

## Chapter 1

*But first whom shall we send  
In search of this new world, whom shall we find  
Sufficient? Who shall tempt with wand'ring feet  
The dark unbottomed infinite abyss  
And through the palpable obscure find out  
His uncouth way, or spread his aery flight  
Upbourne with indefatigable wings  
Over the vast abrupt, ere he arrive  
The happy isle? What strength, what art can then  
Suffice, or what evasion bear him safe  
Through the strict sentries and stations thick  
Of angels watching round? Here he had need  
All circumspection, and we now no less  
Choice in our suffrage; for on whom we send,  
The weight of all and our last hope relies.  
Book 2, l. 402-16*

The poet had returned.

His long silent voice tripped through her dream state pursued by creation's ballet which danced an ever-expanding expression before her.

Lights weaved a magical scene; first one, then two, a hundred, a million. She grinned at the display as childhood memory fused with the lights. Memories of celebratory fireworks pushed forward when mouths young and old flopped wide with the 'oohs' and 'ahs' of appreciation. Delighted squeals followed the sky-striving lights and crescendoed with their explosion. Yet despite the happy sounds and the Byzantine display something began to change.

She couldn't identify the why or how, but a growing discomfort took hold of her. Her neck prickled. Her nerve endings twitched as if tiny, imaginary insects hopped and crawled over the surface of her skin. Soon, tiny stinging sensations accompanied each and every fireworks explosion.

The evolution to pain burst with the speed of a Big Bang. A pain always present, yet never experienced paralyzed mind, body, and spirit.

Then the voice intruded, "It is time."

Harry snapped upright and swore the voice lingered not just in dream time, but in real time. The harder she concentrated to will it back the further it retreated as consciousness took over, and the only sounds to reach her were the harbour waters licking at the dock forms just under her open window. A lone coyote sang in the distance. Crickets cheeped and chirped. No voice.

"You're freakin' out, Harry," she muttered and rolled back into the bedcovers. But the damn voice sounded so real ...so close....

## Chapter 2

*“... have ye chos’n this place  
After the toil of battle to repose  
Your wearied virtue, for the ease you find  
To slumber here, as in the vales of Heav’n?”*

...  
*Awake, arise, or be for ever fall’n”*  
*Book 1, l. 315-30*

Welocho fidgeted in the small human chair. Comfort proved to be an impossibility. He stretched out his legs attempting to compensate for the cramped feeling, yet only succeeded in irritating his back. With a sigh he pulled up straight again. How much longer would he have to wait? He knew the Admiral was busy, but too busy to see an old friend? Welocho's grey face tightened into a grimace. The fur on his forehead rippled as he remembered their first meeting five years before when still enemies. Desperate circumstances forced them into begrudging allies, and after a couple of years a tentative friendship developed. Welocho came to depend upon that friendship since his transfer to Earth as Karlonia's ambassador.

The humans' acceptance of him was as yet hesitant. Wary glances followed him even after a year of living with them. He supposed this to be a natural reaction especially when the conflict between their peoples remained fresh in many memories.

Despite the inhabitants' cool reception Welocho had grown fond of the planet. Its biodiversity fascinated him. Not only were there copious species of flora and fauna, but the humans themselves were a varied lot. They exhibited many colours and facial characteristics unlike his monochromatic species. A real pity they couldn't have overcome the difficulties such differences produced earlier in their development.

"The Admiral will see you now," the computer interrupted.

Welocho untangled from the little chair and stretched as he approached the office door. He dipped his head below the door jamb to enter the large office.

"Welocho!" the Admiral smiled and got up from behind his desk to greet the Karlonian. He held out his hand and pumped the alien's hand with genuine pleasure. "Good to see you. Been too long."

"Philip," Welocho acknowledged. "Yes it has. Diplomatic concerns keep me busy."

Philip Quinn crossed to the opposite side of the office and dragged over a large chair he had built specifically for the Ambassador's visits. "Please -- sit." Quinn returned to his chair and leaned back in the cushioned comfort. "Your visit is a welcome break. I've been dealing with demanding PDC Captains all day," he smiled. "Can't imagine I was that difficult when in command of the Bounty."

Welocho grinned. "Your superiors at the time may have disagreed." The alien referred to five years before when Captain Philip Quinn disobeyed orders and took his ship beyond the perimeter into enemy Karlonian space, single-handedly pushing the two species into a peace process.

Quinn chuckled. "I suppose you're right."

Welocho settled into the large chair with a contented sigh. "Something I never understood was why you accepted the admiralty over commanding the Bounty. I never saw you as being eager for upper command."

