

F o u r

After the rally, Prime Settlement's Solaray lamp was shut off and the evening's parties began. Freedom Square was alive with jubilant dancing, feasting, and singing. Remy was escorted to a large conference room which overlooked Freedom Square from a hundred meters above the celebration below. At the quiet, respectful dinner laid out for Lindy, the heads of the military, incoming and outgoing Council members, and the religious leaders, Remy was given the seal of the Highest Order of the Almighty. Remy accepted the ring graciously as it was set on her left ring finger by the highest priest of the Temple. Lindy actively spoke for Remy as she held Remy's right hand. Sullen and wishing to be with the people below instead of listening to Council members drone on about the workings of Prime Settlement, Remy sat cross-legged in her tall-backed chair and glared down the long table to its foot, where a general fidgeted under her caustic gaze.

Daniel stood attentively behind Remy's chair, hands behind his back. Remy glanced up at him several times through the meal, to see if his somber expression changed at all; it didn't. When dessert service had ended, Lindy explained Remy's upcoming schedule to all present. Remy needed military training, so she would be joining the recent group of militia recruits to learn basic combat during the morning hours. In the afternoons, Remy would sit with the Council and watch them mete justice in the name of the Almighty One. "When do I see the computer network?"

Talk at the table stopped. Lindy crushed Remy's fingers a moment, then released Remy's hand. "I'm sorry. You wish to see our computer network?"

"I am only here because of it; had they not disarmed the nanotechnology, I would have been dead before I left Dome 827. I wish to personally thank the man who broke through the last passcode just as the last of the nanorobotics armed itself."

One of the incoming Council members raised his hand meekly. "I could show her around the Intelligence Department, Lindy. It would be an honor to find the worker who was instrumental in saving our Messiah from the Dome."

"A tour." Lindy frowned at the man.

"Sounds excellent," Remy said, taking a sip of water. She set her cup down, pleased. "I wish to inspect the Intelligence Department."

Lindy entered the information into her portable. With bitter sarcasm, Lindy asked, "Are there any other little tours people wish to take the Messiah on?"

Volunteers raised their hands, offering to show Remy their areas of expertise: the advanced medical floor, the artisans' corridor, the hydroponic rooms (dubbed Prime Farm), the processing plants, and the military complex. Annoyed, Lindy added items to Remy's schedule.

Daniel cleared his throat. "If I may, Lindy?"

Lindy rolled her hand. "Oh, please. Do go ahead. I'm sure I can wedge one more thing into the Messiah's now overbooked schedule."

"I wish the Messiah come to my mother's home, to see how her faithful live. She is aware of those in my family who sacrificed themselves for Prime Settlement; I humbly petition to show her the reason why." Daniel bowed respectfully to Lindy.

Lindy's impatience melted away. She smiled. "That is the best suggestion I have heard all evening, Daniel. Tell your mother to expect guests tomorrow, but do not tell her it is the Messiah." Lindy leaned back in her chair. "I will attend as well."

The dinner ended soon after, and Lindy walked Remy to her apartment door. Daniel stood close by. Lindy kissed Remy's cheek then left, promising to have Remy's schedule ready by the dinner at Daniel's home in Prime Settlement.

Daniel strode into the apartment after Remy. After retreating behind the tapestry to the privacy of her room, Remy removed her uniform, hung it up, then took a shower. She changed into black tie-waist pants and a kimono sleeve top then exited to the main room. Daniel reclined on the padded bench, a forearm over his eyes. He sat up, startled, then groaned in pathetic defeat as pillows spilled from the bench. As Remy walked onto the ledge before her window, Daniel picked up the pillows and set them onto the seat again. She sat and watched the undaunted revelry, placing the fingertips of her right hand to the plexiresin. Her gaze shifted from the world outside to the ring on her finger. Dropping her hands into her lap, she spun it slowly. Daniel sat beside Remy, looking out over the festivities. "You want to be down there, too, don't you?"

"My fiancée, Essi, wanted to go, but that was before I was made your private guard. I had hoped you wouldn't need me right now, but I know I must be here. She understands and chose not to go without me."

"You're free to go, then."

"I cannot. Until another of your guards finds favor in your eyes, then I belong at your side, as the Almighty One commanded.

Remy stood and walked past Daniel, sliding the tapestry dividing her private room from the rest of the room. Leaving the dividing curtain open, Remy entered her private room. She emerged moments later wearing shoes. Her hair was pulled back under a black kerchief. "Take me below, please."

"But Lindy said —"

“Drek what Lindy said! Which of us is the Messiah – her or me? Now take me down to where everyone else is, Daniel.”

“I have to go change out of my uniform.” Daniel hopped up, exuberant. “You’ll really like Essi.”

“I’m sure I will. Now hurry up before she gives up on you.”

Daniel left for a short time then returned, still wearing his uniform. He carried a satchel with his clothes and a surprise for Remy: a flouncy white women’s blouse with hand-embroidered flowers along the collar and a tan skirt. “I thought you might not want people to know you were the Messiah.”

“Is it that obvious?”

“Black is the color of death and mourning. It is the Destroyer’s color.”

Remy took the clothes from Daniel, changed in her room, and walked out. The long tendrils of her hair had been pulled back with an elastic. She waggled her fingers. “Thought I shouldn’t wear the rings, either.”

Daniel stood before Remy in a light green kimono shirt and tan drawstring pants. He slipped on a pair of sandals, hopping on one foot then the other. They walked to the door, sharing a conspiratorial smile. Looking down the hallway, they saw no one. They crept together to the elevator, pushed its call button, and ran in when the elevator door opened. Daniel selected the floor where the elevator was to stop. The doors closed and they laughed as the elevator descended. “I thought I was going to be stuck up there sitting in that apartment for the rest of my life, Messiah!”

“Are you kidding? You get to come with me to every boring tour each Council member is taking me on. Hydroponic farms? Ugh! I don’t need to see where my food comes from, only that it arrives.”

“It’s more interesting than you think,” protested Daniel. “It’s what my family does to contribute to the community. When I’ve fulfilled my military service, I’ll marry Essi and we’ll move into my family home. I become the patriarch and take care of my younger sister and my mother.” He leaned in confidentially. “Essi and I plan to have a dozen children.”

“A dozen? I’m not sure I could even handle one!” Remy’s smile turned to empty wretched sadness again. She turned her face away, not wanting him to see her tears.

Daniel put an arm around her. “Messiah? Messiah?” When Remy didn’t reply, he begged, “Please don’t cry, Messiah.”

She wiped her tears away. “I’m sorry. It hasn’t been that long since I lost the baby. I really loved her father, Daniel.”

Daniel startled. “*His* father. You lost Alan’s brave son to the cause.”

“I’m sorry. His father.”

