

Chapter 21 - A Comet's Chance

Dyvah was so certain Barrett would call her back with an immediate update, that she fell asleep holding her tablet. When she woke up in the morning, stiff and crusty-eyed, Dyvah checked her messages. He hadn't replied.

She toyed with the idea of writing to the Coasters with an apology, but for Stars' sake, she hadn't done anything wrong.

Still, the total tablet silence bothered Dyvah. The Coasters should at least be talking to each other, if not her.

She slid her thumb over the corner of her tablet that launched group chats, but the Coasters chat was no longer there.

"Good morning, Dyvah," CARA said.

"Hey, CARA," Dyvah replied with half-focus.

She sat up and closed then reopened the group chat app, but nothing had changed.

"They ejected me from the group!" Dyvah said in a shrill voice.

A low hum from CARA calmed Dyvah's raw nerves.

"How could they just drop me like that?" Dyvah rubbed her hands across her face, not liking the gritty sweat gathered there. If she didn't stop panicking, she'd probably break out with acne. *Just what I need.*

"Please clarify your query," CARA requested softly.

"Oh. Sorry." Dyvah flushed. "The Coasters. They kicked me out of the group."

"Please elaborate."

Dyvah sighed. "I just went to log into the group chat and it's gone."

CARA paused for a moment, the room silent, then said, "My records indicate the group chat titled 'Coasters' has been disabled due to illegal activity."

Dyvah shot up from her bunk, her thin blanket fluttering to her feet. "What does that mean?"

CARA replied, "All but two members of the group chat titled 'Coasters' have been arrested for trespassing and hydro contamination."

Her blood chilled. Had the fight with Celeste somehow saved her? But then . . .

"You said two. Who else got away?" Dyvah relaxed her clenched fists. Her nails had bitten into her palms hard enough to break skin.

"Tatom Pepys," CARA said.

"He might have taken the ejection pod. He does that sometimes." Dyvah flipped through possible scenarios in her mind. Had the Masters-at-Arms come back? "If the MAs know about the group chat, then they'll find me, eventually."

It will ruin my family.

"My records indicate that all data related to your involvement with the group chat titled 'Coasters' has been erased. It does not appear likely that you are in direct danger of discovery."

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then cut off the call.

“Just what the Stars was that all about?” her mom asked. One eyebrow was cocked in skepticism.

“I don’t know,” Dyvah said in complete honesty. “I’ll let you know when I find out. *If I’m allowed to go.*”

Ena Bellingtier’s face became as hard as marble. After a moment she said, “I thought you were lying to me, like before.”

Dyvah held her breath. Asking for clarification would give herself away.

“Fine. Go.” Her mother leaned back on the sofa and closed her eyes. Her hand fluttered to her temple as though a headache lingered there.

Dyvah thought of Darwin. Now that Rey had been arrested, was she at the Plant with him, serving mandatory labor? Could Dyvah survive watching the ruin of Rey’s face? Could she stand it if Rey’s spiky eyelashes fell out, one by one?

Or would the Coasters be on full display, under layers of weeks-old food waste and refuse?

She wanted to sprint out, straight to Rey and the Coasters, but the precariousness of her situation—and the clear cost of any misstep—~~was~~ too blatant to ignore.

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One thing at a time. I’ve committed to seeing Andros. Then I’ll find Tatom. Then I’ll talk to Mom.

“Bye, Mom,” she said, as she passed through the door.

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A hard conversation loomed before them, but with a little luck, maybe Dyvah could still change course.



“Dyvah!” The D’Orions’ door slid open to reveal the most excited, adorable version of Andros that Dyvah had ever seen. His two cheeks were apples of joy and his eyes crinkled at the corners.

She stepped into his living room, and he threw his arms around her. “I can’t believe you haven’t heard. I’ll finally get to tell someone that doesn’t already know!”

Andros grabbed her hand and led her over to the sofa. The vid screen was on, volume blaring.

They both sat down.

“I won the tickets!” Andros said, eyes shining.

On the screen, a video of Andros standing wide-eyed at his front door played to triumphant music.

“What?” Dyvah asked, disoriented.

“I won the Javier tickets,” Andros repeated.

Dyvah turned back to the screen, struggling for comprehension. Video Andros said, “I won? I WON!”

“You won?” Dyvah asked video Andros, but real-life Andros answered instead.

