

CHAPTER 1

Why was he running? How could an old guy run so fast? And what was with the yellow hazmat-looking suit?

Janee rounded the corner and skidded to a halt. Stretched out before her was a long, depressing gray hall. At the far end a single door beckoned her. The abandoned building, on an old military base outside of old Las Vegas, screamed of neglect. Small creatures were the only inhabitants left. They scurried into hidden corners afraid of their own shadow. And Mr. Wong had disappeared.

“How’d he do that?” her voice ricocheted off the walls, startling her.

She crept down the hall toward the door, hesitating before she turned the knob. Instincts kicked in, warning her to use caution. She opened the door to a cavernous room, a graveyard of standard issue gunmetal gray desks, chairs, and file cabinets. All long forgotten. The room smelled of dust and mold, causing her nose to twitch. High up on the exterior cement wall, small windows allowed speckles of daylight into the room. A grunting sound, followed by a clanging metal noise in the far corner, caught her attention.

A man dressed in old army fatigues tossed a large metal case on to a cart. He stopped and turned; his menacing look caused her to take a step back.

“Sorry, I must have taken a wrong turn,” she said while backing out of the room. She turned to run back down the hall, which now seemed like the length of a football field.

Behind her the door opened and she turned to look. The army-fatigue man stood just outside the door, tense and alert. The slamming of the door behind him echoed like thunder making her flinch.

She stopped and faced the stranger. “You didn’t happen to see a guy in a yellow suit?” she asked, hoping to break some of the tension.

He took a menacing step forward with what looked like a weapon in his hand. Janee decided to run since he wasn’t interested in a friendly chat. The sound of his boots pounding on the concrete floor drowned out the sound of her beating heart. She heard him gaining on her. It reminded her of those side-view mirrors, which warned, “Objects are closer than they appear.”

Not paying attention she slammed into a solid wall, a wall which sprouted arms and slung her behind it. She peeked around the corner just as a loud noise went off. The army-fatigue guy exploded, green gel-like gunk splattered all over the walls and floor.

“Wow,” she yelled as she jumped in front of the wall. “That was so cool!” She looked up at the guy who stood glaring down at her. Still full of excitement she exclaimed, “There really are green guys. Well, technically he was green on the inside, but still.”

“Let’s go,” he ordered and headed down the hall.

She took one last glance before she turned to follow.

“Where are we going?” she asked. The wall, her savior, stood a good foot taller than her, which made him a little over six feet. And man was he packing. Not just muscles, he was loaded with a mini armory of weapons she didn’t even recognize. For some unknown reason, he intrigued her, so she followed him.

“Somewhere trouble doesn’t follow you.”

“Trouble doesn’t follow me.”

He stopped and gave her one of those raised-eyebrow looks. “Really?”

“The trouble was already there, so it wasn’t technically following me,” she tried to explain and wondered why?

He shook his head and turned to continue on.

“What was that green guy?” she asked.

“A Muchawk.”

“A Mu what?” she asked.

“What was he doing in that room?” he asked, not answering her question. He didn’t really have time for this but until he knew why the Muchawks were here and found Wyunik, he felt obligated to keep the little human close to him.

“Stacking large metal cases on a cart,” she answered. “What do you suppose he wanted with those old things?”

“That means he is not alone. We should hurry.” His long strides made it difficult to keep up.

“But, I am looking for someone. I can’t leave without him.”

“Who?”

“An older man wearing a yellow suit,” she replied.

“Let’s go,” he ordered.

“Go where?” she hiccupped, her body still pumped from adrenaline.

“To find this yellow-suit man and get you somewhere safe.”

She followed him through the maze of hallways, not sure where they were heading, or why. “Why do you suppose Mr. Wong was dressed in that odd-looking suit? Do you think he knows about these Muchawks? He’s always been a little strange, but today he was weirder than normal.” When nervous she babbled, and here she was babbling away to this stranger.

He pushed through a set of large metal doors. Their loud clang echoed when they opened. When she stepped outside the hot air blasted past her as if seeking the cool hidden shadows. Her eyes squeezed shut in response to the blinding sun while she breathed in the thick stale air. Her skin, tinted with an olive coloring, protected her from getting sunburned. And to manage her out-of-control brown hair she tied it back in a ponytail. Streaks of golden red highlights, from too much sun, lightened the coloring. Father used to say her brilliant green eyes sparkled like emeralds.

“You sure talk a lot,” he said as he stood in front of her, shading her from the sun.

“Sometimes,” she answered. “Mostly when I’m nervous, or is it anxious? I always get those two mixed up.”

“Where are your people?” he asked.

“My people?” The change of subject confused her.

“I cannot leave you alone, you must belong to someone? Do you belong to this Mr. Wong?”

Ruffled she answered, “I don’t belong to anybody.” A little annoyed she continued, “I have a brother, if that is what you are asking? But he’s a lot older and I haven’t seen him since the war. I am not even

sure if he is still alive or not? My brother left home when I was around nine, about a year before our parents died and four years before the war. Mr. Wong has been with me since I was born and we take care of each other.” She was babbling again.

They were walking, well he was walking, she sprinted to keep up. The muscled man stopped and she smacked into his back.

“Ouch. You hurt my nose.”

“But not your mouth, I see.”