The doors opened onto a walkway. Remy stepped forward and looked over the railing; below was the large foyer with the doors to the processional causeway. Daniel pulled Remy back, whispering, "There are a few guards below, but they're not paying attention. Follow me; I'll take you out through one of the neighborhoods."

Daniel sneaked along the walkway with Remy in tow. He entered a passcode into a keypad on a curved wall. A door slid away to reveal an access tube. Along the back of the tube, a ladder stretched upward as far as she could see. Down, it was only twenty feet of climbing. Daniel hopped onto the ladder and slid down partway before resting his foot on a rung. He reached his hand out to help her, but Remy jumped and caught the ladder, her feet planted firmly on a rung. The door slid shut behind them and caged bulbs along the access tube illuminated. Daniel slipped his foot from the run and slid the twenty feet to the bottom. He waited at the bottom for Remy; she climbed down quickly, pausing when Daniel grabbed her waist. "I can do it, Daniel." He released Remy and she climbed the rest of the way to the floor.

Daniel slapped a raised button. The access tube door slid open to reveal a long hallway with doors on either side. Between the doors were planter boxes; grow lights were installed along the walls above them to nourish the plants growing within. "Is this your neighborhood?"

"Essi's," Daniel replied, walking briskly down the hallway. "Don't move; I'll see if she's still at home."

He turned a corner and Remy paced in a circle, anxious. Swinging her arms, Remy walked to a planter box and leaned over it to see what was being grown. "Greetings, neighbor. Newly married in?"

Remy turned, surprised. An older woman dressed in black stood before Remy. "Visiting," she said, bowing her head, worried her vivid irises would give her away. "A friend of mine is picking up his fiancée."

"Going to the festival?"

Remy nodded. "I'm quite looking forward to it." She looked up at the woman in black. "Why aren't you going?"

"My son and his son were both killed in service to Prime Settlement."

"I'm so sorry," Remy said, taking the woman's hands. Their eyes met; the woman started to weep.

"Messiah," the woman whispered. "Beloved Messiah."

"I'll think on your loss. What was your son's name?"

"Alan, Messiah. You honor me coming to mourn with us." The woman in black kissed Remy's hands.

"Nell," Remy whispered. "I, um," she stammered. "Alan was my first friend in

HumSan and barely left my side when we worked together in the kitchen. Alan was always kind to me, and he longed for me to meet you and his siblings.” Remy stepped forward and hugged Nell. “I am sorry we meet under such sad circumstances. Carl was so unhappy on the trip over; he wanted to bring you Alan’s and the baby’s ashes.”

Nell nodded, sniffing. “Carl is a fine husband and always was an excellent father; he should have retired early, but he wished to go with Alan to assure his safety for me. Alan was our youngest, and now . . .”

“Nell, Carl saved my life several times. If it weren’t for him, there would have been no festival today.” Remy stepped back and smiled at Nell. “Your husband is a hero of Prime Settlement and will be accorded every honor I can give him for it.”

Nell sobbed harder, thanking Remy and kissing Remy’s hands before wrapping her arms around Remy. Daniel and Essi turned the corner; Daniel’s eyes went wide in surprise and terror; Essi ran to the two women. “Nell,” Essi said, reaching the older woman. She rubbed Nell’s shoulder. “Is it Alan again?”

Nell stepped back, laughing as she wiped her eyes. “Hello, Daniel; hello, Esther. I’m not sad this time, I’m happy. I have heard wonderful news.”

Essi patted Nell’s shoulder. “Danny wants to go to the festival; if you wish, I will come by tomorrow.”

Nell squeezed Essi’s hand. “Carl will be home from the Temple tonight; he shall be pleased to see you again, Esther – you have grown so much since he last saw you.”

“Welcome to the neighborhood,” Essi said, shaking Remy’s hand before pulling Daniel down the hallway toward Freedom Square. “Come on, Danny. Your soldier friend is waiting for us!”

Nell glanced from Daniel to Remy; Remy put her index finger to her lips and smiled. Daniel was pulled around the corner trying to explain where the soldier they were waiting for was. “Alan’s trade was metalsmithing. He had just completed your wedding bands before he returned to retrieve you.” Nell sniffled. “Come to our home when you are able, and Carl and I shall show you the set; it was Alan’s best work.” Nell kissed Remy’s cheek as Daniel pulled Essi back around the corner. “Love motivated him, so how could it not be?” Nell dug into her apron pockets and pulled out a handful of ornate rings and bracelets, pressing them into Remy’s hands. “Take them. He would have wanted you to have them.”

“I can’t take these from you.” Remy looked at Nell, distressed.

“You’ll need something for barter, and they are yours.”

Daniel pulled Essi back to Remy. “Are you ready?”

“Yes, Daniel.” Remy pocketed the jewelry. “I’m ready.”

Daniel eyed Nell, worried. “My mother will come by soon,” he said, anxious.

“You and this fine soldier of Prime Settlement enjoy yourselves. We live in great and glorious times.” Nell laughed, clapping her hands together. “Praise Him!”

Essi frowned, and she hissed, “You said we were bringing a soldier who recently transferred to Prime Settlement!”

“She is.” Daniel strode with Essi under his arm; Remy walked next to him. As they entered Freedom Square, Remy knelt at the first wide lawn and swept her hands across the cool grass. Daniel stopped Essi as Remy took in her surroundings. Colored lights were strung from tree to tree and along the sides of the tall processional structure. Tents were set up all around; the people under the tents traded food, drink, and hand-crafted items. Essi tried to tug Daniel into the crowd, but he waited with Remy. “Come on, Danny! Everyone’s dancing at the beer garden already!”

“I have to wait, Essi.”

“I’m coming, I’m coming.” Remy followed at a quick jog as Essi pulled Daniel through the crowd. Remy nearly lost them twice in areas of heavy foot traffic. After the second time, Daniel slapped his hand around Remy’s hand and clamped down, pulling Remy from her feet as the three ran through the crowd. When the three arrived at the wooden-floored beer garden, Essi and Daniel’s friends eyed Remy curiously. Daniel quickly threw Remy’s arm down and greeted his friends, tucking Essi under his arm and kissing her cheek. Remy followed Daniel and Essi up onto the raised platform. Daniel stepped over the long bench and straddled it; Essi sat in front of him and leaned back against Daniel. Remy walked around them and stepped over the bench to sit at the end nearest the balustrade. Remy turned her head to watch the dancers on the knoll as the band played a merry tune. A woman approached the table with a tray of beer mugs. Remy dug through her pocket and lifted a handful of rings; the waitress picked one and set a liter mug in front of Remy. The others along the table traded items for their own drinks.