“Yeah! Can you believe it? I entered on a comet’s chance. I was actually hoping for the second-place prize—a brand new reverberite guitar—but first is good too. I

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“I’m sorry that happened to *you*, Tatom,” she said in a softer tone.
Tatom relaxed his shoulders a little and poked his head up tentatively.
Andros patted one of Tatom’s shoulders with a large but gentle hand. “It’s not your fault for working in a broken system. It’s the only system we have.”
“But it doesn’t have to be,” Wren added in a quiet voice.
“It sounds like they’re planning to punish the Coasters publicly next week,” Dyvah reported.
“What kind of punishment?” Wren asked.
“I’m not sure.” Dyvah shifted, uncomfortable. “They’re being called ‘terrorists,’ so it will probably be bad.”
“After that they’ll be sent to the Plant,” Tatom predicted.
“Is there any way to break them out? Maybe if we get blueprints? I can ask CARA—” Dyvah tried to keep her voice from sounding desperate.
“No.” Wren shook her head. “That will never work.”
Dyvah bit back frustration, closing her eyes and taking a deep breath.
“There’s no way to save a single person. Not on a ship in the dark void of space. There’s nowhere to run. It isn’t that I don’t want to, it’s just not a practical option.” Wren rested her chin on her fist, her eyes calculating.
“I can’t leave them there,” Dyvah said.
“We can’t,” Tatom corrected.
“Of course we can’t,” Wren agreed. “But the only way to help them is to expose the inequity at play. And that sort of thing isn’t easy. There are a lot of risks in revolution.”
Andros nodded. “We’ll be caught. Probably arrested.”
“We’ll be sentenced to forced labor, if we’re lucky.” Wren hugged herself with her thin, alabaster arms.
“If we’re lucky?” Dyvah asked. “What happens if we’re not lucky?”
“Ejection,” Wren said, her face sheet-white.
“Or compost,” Tatom added in a meek voice without looking up.
“You mean they could . . . ?” Dyvah’s throat squeezed closed.
Wren shrugged. “What I’m trying to say is once we walk this path, there’s no turning back. Are you willing to expose yourself to all of that?” Her pointy chin stuck out.
But my parents . . . Dyvah chewed on her lower lip. She didn’t want to do anything that would hurt them. But she knew nothing mattered more to them than the future. They understood the relatively temporary nature of each person in the fleet. Thousands of them would be born, live, and die before they reached Gaia 2, Dyvah and her parents included. Those on *New Coventry* weren’t toiling for themselves. They were toiling for a better future for those who would come later.
“Yes,” Dyvah said. Her voice didn’t shake.
“Me too,” Tatom agreed, his face solemn.
“But why would you risk it?” Dyvah analyzed the curves and angles of Wren’s strong face.

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was a monster for betraying my friends, but this . . .?”

“The concert is tomorrow,” Andros said. “We need to iron out the details.”

“Every detail,” Wren agreed. “Every word, every step, every press of a button. The timing has to be perfect. We have one shot at this. One.” She held up a slender finger.

Andros, Dyvah, and Tatom all nodded somberly.

“The part I can’t work out is the broadcast. The only way, as I see it, is to hack CARA, and that’s no easy feat. Even if I was a genius, I’m not sure I could do it.”

“You are a genius,” Andros countered.

“It’s not the only way,” Dyvah added.

Wren raised an eyebrow in challenge.

“Activate CARA in this room,” Dyvah said.

Wren’s face tightened with alarm. “What? Are you crazy?”

“Do you trust me?” Dyvah asked.

“Yes, but Dyvah, you are notoriously naïve,” Wren said. “I know that your heart’s in the right place, but . . .”

“I do,” Tatom said. “I trust you.”

Andros nodded. “Me too.”

“Please, Wren,” Dyvah said. “You trusted me with the balance beam. Trust me now.”

Wren let out a long-suffering sigh, frowning, and said, “Fine. Activate CARA, authorization code 42114.”

A soft whir preceded CARA’s ever-optimistic greeting. “Hello, Wren Gallo.”

Wren threw her hands up and looked at Dyvah as if to ask, “Now what?”

“Hi, CARA,” Dyvah said.

“Hello, Dyvah,” CARA replied with warmth.

Dyvah looked from Wren to Andros to Tatom, her eyes wide and eager. “There! Did you hear that?”

Tatom shrugged and Andros shook his head. Wren studied Dyvah with blatant skepticism.

“CARA’s not just an AI. She’s my friend.”

Wren and Andros regarded each other with concerned expressions.

Tatom avoided Dyvah’s eyes.

“I know it sounds crazy, but CARA is my friend. Aren’t you, CARA?”

“Yes, Dyvah,” CARA agreed, “And you are my friend.”

Dyvah blushed, pleased and relieved. “Thanks CARA.”

Wren scoffed.

Dyvah ignored her. CARA had proven herself to Dyvah. And now it was time for Dyvah to prove herself to CARA.

“CARA, we need to tell you about something that is harming the people on the ship. I know how important protecting the ship is to you.”

“Thank you, Dyvah.”

Wren’s chin jutted out.

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