“So you do have a sense of humor,” she giggled.

“Should I take you to your brother?”

“No. Weren’t you listening? I said I don’t even know if he’s alive or not. Besides, I have to find Mr. Wong.”

“Mr. Wong?”

“You know, the guy in the yellow suit. You really should pay attention.” She felt a little frustrated with him. She paused when she noticed him studying her. “Why are you looking at me funny?”

“Who are you?” His quiet voice commanded.

“My name is Janee. It’s like Jane, only it has an extra e on the end. It sounds like Ja-Knee. I think my mom was from somewhere like Iran or something.”

“Your parents?”

“My dad, John, was from L.A. My mom had this exotic name, Marjeena.” The look in his eyes and the sudden stillness stopped her. “What’s your name?” she asked.

He started to pace. “Thuron,” he answered absent-mindedly.

Not sure if she wanted to know the answer she asked anyway. “Just where are you from, Thuron? Who are your people?”

“I am from Tetonisk.”

“Is that like near Iran, or some place close by?” she asked. The name didn’t sound familiar, but she didn’t exactly get to finish school.

“No. It is far from here. It is not on this earth.” He paused for a moment. As he looked at her, his face softened and a touch of sadness shone in his eyes. “Marjeena was my queen.”

Janee started to shiver, despite the heat. She stumbled and sat on a rock. “Queen?” The word exploded in her head so fast she couldn’t grasp it. It was like someone dropped a bomb. “Are you saying that my mom was a queen?”

“Yes,” he answered matter-of-factly.

“On a different planet?”

“Yes.”

For reasons she couldn't explain she believed him. Somehow so many questions she had started to make sense.

“How did you know her?” Emotions tumbled through her so fast she couldn't recognize them.

“I was her guard,” he answered. He watched her intently as the emotions filtered through her.

“Her guard?”

“I was a member of the Royal Guard and assigned to her when she became the new queen.”

“New queen?” Janee felt like a puppet, mimicking everything the master said. “That means there was a king.”

“Yes. She was married to King Hellum.”

“Was?” There she went repeating him again. “What happened?”

“Two months after the wedding, the King was assassinated by his brother, Joffra. Joffra, not only wanted to claim the throne, he also wanted to claim the new queen. He was an evil man and I feared for Queen Marjeena's life. I arranged transportation for her to leave Tetonisk. I suspect that your Mr. Wong is actually Wyunik. He accompanied her when she left. He was her teacher and her protector.”

“Mr. Wong? My Mr. Wong?”

Thuron went on to explain. “Queen Marjeena was young and could be somewhat willful at times. Wyunik was the only one able to counsel her.”

Janee smiled. “My grandfather use to say the same thing about her.” Memories took her back to a better time, her mother's smile and her grandfather's rich baritone voice when he would tell her stories.

“You look like her. I see that now,” he said, snapping her out of her reverie.

“Mr. Wong says I am a lot like her.”

The back of her neck tingled. It always did that when Mr. Wong snuck up on her. She whirled around to face him. “Where the hell have you been? And why the hell didn't you tell me you were from a different planet?”

Mr. Wong ignored her tirade when he noticed who was with her.

“You have found us,” he said to Thuron.

“Yes,” Thuron answered. Looking at Janee he replied, “the girl tells me that the queen is gone.”

Janee harumpffed at being called, “the girl.”

“Yes, she died several years ago,” answered Mr. Wong.

“How?”

“She and her earth husband were killed in an auto accident.”

“Who is this brother she speaks of?”

“He is the son of the earth husband, a son from another woman.”

“Stop,” she screamed. “Stop calling him earth husband. His name was John. And he was my father.”

She wanted to throw something at them. Her hands clenched into fists so tight she felt the nails cutting into the skin. How dare they.

Ignoring her, again, Thuron looked at Mr. Wong. “Was he her father?”

Mr Wong finally looked at her as he reached for her hands. She knew it wasn't going to be good news.

“In all ways that matter he was your father, Princess. He loved you like you were his own.”

Shaking her head, she yanked her hands away from him. Anger boiled to the surface. “I don't believe you. John was my father. You're lying. Why?”

The whole story was surreal. Unbelievable. She glanced at Thuron. He looked normal. He didn't look like something from outer space. He didn't look deranged. He also didn't look too happy at this moment. A little recording repeated in her head, “It's a lie. Don't believe them.” But her heart was another matter. It felt betrayed. Everything she had known was a lie.

As if in a distance somewhere, she heard Mr. Wong say, “I am sorry Janee. We were only trying to protect you. Your mother was happy here and she wanted you to feel happy and normal. She had many enemies and my job was to protect you. It still is.”

“You're sorry,” she growled. “It's too late for apologies. You lied to me. You...you betrayed me.” Tears pooled in her eyes. She had to get away from them before she really lost it. She turned to leave, but Thuron grabbed her arm.

“I am sorry, Little One, I am afraid I cannot let you leave now.”

Janee glared at him. "This is all your fault," she spat. "Just stay out of this and leave me alone, and don't tell me what to do." Tugging her arm from his grasp, she stumbled backwards. She walked away with as much dignity as she could muster. Her heart felt as if it were breaking into a million pieces.

"We must go after her," Thuron said.

"She won't go far. Let us give her some time," Mr. Wong answered.