Daniel and Essi chatted quietly and kissed; Remy looked away, across Freedom Square. The song ended, and another lively song began. Daniel laughed. “Essi, it’s our favorite!” He helped Essi up and pulled her to the dancing on a nearby grass knoll to whirl and twirl with other happy couples. Remy took a sip from her tankard. The drink had a heavy bread-like quality; it was nothing like the watery drink served in the Dome. Draining the first liter; Remy waved down the server and traded a bracelet for three liters, sliding the two to where Daniel and Essi had been sitting. Remy had drunk half of the second when the tipsiness hit her. Remy watched Daniel and Essi dance, smiling at their delight. Two of Essi’s and Daniel’s friends – a boy and a girl – plopped down across from Remy. They were red-faced and panting from dancing. The girl bartered for beer, and the boy leaned forward to Remy. “What’s going on

between you and Dan?”

Remy set her mug down and leaned forward, smiling. “What do you mean?”

“Dan and Essi have been engaged since she was born, and now he shows up here holding your hand, too?”

“Only because your friend Essi is quite the runner. Daniel grabbed my hand to keep me with him – I mean, them.”

The girl elbowed the boy hard then reached up to take two liters from the woman. He winced, rolled his eyes, then leaned forward to Remy. “I don’t think you understood me. Leave them alone. I don’t know how things are out in the colonies, but in Prime Settlement, there’s a way things are done. You’re too old for him anyway.”

“You think that he and I . . . ?” Remy laughed loudly; people looked over. “No, no. We just work together, that’s all.” Remy wiped at her eyes. “Oh, that’s funny. Daniel and me.” Remy’s jovial demeanor changed instantly. She grabbed the boy’s collar, yanked him across the table to her, and glared into his terrified eyes; his girlfriend was paralyzed in fear. “You listen to me, you self-absorbed little bastard. You ever threaten a soldier of Prime Settlement again, and I will come down on you so hard, you will wish you had never been born. Daniel is a soldier first, as I am. We serve Prime Settlement so you can dance and drink with your friends in peace, paying with blood to keep Enforcement from pouring down here to slaughter the lot of you.” Remy shoved him back; the bench rocked as he fell back onto it. “Do you know where the military complex is, son?”

“Y-yes,” he said, shaking.

“Good. You have just been recruited to serve the Almighty One’s Messiah as her entry guard, once you’ve been trained. Let’s see how your fiancée handles you being gone days on end.”

The boy took his girlfriend’s hand, and they ran from the table into the night. Remy smirked as she drank. Daniel and Essi returned, both rosy-cheeked. Daniel frowned. “Where is everyone?”

Remy waved a hand toward the mugs. “I bought you something to drink.”

Essi frowned, arms crossed over her chest. “Hannah and Aaron left their drinks untouched. She did something.”

Daniel sat on the bench and leaned forward to Remy; his voice was filled with anxious worry as he asked, “Where is Aaron?”

Leaning over her mug, Remy said, “Aaron has been recruited to serve his Messiah as her door guard.” Remy turned her head, tears flowing down her face. “Now you and Essi can have your life together with your dozen children and your farm.”

“No,” Daniel whispered, desperate. “I need to serve Prime Settlement.”

Essi looked from Daniel to Remy, confused. “Who is she? Is she a general?”

Daniel leaned back and whispered in Essi’s ear. “What?” Essi’s shriek stopped the dancing; even the music paused. People looked over, and Remy hid her face in her cup, drinking from the mug. As the music and dancing started again, Essi crouched between Daniel and Remy. “What were you thinking bringing her here?” she whispered. “Danny, you could be really badly punished. We’d never be able to get married, then!”

Remy turned toward Daniel, straddling the bench as she leaned toward Essi. She poked Essi’s nose accidentally as she pointed at her. “You, little girl, need to trust that man more. I wanted to come down here, and Dan is sworn to protect me; it’s the only reason he grabbed my hand. If you hadn’t tried to lose me in the shopping area, we wouldn’t have had this little misunderstanding.”

Daniel frowned at Essi. “Is that what you were doing?”

In despair, Essi said, “I’m sorry Danny. It’s just, well, Rianna lost her fiancé to some girl he met in an outlying settlement. I just, I just don’t want to lose you!”

Daniel opened his arms to Essi, and she sat on the bench before him, facing Remy. He lopped his arms over Essi’s shoulders. “Essi, you have to understand that even when we’re married, if she calls me to service, I will go willingly. If she wishes me to take fire so that her personal guard can move in to a zone she wishes to control, I will do it willingly. I would die knowing the Almighty One has chosen that for my purpose – not only as a soldier of the Almighty’s militia but as a Freedomer. You, too, must be ready to take up arms and die for her if the Almighty calls you.” Daniel kissed Essi; Remy bowed her head until Daniel spoke again. “Though I would hope that the Almighty chooses us to serve his Messiah in Prime Settlement, so we can get married soon and live our lives as your mother and father were able.” Daniel looked up at Remy. “But I humbly petition not before I have honorably served the Messiah.”

“Remember to name one of the dozen after my mother, Maria,” Remy said, tipsy.

Daniel bowed his head, shaking it. “I think I need to take her back, Essi. I don’t think she’s used to what we drink here.”

“I’m going to stay,” Essi said, leaning back against Daniel. “I won’t tell. I swear.”

“That reminds me. Please let my mother know you and I are coming to dinner tomorrow night and tell her that I’m bringing two guests with me.”

“Two guests? Who?”

“Lindy and her.” Daniel helped Remy up from the bench. Remy stumbled as she tried to maneuver around the seating. Daniel helped Remy over by holding her arm to steady her then released her.

“Her?” Essi’s eyes widened. In a strained whisper, Essi told Daniel, “Sarah will be at her wits’ end trying to prepare a suitable feast, Danny!”

“Which is why you’re not telling her who I’m bringing. Those are Lindy’s orders to me, Essi. If you tell my mother who is coming, Lindy will probably send me to the same outlying settlement that Rianna’s ex-fiancé ended up.”

“I won’t say, then. I love you, Danny.”

“I love you, too, Essi.”

Daniel bent to kiss Essi goodbye; Remy averted her eyes. When Daniel tugged Remy from her feet, she shook his hand from hers and strolled next to him as they walked toward the closest ingress. “I’m going to retire you from service when Aaron’s ready so you can start your life with Essi, now.”

“That would dishonor my family,” Daniel said, taking Remy to the closest elevator. He slid his identification card through it; the elevator doors opened. He helped Remy into the elevator then entered. When the doors closed, Daniel turned to Remy. “I would rather die than shame my brothers’ and father’s memories. Before Messiah Ami left, my father Samuel was her second on her personal strike team. He stood between her and many bullets; I remember the scars. I have been chosen to guard the Almighty One’s new Messiah. He has granted my family His favor twice, and I will not turn from the Almighty’s plan for me.”

Remy nodded slowly then squinted up at Daniel. “What the drek do you people put in your beer?”