Quinn sent off a wistful smile. "Yes -- well things change. Life forces us to make some decisions we wouldn't normally make. It was time for me to get reacquainted with Earth again."

And the Lieutenant, Welocho thought to himself. The Admiral's affection for his time-estranged wife was no secret. She would be the only reason he could give up helm for desk.

"So, Welocho, what brings you here?"

"Things are not well with Earth's latest ambassador to Karlonia. I am receiving continuous complaints over his inability to adapt to, or understand, our people. The Ambassador seems bent on implementing his own idea of diplomacy regardless of other opinions."

"Mr. Cochran, yes, he can be a difficult sort. I warned the Central Government he wouldn't be a good choice," Quinn tapped his fingers on the desk.

"Then why did they send him?" Welocho asked.

"Simply put, no one else wanted to go. He volunteered." Quinn frowned, "But why come to me with this? You should be talking to Central."

Welocho leaned forward, his grey expression tightened. "We need the Lieutenant back. Only she understood the Karlonian people because of her merging with the Mathew energy. I thought maybe you would put me in contact with her." He leaned back. "I have tried, but I cannot seem to raise her on her wristband. It's as if she doesn't exist," he threw up his long arms. His sleeves dangled with the effort.

Quinn frowned. "She almost doesn't."

"Captain?" Welocho asked, slipping into the old pattern of address.

"Charlene ...," Quinn paused, "Excuse me, Harriette Calder has made herself almost invisible to the world since her return from Karlonia four years ago."

"An unfortunate business," Welocho nodded. "But I am here to offer her a complete and official apology from the Karlonian government."

"That will be difficult to deliver. She lives a reclusive life and receives no one except the odd visit from Walter Trembley, her Transplant Integration Assistant." Quinn scowled. "I'm not even sure where she lives."

"But this Walter Trembley knows?" Welocho's voice raised in hope.

"Yes. But she's given him specific instructions not to give that information out." Quinn smiled, "and Walter does pretty much whatever she asks. He even disconnected her wristband at her request."

"Is that legal?"

"No, but Walter covers for her."

"Philip, it is vital I get in touch with her."

Quinn noted something in the Karlonian that he had never seen before -- desperation bordering on pain, or something ... something he could not put his finger on.

Welocho wrestled within. How much should he tell his human friend? As far as the Karlonian knew, Quinn had never been deceitful with him. Yet, was it deceit which held his tongue from confessing the whole truth? Truth! Who knew the truth? The Ambassador certainly didn't, and those who should be in the know were shrouded in darkness almost as much as he. Each of them simply followed orders; orders which spanned time, and until now, proved valid. Faith allowed one to accomplish much. No, telling Quinn the entire truth, as far as Welocho knew truth, would only complicate matters.

"I will do what I can, Welocho," Quinn promised.

"That is all I ask." Welocho smiled, a little relieved. "Well, Philip, I must get back," he said rising from his chair.

Quinn walked him to the door. "I'll try to get hold of Walter today and talk to you soon."

"Thank you, Captain," Welocho bowed low and left.

Quinn returned to his desk and swivelled the chair around to view the grassy green outside. A flutter reawakened old memories and hopes. For a long time he'd sought an opportunity to make contact with Charlene. He shook his head -- must stop thinking of her as Charlene. Quinn smiled at the bright day. This opening might allow him to see her face to face. How much had she changed? Looking at his own reflection in the window he wondered what she would think of his changes. The extra pounds added what he hoped would be seen as an air of dignity. He chuckled out loud. She always said, as Charlene, that he needed a few extra pounds.

## Chapter 3

*In thoughts more elevate, and reasoned high  
Of providence, foreknowledge, will and fate,  
Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute,  
And found no end, in wand'ring mazes lost.  
Of good and evil much they argued then,  
Of happiness and final misery,  
Passion and apathy, and glory and shame,  
Vain wisdom all, and false philosophy:  
Book 2, l. 558-65*

Walter Trembley paced in his office. With his head bent he contemplated his lies. Well, maybe not quite lies, but certainly not the entire truth. On the other hand, perhaps it could be considered more of an omission of some truths. Not lies ... not really.

