sending enough electricity through a young man to short-circuit a city. He’s still in a coma, and she has no memory of it. That experience, combined with her miraculous healing after your father recovered five weeks ago -- we’re interested in her.”

Annaliese laughed. “Kalea has always been the most interesting of all of us, but that hardly warrants psychiatric care. She has a big personality.” She leaned back and crossed her arms. “I saw the footage of her interview, and there was a lot of electricity in that room. She showed me the blueprints of the work she did. That guy was shooting up equipment all over the room, too. It’s possible he did something that caused that to happen.”

Dr. Mercer spread his hands. "I'm not dismissing any possibilities. We noticed that both she and your father healed, but she's going one way, and he's going the other."

"I fail to see the correlation between their conditions," Annaliese said darkly.

"We aren't certain that there is one," he said, "but did she tell you that all of her physical ailments disappeared after your father recovered? Not just her foot. Her allergies, her migraines, a scar from surgery as a child, and even some scar tissue from tendinitis that she had in her right wrist three years ago is gone."

"She didn't mention that."

"Similar things are happening in the other cases where there was a 'miracle recovery.' The person that came back from the brink of death is dying again, and the person that witnessed it is in peak health and doing unusual things." He raised an eyebrow. "I hear one of them drove to D.C. from Raleigh to speak with you on a similar case last week. Don't tell me you didn't know about this. It's all over the news."

Annaliese uncrossed her arms. "My client files are as confidential as yours."

"I'm not asking you to share anything that would be an ethical violation." He spread his hands. "I offered general information on your cousin that I probably shouldn't have. Can't you tell me something about this case that literally came to your door?"

Annaliese stared at the doctor. "I'm not sharing anything with you at all because it's too soon to make anything out of it." She paused, listening to the clock over the doctor's desk tick. "Are any of these others under psychiatric care?"

Dr. Mercer bristled. "Some are; some aren't."

Annaliese fiddled with her diamond necklace. "Mom and Kalea have to give the final word on this."

"Your mother isn't keen on having your father put in a psychiatric institution. I was hoping you could talk to her about the benefits of round the clock care in a facility that specializes in mental health issues, especially since dementia is a completely neurological issue." He leaned back. "They do have

geriatric units, and there's one relatively close to the estate where you live," he checked his computer. "Creekside Care."

Annaliese nodded. "I did my doctoral work there. It's a good place." She sighed, dropping her necklace. "I volunteer to serve as the primary psychiatrist."

He stared at Annaliese. "For your father or Kalea?"

"Both of them."

"Is that wise, considering your relationship with them? I thought you preferred to have a 'disinterested third party' to oversee psychiatric care."

"We do, but this seems to be organic in nature. There's no mood disorder, psychological trauma, or abuse in these cases. Besides, it would take somebody else too long to catch up on their cases. I've known both of them my whole life, so there's no better historical knowledge on the patients than firsthand experience. I'll oversee and consult on their care." She paused. "It's probably the only way they'll agree to it. I'll stay here as long as I can, and do the rest remotely."

Dr. Mercer shrugged and snapped his computer closed. "I don't like it. I suppose it will be all right as long as you have on-site doctors working with you."

Annaliese stared at him coldly again. "It has to be."