Daniel laughed. As the elevator door opened, they crossed to a disused hallway and entered the elevator which went directly to Remy’s apartment. When they reached the hallway, Remy tripped over the threshold between the elevator and the hallway. He escorted Remy in, and she pulled him to her room. “Messiah, I don’t think –”

“Don’t order the lights on, Daniel. I just want to watch the colors,” Remy said, crawling up to the head of the bed and onto the window ledge. She tailor-sat and observed the celebration below. “Jack would have loved this.”

After an uncomfortable silence, Daniel asked. “Don’t you mean Alan?”

Remy slouched forward. “I mean Jack. I was never going to marry Alan.” She turned, reaching a hand to Daniel. He approached Remy, uncertain, and took her hand. “If Damian hadn’t killed our baby and Ami hadn’t lied so Carl would think my daughter was Alan’s –”

“This isn’t how it is written.” Daniel yanked his hand from Remy. “The Almighty One’s word is infallible!”

Remy stood and turned, walking onto the bed. She looked down at Daniel. “I was there, Daniel! Ami, not Cain, tried to kill me!”

“You said the Betrayer’s true name,” Daniel murmured, fearful.

“Cain! Cain! Cain! Cain! Cain! I could say it until I went hoarse, and he would

still think I was dead, just like everyone else up there thinks I am!” Remy stalked to the edge of the bed; she grabbed Daniel’s face with one hand as she steadied herself on his shoulder with the other. “I lost my friends, I lost my family, and I lost the only man I ever truly loved. He thinks I’m dead. They all do.”

Daniel pried Remy’s hand from his face. Remy crawled up her bed to the window ledge. Bringing her feet around, she sat cross-legged and watched Prime Settlement in silence. Daniel opened his mouth to speak then retreated from the dark room.

In the morning, Remy began her life as the leader of the Freedomer army being screamed at by a drill instructor. Lindy stood next to him, reassuring him regularly that the Almighty One did indeed wish the Messiah to be cleansed of the evil than had softened her mind. Daniel joined the recruits’ calisthenics happily, though as far from Remy as he could get. When Lindy questioned Daniel, he hung his head and took her verbal assault. “Protecting the Messiah as her private guard means being present to stop a bullet. Your father understood that when he served Messiah Ami, and he was successful many times over. You cannot get between a bullet and your Messiah if you’re across the room, can you, Daniel?” Lindy slapped Daniel hard across the face, leaving a rosy hand print on his cheek. “Can you, Daniel!” She slapped him a second time. After a mumbled assent, Lindy stalked to the drill instructor, seething as Daniel reluctantly stood next to Remy.

The afternoon went as miserably when Remy was taken to the Prime Settlement Intelligence Department. When she arrived at the technical center, Remy’s hope fell. It was backwards at best; lines of dumb terminals along the walls had Freedomers hunting and pecking on keyboards and talking over headsets. Remy had hoped to finally meet Tem and thank him for the years of help he had given her. Irate, Remy turned to Lindy. “Bring the field computer technician called Jeremy to me; Carl knows who he is. I told him he would not be forgotten, and I want him here and honored. He will stay with me in my apartments as my technology adviser. I also want a data connection to the system with all of the blocks required for an eight-line neural interface.”

The Councilman startled. “Neural interface?”

Remy closed her eyes, incensed. “Then get me the research and necessary nanorobotics from the Universities! I want at least one person here to have a brainframe connection before we begin the strikes.”

Unnerved, the group of data entry and dispatch operators glanced at one another, not ready to volunteer. Remy’s Council guide cleared his throat and wrung his hands. “Everyone here serves limited terms before returning to work. But for a few, it is a temporary civil service position, the same as the Council.”

Remy covered her eyes, impatient. “Then get Jeremy to obtain any information he

can on developing neural interface technology for Prime Settlement before he returns. I will take care of who gets the surgery and who does not.” Uncovering her eyes, Remy put her finger to the Councilman’s nose. “And if I say it’s you, then you will go to the medical floor and have it done.”

Lindy stepped forward; she rested her hand on Remy’s lower back. “Well, it seems you have much to do, Councilman. Please assemble the appropriate technicians who would be capable of completing these tasks for the Messiah.”

Lindy walked Remy to her apartment, Daniel trailing behind them. After speaking with Lindy about honoring Carl publicly, Remy said, “I hope you don’t mind that I’m taking this initiative, Lindy. Having powerful connections from here into Central Computer for the purpose of infiltrating both Enforcement and University systems would be advantageous when planning strikes and assaults.”

“Are you going to attack Universities?”

“That’s where they’re slaughtering denizens in an attempt to exterminate us, so yes. Besides, I want Enforcement to be surprised when First Dome is overrun and cut off from the rest of the Domes. If they expect attacks only at University Domes, they cannot prepare for the day when first Dome is conquered. We will hold it hostage until the Dome world either gives up on it or concedes to our will.”

“Tell me,” said Lindy, looping her arm around Remy’s, “who were you looking for when we went to the Intelligence Department?”

Remy stared forward. “We both know who, Lindy.”

“Tell me; if you could bring the rest down, would you?”

Remy flinched; futile hope sent a single painful reverberation through her. Taking a deep breath, Remy replied, “She protects them as if they were her own children, therefore it is not an option to bring them to Prime Settlement. They defend certain parts of the UnderDome, which will make it difficult to choose targets without reconnaissance. Therefore we must create our own.”

“Not many people would volunteer for the technology to be implanted.”

“The computer technician named Jeremy already has – at Dome 827. His wish shall be granted to him.”

Lindy stopped before Remy’s door; she handed Remy a portable and kissed Remy’s cheek. Glancing toward Daniel, Lindy said, “Your schedule is complete for the next three months. Once you have endured the rigors of military training, you will attend classes in military strategy and operation. Just because Ami was naturally gifted at moving troops doesn’t mean you are.” Lindy glanced toward Daniel again then smiled to Remy. “I shall see you both at dinner; I have an announcement for Daniel’s family.” Lindy kissed Remy’s hands and exited to the elevator. Remy entered the apartment

and waited at the doorway for Daniel; he stood outside, at attention. “Fine. You just stand there, Dan. See how long it takes me to have you dishonorably discharged from my service.” Remy stalked to the back hallway. The tapestry in her way, Remy yanked it aside, shoving it against the wall. It slid back along its curtain rod to cover the door halfway, and Remy frowned, annoyed.

Pulling a dining chair to the hallway, Remy found that the bar could be lifted out easily. Remy slid the tapestry from the bar and folded it carefully, carrying it to the linen storage. She dropped the bar at the bottom of the closet after setting the folded tapestry on a shelf.

Remy retreated to her room. An hour later, Daniel entered. “Messiah?”

“In here?”

Daniel walked through her bedroom to her private baths, where she was resting in a tub of hot water. Daniel startled and looked away, shielding his eyes. “It’s time. To, uh, to go.”

