

Chapter One

Taken in the Night

It is the New Year 2050, half a century of the millennium has gone by, and people across the country are celebrating the milestone. Some are glad to see the old year come to an end and others look forward to the beginning of a new year with hopes for a better life, a better them, a better way to exist. These are the same fervent hopes made every New Year only to be soon forgotten in a couple of weeks when most people just go back to living their lives just as before. They have never really made a change that lasted or a difference in their lives that mattered.

Out in Montana, in the middle of this frosty night a family sleeps. All is quiet, peaceful, and dark except for the soft glisten of the snow and a distant light, first only one then several evenly spaced apart and growing larger and brighter as they come closer.

The residents of this portable living unit are aroused from their deep sleep not sure as to what actually woke them. They lay in bed with their eyes fighting to stay closed but their ears begin to hear a distant humming sound getting closer and louder. A light outside their windows grows brighter shining on their still faces annoying their eyes. Suddenly sleep is pushed away as they open their eyes fearing the worst and within seconds and in urgency they throw off their warm bed covers running to the windows now knowing exactly what it is disturbing their rest.

A man in his early sixties and a woman in her early fifties stand together in front of their bedroom window. They blink and shade their eyes

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from lights that seem to come from several directions at once struggling to see past the glare. Their two grown children burst into the room from behind them, calling, “Mom, Dad! What is going on?” as they run to where their parents stand in front of windows. They too raise their hands to shield their eyes from the harsh light bright in their faces.

Dad answers their question, “Floater planes (crafts with no blades or wings emitting a strong current of vacuum in downward angles propelling them forward in all directions), there are about a dozen I think. The bastards didn’t even try to muffle the noise of their engines wanting to add fear to their surprise attack ... they’re landing in our yard ... they’re coming inside!”

A loud crash is heard downstairs as the front door is broken off its frame and glass shatters as it hits the floor hard. Heavy boots running about, there is yelling, and shouted orders not clearly understood by the family. “Here they come,” the father warns as the noise begins to come up the stairs. The two men instinctively jump in front of the women forcing them back as if to shield them with their own bodies. The women shaking with terror allow them to do so, thankful that they are not alone to face this onslaught coming towards them.

The house is quickly surrounded as uniformed men and women appear everywhere at once. Vacuum crafts are outside their second floor windows pointing their heavy artillery with computerized firing mechanisms into the room unseen fingers on the triggers ready to fire on command if necessary.

These Special Council Forces are now in the bedroom a few feet away from the family with more standing in the hall and on the stairs. They stand alert aiming the light rays from their guns at each family member making clear their intent to shoot on command. Their uniforms are dark, a one-piece outfit with no buttons or insignias that depict who sent them. Their heads and faces are completely covered, nothing personal is exposed, but the family knows who they are anyway. This government agency strikes only at night, suddenly, and always without warning.

“We only want the girl!” A loud commanding voice calls from somewhere out in the hall, flat and emotionless.

“You can’t have her, leave us alone!” the father tries to make his voice as strong as the commander’s. “How did you find us?” he adds a little weaker.

Laser shots are fired over their heads, debris falls about them making them cringe as little embers burn their skin. They gather closer together trying to gain courage from each other. No verbal warnings are given, no choices are offered, only the command. “Give us the girl. Now!”

From behind the father, a slender hand grasps his arm in front. Its owner speaks softly, “Daddy, please, I’ll go. We know what they want and what they will do if I don’t.” She slowly steps from behind her father’s protective form and still in her nightclothes hesitates for only a moment. Her father holds his daughter’s hand as she comes from behind him. She begins to cry as she hugs each of her family in turn. “It’s okay,” she comforts them, “we knew I couldn’t hide forever.” She turns away from her family and begins to walk toward the agents. Watching the girl surrender the commanding voice can now afford to be benevolent, “She’ll be back in time for dinner.” Its poor attempt to show compassion comes out as a statement flat and dry.

The young woman wipes her face with her hands and straightens her shoulders. The squad parts in the middle inviting her to walk in between the two rows of agents then quickly closes ranks once she steps inside. They move as if rehearsed in a steady pace down the stairs and out of the house in one unit.

Once she is out of sight the mother falls to the floor onto her knees as if too tired to stand. Her son kneels beside her trying to give her the strength she needs to let her daughter go but having little of his own to spare. He struggles to control the young fury he feels over their impotence to act and defend his sister. The father remains standing watching the doorway as if unable to believe his daughter had been forcibly taken from her home and he did nothing to save her. He hears his heart admonish him: A father is supposed to protect his child, he barely tried. There were so many agents he tells himself as if in consolation, so many weapons what could he have done but to let her go? He closes his eyes and silently begins to cry.