"Who are you kidding, Walter?" he asked himself aloud, and leaned his head back, stretching his neck and rolling his shoulders. "When she finds out what you've done ..." he paused and smiled, remembering one of her colloquial terms, "she will be pissed." He resumed his pace out past the office and into the Transplant temporary living quarters, where his memory shifted back five years to when he'd first met Harriette Calder; a very confused, out-of-place, yet determined woman, and when she finally deigned to smile its result produced magic. Walter could not explain the effect. Harry's features could not be described as beautiful, at least not in the traditional sense, yet a simple smile seemed to lift her features into perfect symmetry where light emanated and created a genuine and pure visage. It brightened Walter's outlook by simply remembering it, and while he held affection for her it remained platonic. Romantic notions never played a part in his appreciation of her smile and person.

Upon her return to Earth from Karlonia four years earlier she approached him before anyone else with a request to help her find somewhere quiet and out of the way. A place where she could live in peace. Walter obliged with little protest. He reasoned she deserved that much. Life had been anything but kind to his friend. He stayed in contact with her through regular visits to her ocean-side home. Truth be told these visits to her quiet hamlet revived him, and provided a safety valve from the exacting job of Transplant Integration Assistant. Unlike Harry many of the transplants he assisted in adjusting to their new lives were demanding and belligerent. The visits helped him to refocus and retune to their needs.

Yet, once she found out he had exposed her whereabouts, especially to Quinn, those visits might end. Her trust in him would be shaken, if not destroyed. But perhaps now was time for Harriette Calder to come out of hiding. Out of their many conversations over the last four years she admitted the need to hide, and Walter understood this need, especially after that nasty bit of business with the Karlonians as Earth's Ambassador, but her hermit-like existence intensified over time instead of wearing away like he thought should happen.

Walter realised she suffered from an identity crisis of sorts -- no small wonder. Dragging her from the twenty-first century into the twenty-third and implanting a section of a dead person's brain within her own decided the beginning of the crisis. Then of course, merging with the Mathew energy and a trip back in time which proved to be her 'Charlene' period added to the psychosis. All in all, Harry had reason for her anomalous and anti-social behaviour.

A grim line accented Walter's large mouth. While he understood the reasons, he had to make her understand before she wedded herself to the solitary life that now was as a good a time as any to face the real world once again. Quinn's call set the ball into motion.

As much as he hated to do it, he would have to betray Harry's trust. Besides, Quinn insisted Welocho was adamant about getting Harry back into the Ambassador role. From what Walter knew of either Quinn or Welocho, they weren't alarmists. Whatever their reasons for wanting to drag Harry from the world of comfort she was ensconced, Walter remained sure of their validity and sincerity.

Still -- he hated to lose that smile.

"She won't take kindly to this at all," Walter lamented with a shake of his head.

## Chapter 4

*Farewell happy fields  
Where joy for ever dwells; Hail horrors, hail  
Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell  
Receive thy new possessor: one who brings  
A mind not to be changed by place or time.  
The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.  
What matter where, if I be still the same...  
Book 1, l.249-56*

Harry dangled her legs over the edge of the dock. She closed her eyes and stretched her neck toward the warming sun. "Can't get any better than this," she whispered and smiled wide. Two seals on a tiny island of storm-smoothed rock in the middle of the harbour barked an agreeing answer. She shielded her eyes and looked over in time to see them bounce into the water and flipper away. Christian's head popped up from between his paws. He gave a throaty growl, but didn't move. Morning sun time was precious.

Sipping on her coffee, Harry thought back to her uneven sleep percolated with the dreams again. Every night this week her unconscious mind took her on a trip to the fireworks display. The first night dragged her into the realization that comfort zones only existed to be disturbed. She had begun to believe that her solitary, settled life would remain cemented in reality, but the intensity of the dreams spoke of other plans. Intuition told her that change waited around the corner. Sighing, she looked over at Christian, "Should know better -- things never remain the same." With a grunt she pushed up to her feet. "Come on, Christian. Let's check out what havoc the North Atlantic wreaked this time." She walked down the dock and back to the house. Her bare feet pattered on the old wood; Christian's short nails echoed behind her.

She paused to stare at the tiny house perched on the edge of the dock. Home. Yet how much longer? Only two bedrooms, living room, small country kitchen, and an old fashioned bathroom made up her living space. More than enough for her and occasional guests who were limited to Walter, and Eli's Hopper crew. While she enjoyed their visits she preferred the solitary existence. She continued to admire the house. Although only about thirty years old the weathered cedar shingles spoke of twentieth century times -- a leftover from an obsolete Villa that the residents decided, upon closer examination of the area and weather conditions, to move further down the coast to a more sheltered harbour. Harry relished the Atlantic hissy fits. She often sat outside during a storm and soaked up the cleansing ritual offered.