Remy stood. “I hope Lindy will announce you can go back to farming. I tell you the truth in a moment of weakness, and you lose faith. What kind of zealot are you?”

“We are supposed to be writing the history of our time, Messiah. The history in the Book says one thing, yet you have told me another.”

Remy pushed past Daniel to get out of the bathroom and into her room. Remy dressed as she lectured him. “The history in the Book is meant to inspire people, not to be a perfect retelling. The basic truths are the same: my baby was killed by a citizen of the Dome. Putting Alan’s name there instead of some UnderDome denizen makes it part of your story. People knew Alan; Carl’s and Nell’s loss not only of a soldier son but an innocent grandson impassions people to fight for them, to avenge their loss – which is a loss many people down here know personally. Why the baby’s sex had to be changed, I don’t understand, but I’m sure it has some sort of meaning.”

“So, you’re saying the Book may be changed to serve the will of the Almighty One, even if we, as men, fail Him?”

Fully dressed, Remy slid her feet into her shoes. “You lost control of your sidearm, and I was ready to kill the Council with it. Do you think that will be written exactly as it happened?” Remy curled her arm around Daniel’s so her hand rested on his forearm. She smiled as he kept his eyes covered. “I’m dressed, Dan. You can look now.”

He peeked then relaxed. “I do not understand the immodesty the Dome has burdened you with. Nudity leads to desire; desire leads to sexual intercourse; sexual intercourse creates life.”

Irritated at the unintended jab, Remy dropped his arm and stalked to the main entry. “Thank you very much for the refresher course in human biology, Dan. That’s

why they invented birth control.”

The journey to Daniel’s family home was silent. Neither Daniel nor Remy would look at the other. Lindy was already in the home, and she greeted them as Sarah ran from the kitchen to see who else was coming to dinner. Daniel stood stiffly at the entry as Remy walked into the home. A middle-aged blond-haired, blue-eyed woman, Sarah came around the corner from the kitchen. “Danny, the prophet Lindy is going to be at our dinner, too, so your guests will need to . . .” Sarah covered her mouth, stunned, then dropped to her knees; Essi and Daniel’s siblings knelt before Remy in deference. “My home is not worthy of your presence, Messiah. My food is not fine enough for your body. I am ashamed that I cannot show you the honor you deserve, Messiah.”

Lindy bent and spoke in Sarah’s ear: “The Messiah is here to see how our people live every day, not just when we celebrate.”

“Please rise,” Remy said, reaching to Sarah. “I’m not here as your Messiah, I’m here only as a soldier of the militia of Prime Settlement.”

Sarah took Remy’s hand and pulled herself up with Remy’s help. Everyone stood. Daniel moved to Essi’s side and put his arm around her. He spoke softly to Essi. Her eyes went wide, and she tugged him from the central room into a side room. Relieved to see Daniel go, Remy relaxed.

Daniel’s brother, James, was as wiry as Daniel was burly yet shared Daniel’s coloration. Ruth, nicknamed Ruthie, was Daniel’s twelve-year-old sister. She had straight red hair which fell to her waist. When Remy complimented it, Ruth said, “Benji thinks it’s very fine.”

“Benji?”

“Benjamin is Ruthie’s fiancé, Messiah.” Sarah leaned close. “James’s fiancée died in an accident when she was very young, so we hope he will go into the military and follow his brothers into honor. Right now, he helps his uncles in Prime Farm.”

“I hope to join your strike force, Messiah,” James said, glancing nervously at his mother. “To honor my father and brothers in the service of the Almighty One.”

Remy smiled and reached her hand to him. “I think something can be done, James.” After Remy shook James’s hand, Sarah draped her arms around James and kissed his cheek. “Shall we be seated then?”

Dinner started without Daniel and Essi; Sarah served the meal then sat at the head of the table. Lindy sat next to Sarah, Remy sat next to Lindy, and Ruth sat on the other side of Remy. James sat across from Lindy next to his mother. Lindy led the prayer over the meal in Remy’s stead. Daniel emerged with Essi and they sat at the table. “Sarah, everything looks spectacular.” Essi turned to Remy. “Messiah, you

honor Daniel's family so very, very much, and Daniel thanks you for it." She tittered nervously. "He's, um, speechless right now because of it."

Remy nodded dismissively then turned to James. "When are you able to join basic militia training, James?"

"I am sixteen, Messiah, old enough to go if it is your will."

Daniel glanced from Remy to James as Essi pulled him to the table. "What is happening?"

"James shall join you in the field with the Messiah," Sarah said, delighted. "Is this not excellent news?"

"Daniel, your life begins when your brother is done with his training," Remy said, staring Daniel down. "James is—"

"Meant for a special purpose," Lindy said, smirking. "One the Almighty has shown me in a vision." As Lindy gripped Remy's hand, she held Sarah's hand gently. "Oh, the Almighty One knows the pain of your sacrifice, Sarah. Last night, as I prayed, His will was made clear to me." Lindy nodded toward Essi and Daniel. "Esther stood with Daniel, a basket in her hands. What a harvest was upon it! As Daniel reached for it, all spilled out. Daniel tried to refill the basket with its lost contents. His efforts went to waste; it was as if the basket had a hole in it. I knelt before Esther to help her, and found the basket was holding its fill again. When I looked up, I saw it was not Daniel but James who had restored the basket's bounty. I looked around, startled. Where was Daniel?"

Sarah's voice trembled; tears filled her eyes as she leaned close to Lindy and gripped Lindy's hand. "W-where was my Daniel, Lindy?"

Lindy squeezed Sarah's hand. "Daniel was standing at the side of the Lifebringer, in the Almighty One's realm, all in white. The Almighty One's voice spoke, then: 'So shall it be in this world and the next.'"

The room was silent. Remy eyed the table, unnerved by the reaction to Lindy's parable. Sarah covered her mouth; Daniel stood, affronted. "This cannot be! It must have been James that you saw, not me!"

"My Daniel?" Sarah wept.

"And Esther's sacrifice will not go unrewarded. She shall have James."

Essi's eyes went wide. "James is my age!" Essi shouted, offended.

Daniel leaned over the table. "Dismiss me, Messiah. I wish dishonor over this."

Sarah stood, crossed the room, and slapped Daniel across the face. "You have been granted the greatest gift the Almighty One could bestow on any man, and you beg to turn from it?" Sarah trembled. "You cannot turn from it, Daniel. You know the Law. You are now the Messiah's Chosen."

“Chosen?” Remy said, stunned. “As in—”

“Chosen husband, Messiah.” Ruth ate, smiling. Remy stood slowly as the table erupted in arguments around her. She stepped over the bench and crossed the room; the squabbling stopped as Remy walked from Sarah’s home. The door closed behind her. A few paces down the hallway, between two planter boxes, Remy slid down the wall to a squat and leaned forward. Her eyes narrowed in thought as she set her clasped hands gently to her mouth. Thumbs tapping her bottom lip as she frowned, Remy puzzled through the predicament.