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From their bedroom they hear more orders shouted outside and soon the vacuum crafts rise and fly away turning their brightest lights off, their need for drama is over this mission is completed.

The rest of the day passes slowly, the family is going through its motions of living their day until hours later in the same house, it is early evening. Their table is set for dinner, four places arranged with care and attention to detail as usual, the older man, woman, and their son already seated in their places. No one speaks or moves to serve the meal that is already prepared and cooling in the serving bowls.

A few minutes later and an air compression vehicle just like a vacuum craft but smaller and staying closer to the ground is blowing all the small rocks from the road out in front of the house. It comes to a stop a few feet from the front door. A car door is raised and then quickly lowered, no words are heard exchanged. The vehicle closes its door again, raises slowly, and turns in midair speeding away with no other motion given to its recent passenger. The harsh warm air blows her hair about her face and the pebbles about her feet. She watches it leave without turning away accepting it all as if in defiance to all the indignities she has endured.

The family inside the home hears her soft steps on the path, the front door is roughly pushed aside as it has not yet been repaired or the replacement part yet ordered. The steps continue inside the foyer and turn to the dining space. No one turns to look at the young woman who returns with her nightclothes still on but turned inside out with all the seams showing. Her eyes are glazed from too much crying and remnants of some kind of anesthesia administered more to quiet her down than for actual pain. The daughter takes her seat at the table, just as she has always done since she was a little girl. She folds her hands on her lap looking straight ahead. Her father presses a recessed button, which then causes a panel to open on the table and uncover their food emitting puffs of steam and fragrant smells. The food appears hot and inviting as he begins to take a serving for himself as the others stare at their plates waiting their turn.

Father senses his child's inability to move and fills her plate for her, but she does not eat. They all finally just sit and stare down at their food not really seeing it.

The father suddenly bursts out attempting to regain a sense of self, “We’ll file a complaint against the council, this is the United States of America, this is not supposed to happen to its citizens!”

After an uncomfortable silence the young woman finally looks at her father and replies, “What good will that do now? It’s the law, and we let it happen, you let it happen years ago!”

With those accusatory words hanging in the air she stands quickly as if to leave and then just as suddenly she sits down wrapping her arms about herself trying to find a warmth that is gone. Her father wants to speak again but can’t find the words, realizing that she is right, it is too late now, it has been done and there is no way to change it. They, their family, must accept it. They must now prepare so that they will be ready, so that she will be ready, and pass all their tests. She had to prove that they, that she is qualified to have a child or it would never happen for her.

The father stays quiet for now making plans that after a while he and his family will talk. They will talk and make preparations so when his lovely daughter and his handsome son decide to marry and apply for permission to have children they will be able to prove they will be fit parents. That is the law now and what is required by society, no children are possible without the government approval that will allow the procedure to reverse the sterilization mandated by the government on all females before puberty. That was the procedure forced upon his daughter today after they did not comply and bring her in voluntarily. The people voted this mandatory sterilization into law years ago as a solution to the then many seemingly unsolvable social problems of that time. It had worked very well; all those insurmountable social problems intended to be corrected by the law no longer existed. However, who truly understood then at what cost and personal effect? Now, they must live with it until that law too is changed as many laws eventually are although, judging by its popularity, that may not happen for a very long time.

For now the family is deep in thought with father making plans, mother worried what this experience has done to her free-spirited daughter, blaming herself for supporting a law that caused her child such grief. Their son is bewildered with fury and resentment vowing to learn the reasons

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that brought this about. He wanted to understand what made it okay for their government to come crashing into their calm world and snatch his sister away like a thief in the night. What gave them the right to take away her future contributions to posterity without her consent? Finally, the daughter who was not yet even sexually active, who was a good student and not even thinking about having children now and not sure if ever, wanted to understand. She needed to understand why that choice, her choice had been taken away and why someday when and if she decides to have children she will have to obtain permission from a panel of strangers after first passing a series of tests to prove her worth as a future parent. Strangers will decide if she could have the reverse sterilization procedure that will enable her body to get pregnant.

Having a baby had always been a natural right since the beginning of time. Women just had babies when their bodies said it was time and physical conditions were right. Now the government was controlling those conditions, the very people their parents had put into office. She told herself that it did not seem right, it did not feel right, and her body belonged to her. This budding young woman was angry at the government office that did this to her and at her parents and people like them who helped decide years ago this could be done to her and women all over the country. She further questioned how something like this had been allowed to happen, how could this be justified? Her brain reeled at the questions in her head while the family continued to sit in their chairs not eating their meal, and each lost in their thoughts.

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