The door opened and Daniel was bodily ejected from the home. He stumbled out before he caught his balance. Daniel turned in a circle, spotted Remy, and strode toward her. Remy put her hand up. “I did not know that was about to happen, Dan.”

“How could you not? You’re the Almighty’s right hand!”

Remy glared in Daniel’s direction. “I’m His hand, Daniel, not his drekking mouth! If you have problems with this revelation, it’s all Lindy’s connection to the Almighty One, little man.”

“Little man?” Daniel pointed at Remy. “I am the age of majority!”

“You’re what . . . eighteen? I’m thirty, Daniel! What was Lindy thinking?”

“You don’t believe the Almighty One gave Lindy the vision?”

“Not what I said,” Remy defended, glowering at him. “I’m sick of you finding ways to question your religion and using me as your excuse to do it.”

“You are His favored servant, most revered above all others! What am I supposed to believe when you tell me things that are not part of the teachings?”

“You, Daniel, are supposed to have faith!” Remy stood. “Fine. You get your wish. I un-choose you.”

“I can’t.” Daniel averted his eyes.

“Why can’t you? Aren’t I the right hand of the Almighty One?” Remy waved her right hand toward Daniel. “There, you’re unchosen. Go tell your brother to get his hands off your fiancé and go to the military ward; he can stand at my door and train at the same time.” Remy turned her back on him. “Leave me to my solitude, Daniel.”

“Lindy’s vision has two meanings: I am either your husband in this world and the next, or just the next world.”

“So if I tell them the Almighty One made a mistake —”

“I die publicly and dishonor my family.” Daniel leaned against the wall, rolling his head forward as his face wrenched in suffering. “I don’t want to die like this. I wanted to serve and die honorably or of old age!”

Remy slid up the wall to a standing position. She walked to Daniel, arms extended to him. “I won’t reject you; I won’t let them kill you. We will find a way to fix

this together. I promise.” Remy put her arms around Daniel and pulled him to her. “Just believe it can be done, and it can.”

Daniel leaned forward on Remy, curling his back as he buried his head at her neck. He draped his arms around Remy, and she moved her hands around his chest, patting his shoulder gently as he sobbed. Remy looked up as the door to Daniel’s home opened; Lindy peeked out. “It seems everything is going to be fine, Sarah.”

Daniel turned his face as his family exited the apartment to see his arms around Remy and her around him. He tried to break the embrace but Remy squeezed his ribs hard. “It will only work if you don’t move,” Remy hissed at Daniel. He left his arms around Remy, turning his face away as Essi emerged. Essi covered her face and wept miserably. James put his arm around Essi and walked her from the neighborhood toward her home.

Lindy and Sarah approached. “That wasn’t all that bad, now, was it?”

“It was a surprise,” remarked Remy, who held Daniel as he kept from weeping in front of his mother and Lindy.

“Well, young people often have an idea of how simple life’s answers should be.” Lindy patted Daniel’s arm. “Do you accept the Almighty One’s decision, Messiah?”

“I do.” Remy wiped tears from Daniel’s flushed cheeks.

“Excellent,” Lindy said, clapping her hands together once. “Sarah, it seems we have a very important and very public wedding to prepare for.”

Sarah sobbed in relief, extending her arms around Remy and Daniel. Pulling on Daniel’s shoulder, Sarah kissed his cheek as he leaned to the side. “You are my good boy, my beloved and most faithful son.” She touched his hair, smiling proudly. “My Daniel is the Chosen.” After wiping tears from her face, Sarah laughed and clasped her hands. “My Daniel!”

Lindy crossed to Remy and touched her shoulder. “I’ll send a cook up to your home, Messiah. It seems you didn’t get much from tonight’s meal.”

“I’ve had quite enough to digest for the evening. Good night, Lindy. I wish to take your counsel tomorrow afternoon regarding this.” Remy stared evenly at Lindy. “Come on, Daniel. Take me home.”

Remy and Daniel walked back to Remy’s home in silence. When they arrived at the apartment, Remy entered and Daniel followed. “Why did you save me, knowing you don’t want me?”

“Because I couldn’t let you die, Dan.”

“You are the Destroyer. All men are equal in your sight, even us.”

“The priests also said I was the Lifebringer. In that aspect, I am to defend and preserve the Almighty One’s most faithful followers. I have found a good and faithful

man in you, and I am sworn to protect your life as your Almighty One would have me do.” Remy slid her shoes from her feet and left them by the entry door. “You are the most faithful person I’ve met down here, Daniel – did you know that? Everyone else chases their own agendas. Essi wanted a family patriarch to be married to; your mother wanted James to take your place as my guard because he didn’t have anyone any longer. Your only purpose is to serve your god, Daniel.” Remy bowed her head. “I wish I knew my purpose outside of being told by Lindy what to do.”

Daniel scoffed. “Since you arrived, I have had no idea what my purpose is any longer. It once was Essi, and farming, and taking care of my mother until she passed away. Now, I don’t know.”

“Well, I guess Lindy felt you, too, had another purpose to serve.”

Daniel crossed the room and turned Remy to him. “Again you make it sound like Lindy chose this instead of the Almighty One!”

Remy’s gaze bounced from one of Daniel’s arms to the other. Daniel dropped his hands, swinging them behind his back. Remy crossed her arms in front of her. “You really do believe all questions have simple answers. I admire your confidence in them; it must make your decisions easy. However, as life starts grinding forward, we learn we are rarely, if ever, in control of any of it. The things we thought we knew are lies; the dreams we wanted most are snatched away.”

“Like just now.”

“Yes.” Remy walked to the window ledge and stood over the darkened Freedom Square. The colored lights were off. Light from the neighborhood entries flowed into the darkness of the community space, diffusing to nothingness just past the thresholds. “You don’t love me, not even as your Messiah. I don’t blame you; you expected more from me. Drek, I expected more from myself. Today, I could have overreacted like Essi, but that would have led to your unjust death. To keep you alive, I have to accept Lindy’s vision until something changes. As for Essi, she will probably realize James is as good a man as you and will definitely discover he would be a better husband to her than you would be.”

“How can you say James would be better? I love Essi!”

“Your life is centered around your god, Daniel. You love Him more than Essi.”

“We are all taught to love the Almighty One over ourselves. It’s His way.”

“After last night, it’s evident Essi would have asked you to choose her over the Almighty One some day, even if it meant your personal dishonor. Your friends do not possess the responsibility toward Prime Settlement and your deity that you do.”

Daniel sat in the conversation pit. As pillows spilled, Daniel growled in frustration and shoved them all from the benches onto the floor. Remy looked over her

shoulder at him then turned back toward the darkness. “When my father and older brothers died, Messiah, my mother needed someone to provide for her, James, and Ruthie. I petitioned the Almighty One through prayer, and He gave my mother peace when I joined His military service. My faith served me well. Until now.”

Remy shook her head and walked from the main salon into her bedroom. She sat in the darkness of her bedroom staring out the window. When she heard Daniel knock, she told the door to open to him; the window reflected Daniel’s silhouette in the doorway. Remy didn’t turn. “Yes, Daniel?”

“Will I have to . . . ?”

“To what, Daniel?”

“To have marital intimacy with you while I still love Essi.”

“Daniel, if I can undo this, I will perform your wedding to Essi, myself.”

Daniel’s tone was hopeful. “You would?”

Remy slid from the ledge and walked to Daniel. “I have been trying to figure a way to put things to right since I walked out of your mother’s home. I am not here to get married and make little Freedomers, Dan; I am here to start and finish a war. Perhaps if Alan had understood that, he would be standing there instead of you. Now, please choose either of the spare rooms to move into; I’m tired of watching you fight with my living room furnishings, and I doubt Essi will be as willing to bring a satchel of your clothing to you now that she believes I’ve stolen you from her.”

“Yes, Messiah,” Daniel replied, backing out of Remy’s room. Remy changed for bed, lay on the wide mattress, and stared up at the ceiling. Minutes later, a soft rapping sounded on her door. Remy commanded the door open and sat up as Daniel stood at her doorway again. “I’m sorry, Messiah, but I’m hungry. I didn’t get a chance to eat anything at my mother’s place before Lindy made her announcement.”

Remy sat up then stood. “Come on,” she said as she reached Daniel. She waved her hands in the air in mock jubilation. “All hail the Messiah, the Almighty One’s short order cook.”

Jeremy arrived a month later; Remy met him at the elevator with Daniel at her side. Remy tousled Jeremy’s dark hair and hugged him tightly. “Welcome to Prime Settlement, Jeremy. The Council is waiting, and you and Carl are receiving medals today for your heroic service. After that, we are having a dinner in both your honor.”

Jeremy grinned as he walked side by side with Remy. “Makes me happier I got the research for you, Messiah.”

Remy covered her face, laughing. “I can’t believe you were able to find it! Last time I heard, you and the field ops had nothing for me!”

“Turns out your little Network buddies were an Enforcement project. What I

got is way past Ami's Jacks' technology, Messiah. They've had the ability to do this for years, but they still wire their guys to the wall!"

"What ability?"

"Wireless," Jeremy said, nodding with an appreciative smile. "You won't be able to spot a Freedomer Jack in a crowd – they'll look just like you and me."

"Good, because they'll have to look like you, Jer." Remy led Jeremy into the Council waiting room. She turned toward Daniel and touched his shoulder gently. "How are you doing, Dan?"

"Fine," he lied.

After the celebration, Jeremy was moved into the spare bedroom next to the kitchen. Daniel left his door open to make sure he would be awakened by any sound or movement. Jeremy laughed softly, shaking his head after Daniel took him aside and explained that the Messiah was not to be disturbed for any reason. Jeremy retreated to his room. Not long after, Jeremy yelped; Remy and Daniel appeared at their doorways at the same time. They glanced at one another then entered Jeremy's room. Jeremy was at his terminal in his room, shirtless. He looked over his shoulder at Remy. "You got me access to Central Computer! Marry me, Remy. I love you."

"That's Messiah, Jeremy," Daniel corrected, using his commanding baritone.

Jeremy rolled his eyes. "By the way, I found out how to make you a spectrum –"

"Jeremy," Remy warned.

"– once I figure out the trick of bringing you back to life on Central Computer, of course."

"No, Jeremy." Remy rested a hand on his shoulder. "I'm happy where I am."

"What is he talking about, Messiah?" Daniel crossed his arms and glared at his slim, dark-haired nemesis.

"Of course, Rem, you could always announce me as your Chosen, and we can drop the brute on the other side of the door. I could set up a system around you that would eliminate your need for his presence at all. Then he can go back to lifting heavy objects or whatever he was doing before he was given guard duty."

"I am her Chosen, computer-boy."

Jeremy pointed at Daniel then at Remy then back. "Did you decide this, Remy?"

"Lindy had a vision." Remy walked to the doorway.

"Did she." Jeremy rubbed his chin. "At least Lindy doesn't think I'm too young for you. I'm two years older than he is."

Remy sighed patiently. "Good night, Jeremy."

"We can talk her out of it, Rem! Between the two of us, I know we can come up with a plan."

“Good night, Jeremy.”

“I knew you first,” whined Jeremy. “Please?”

Remy ambled from Jeremy’s room into her own. As soon as Remy lay down on her bed, she heard a knock at her door. Huffing, she shouted, “No, Jeremy!”

“It’s me. Daniel.”

“Lights on.” Remy sat up and crossed to the door; it opened to her, and she leaned against the jamb, arms crossed. “Hungry?”

Daniel glanced into Remy’s room. “I have no one to talk to.” Remy moved aside and Daniel entered. The door closed behind him, and he sat on the end of the bed. Remy sat beside him. “Essi is pregnant.”

Remy stared forward a moment then nodded slowly. “Well, that, um, that changes a few things. I will speak to Lindy tomorrow morning; we’ll get James trained to take your place and you and Essi can marry –”

“I never touched her,” Daniel said. “It’s the Almighty’s Law to wait to make life until the marriage bed. I guess something happened the night Lindy announced I was your Chosen. Or something.”

“I see.”

“So, James and Essi are getting married tomorrow after they’re done with their penance. My mother wanted me to ask you to perform the ceremony in the Temple.”

“I see.”

Daniel leaned forward, weeping softly. “What do I do, Messiah?”

Remy put her arm around Daniel. “I suppose you escort me to the Temple, and I marry them.”

Daniel turned to Remy and held her, sobbing. “I still love Essi to the depth of my eternal soul.”

“I know, Daniel. I know.”

The wedding between James and Essi was modest and quick. Essi’s parents stood next to Sarah and Daniel, all four frowning sternly. Essi and James beamed at one another as Remy assisted the priest, performing whatever ritual task he asked. Remy blessed the marriage and pronounced them as husband and wife; Essi’s mother and Sarah descended on the newly-married couple, joyful. Essi’s father approached Remy and thanked her for blessing the union, making it less shameful for both families. Daniel nodded to Essi’s father; somber, Essi’s father spoke to Daniel, bowed his head, and joined his wife and Sarah. Remy shook hands with Essi’s parents, James, Essi, and Sarah. Essi embraced James passionately before pulling him from the Temple to the small reception at her parents’ home. Sarah touched Remy’s shoulder as she passed. “Bring Daniel if he feels ready for it.”

After they left, Daniel strode to the altar and fell to his knees before it, his back arched forward as he prayed through his anguish. Remy sat at the front pew. When the priest approached Daniel to counsel him, Remy said, "Go." The priest looked up at Remy, confused; she waved him from the Temple. As soon as Remy and Daniel were alone in the Temple, Daniel covered his head with his arms and wept. Remy waited out Daniel's grief, bowing her head and wishing at least Daniel could have lived the life he had wanted.

When he was done, Daniel stood stiffly. Remy walked to him, and she left the temple walking side-by-side.

Daniel's dark depression lasted until Remy faltered during morning military training. She was having trouble on the shooting range, and Lindy spent late evenings screaming at Remy while Remy stared up at her, numb. "How can you lead His damned army if you can't hit even one of your damned targets!" Lindy shoved Remy to the floor and stalked from the apartment.

Jeremy ran to Remy, who stayed seated where she had fallen to the floor; she brought her legs up to her and bowed her head. When Jeremy tried to help Remy, she pushed his hands from her. "You're supposed to protect the Messiah, Dan!"

"No," Remy said. "Lindy's right. I'm no Messiah. If I had been, I could have performed the one tiny miracle the Almighty One's most faithful begged of Him."

Daniel stood. "Come, Messiah." He took Remy down to the firing range and taught Remy. Using her meditative learning trick, Remy was able to internalize Daniel's lessons, and she graduated basic training weeks later with markswoman honors. Once she graduated, Remy's mornings were spent in Council arbitration hearings listening to petty arguments between neighbors about what to plant along the corridors or deciding the fair barter for household items. The misery of Council arbitration made Remy's neck seize up the moment she arrived in the room.

Not long after, Remy was trying to rub the kinks out of her neck as two brothers fought over the possession of a clutch of NuDucklings. One brother owned the drake; the other, the hen. Neither was willing to divide the clutch in half. Daniel's hands replaced Remy's, and he rubbed the tension away. Remy's moan stopped the hearing. Daniel pulled his hands from her shoulders quickly, clasping them behind his back. A nervous look was shared all around, Remy pointed to the litigators. "Proceed."

That night, Lindy arrived at Remy's apartment. She asked Jeremy and Daniel to step outside while she spoke to Remy. "The Council has formally asked that Aaron attend you at arbitration."

"Daniel is my Chosen," Remy said. "He should be there, not Aaron."

"Daniel distracts you." Lindy sat next to Remy and took her hands. "I admit your

happiness is key to the happiness of Prime Settlement, but today your happiness came at a very inopportune moment.”

“It was innocent! Daniel was working the muscles out on my neck.”

“You’re responsible for the moral representation on the Council, Remy.” Lindy rubbed Remy’s shoulders, and Remy relaxed under Lindy’s touch. “While I have no problem with you having an orgasm in Council, it might lead others to believe you and your Chosen already know one another intimately.”

Remy pointed toward the door. “I can assure you, Lindy, that sex with Daniel is the farthest thing from my mind.”

“Still mourning Alan, then.”

Remy turned to Lindy. “I don’t know how clearer I can make this to you: I don’t want any man to touch me. That you had this vision bothers me immensely, but apparently the whole of Prime Settlement is happy with the idea of it, even the parents of my first unwanted fiancé.” Remy covered her eyes in frustration, then complained, “Alan’s brother resized the rings Alan made for himself and me, Lindy. The whole drekking place can’t wait until I’m stuck with Daniel for the rest of my life!”

Lindy squeezed Remy’s hand. “The Almighty One chose Daniel because he follows the Almighty One’s will over his own desires. Daniel will not stand in our way, Messiah. That is why Daniel was made your Chosen.” Lindy squeezed Remy to her. “Have patience for just a short while longer. Once everything is set, you will have what you desire most.”

Remy leaned her head on Lindy. “What I desire most right now is to never have to go to Council arbitration again. Would you please do it in my stead?”

Lindy pet Remy’s hair. “Do you need me to step into your place that much?”

“I try to hear your Almighty One’s voice, but all I hear are people complaining and air being pushed through the vents. I just want to do what I came here to do, Lindy. People are suffering and dying up there because of the citizens on Level One. We’ve had two colonies exterminated since I’ve been declared Messiah, not to mention what Enforcement is doing to the denizen population in the name of seeking out Prime Settlement. I have to go out there and stop them, yet I’m stuck here listening to women bicker about their grandmother’s quilt and deciding whether or not patrilineage matters with NuFowl?” Remy squeezed Lindy’s hands. “You were right about Mason – he murdered good people, and their deaths were avenged in his. His death was only one, though. Others stand in the way of the subjugation of First Dome, Lindy. I need to be out there if I’m to keep my promise to Prime Settlement and you.” Remy slid from the chair and knelt before Lindy. “I need to do something besides play politician. I need to invert the world or die trying.”

“I will take your place in Council, Remy. We shall gather your army together.”

Remy hugged Lindy tightly. “Thank you. Thank you for finally freeing me to do what I was sent here to do.”

Lindy held Remy, content. “I never believed I could find happiness like this.”

“You’re my family, now, Lindy,” Remy whispered. “I love you.”

“I love you, too, Remy.” Lindy kissed Remy’s forehead. “I believe my heart would break if you died or left me.”

“I won’t die,” Remy said, smiling at Lindy. “And I will not leave you as long as you want me here. I will bring First Dome to its knees. For you.”

Lindy made a noise of frustration. “Always when we have no time,” she whispered in Remy’s ear. Stepping back, Lindy smiled at Remy. “Once you are married to the boy, the people will be content, and you and I will have more time to spend together.”

“I don’t want to be married to anyone, Lindy.” Remy stepped back from her. “Drek it, you never made Ami get married!”

Lindy’s eyes went wide. “Ami is not you. The people perceive an image of you and Daniel together and unite behind the union because of it. They won’t need to know what may or may not be happening behind closed doors.”

Remy stalked to the window and stood, hands behind her back. “Leave me.”

“Remy,” Lindy whispered, distraught.

“Leave me!” Remy screamed at Lindy. Lindy walked from the apartment; Daniel strode in, Jeremy just behind him. “We begin the assaults at the New Year with or without the Jack technology,” Remy said, watching the people at Night Market below. “They’ve held Prime Settlement far beneath the shadows for too long.”

“I’ll see what our field techs have been able to do about collecting those nanobots,” Jeremy said, striding through the apartment to his room.

Daniel moved toward Remy and stood next to her. “I hope you’re willing to die for me, Dan,” Remy said, facing out toward the darkness of Prime Settlement. “You are my second, as your father was for his Messiah.”

“As long as I breathe, I will not let you die, Messiah.”

Remy eyed Daniel; he was stern, hiding a smile of pride. Returning her attention to Freedom Square, Remy replied, “Good.”