Christian trotted ahead of Harry and nudged the kitchen door open. He waited, long since used to the morning ceremony.

Harry followed him in and downed her last bit of coffee putting the cup in the sink. She retraced her steps to the door and pulled on a pair of well worn work boots, flipping her jean cuffs over the tops. Most of her possessions were copies modelled from the twentieth century. Careful research led her to several small proprietors who supplied the Villas with such antique staples; simple things such as watches that only told the time and didn't connect you with the nearest Master Computer demanding your adherence to silly rules -- toilets that flushed water -- beds that required blankets and didn't cover you in a plastic coffin, and weapons that fired lead not light.

She checked her only weapon before leaving the house. A double barrel Beretta 12 gauge shot gun, and a real antique. Her father owned one and he'd insisted she learn it safely. Walter tried many times to convince her to replace it with a modern laser weapon. He worried about her being in the middle of nowhere with no way to defend herself. She'd just smile and say, "Stick a long length of metal in someone's face and they know you mean business." Walter would sigh and shake his head. She returned the weapon to its niche and pushed through the door again. Christian trotted up to her side as Harry crossed the small compound to check the garden, her first stop of the morning.

Several small weeds struggled to grasp hold of the soft soil and strangle her diligent work to produce fresh food. She pushed her fingers into the well worked earth and took firm hold of the root tops pulling them with care to get the whole invader. Once done she wandered to the corral where the horses she'd promised to take care of for Chris pranced and grew impatient with her methodical feeding and watering. Slopping through the rain soaked earth she crossed the corral and opened up the gate to pasture, where they would mosey around all day after getting their fill of oats, water, and sweet hay. She gave each one a pat on her way back through. They snorted and whinnied whether in appreciation or annoyance she never knew. One bent down to give Christian a smell. He backed away -- still unsure of the large beasts. Until Harry brought Christian to live here he'd never had to deal with other animals. Mathew raised him from an orphaned pup on the Bounty. The dog had more space time than most people did.

She crossed the compound again and approached her windmills with trepidation. Last night's high winds could have done some nasty work on their fine blades. Even though the almost constant wind energy was why she used them as a power source, they needed regular, consistent repair. She peered up at each blade on the three towering poles, but everything appeared to be intact.

"We hit it lucky there, Christian," she smiled and roughed up his red fur. "No damage. Now what about the shed?" She walked around the power storage shed, but not even a board had wiggled out of place. "Bonus!" she muttered and proceeded to her final destination.

A large building covered the back part of the property. The original villa owners had built it to house their fish plant, but when they moved they left it behind deciding it was much too awkward to dismantle and move to the new location. It remained the main reason Harry settled on the property because it converted easily to a hangar and housed her ship -- a gift from the Karlonians shortly after she arrived as Earth's Ambassador.

Harry waved her hand over a sensor and the giant doors slid open, soundless on their hydraulic tracks. As always she stopped to admire the ship prototype. Several more were built later, but their unique, almost temperamental, qualities made them unpopular.

Harry smiled up at the ship. Shaped like a soaring bird, it epitomized grace and beauty. The Karlonian engineers outdid themselves in design, and even added feather-like tips to the wings and tail. Bird quality was further enhanced with a silver body which faded into several different shades of blue on the wings and tail. In flight it also compared to its avian contemporaries. Soaring and directional change were immediate and flowing. And she was fast -- faster than any Earth shuttle of comparative size. Harry suspected she might even give the Bounty a run.

Like she did every day, Harry wandered the sixty foot length, checking for any anomalies. The auto-regenerative bioskin tore sometimes because of poor weather conditions, or sitting too long in the hangar; hence its unpopular showing with the Karlonian buyers. Harry didn't care. She liked the ship's eccentricities -- felt more like a living thing, than a mechanical conveyance. When tiny tears did occur and regeneration didn't kick in because the artificial blood pooled,

Harry would bandage it with a solution the Karlonians developed just for her. They tried to convince her to trade the troublesome ship for another, but she wouldn't hear of it.

"Well, SharTa," she addressed the ship. "You look to be in good shape today. No cracks or tears."

In the Karlonian tradition, ships were named for their owners' 'Kait', or descriptive, name. Like the human nickname the Kait name described the person's main quality. Unlike the informal or haphazard human nickname, the Karlonian Kait was formally bestowed at the age of ten years. Tradition deemed that a Karlonian was sufficiently formed by that age and the Kait would be obvious. While Harry was the exception she still earned the Kait of SharTa – 'one who speaks truth'. The Karlonians didn't always appreciate Harry's truth, but usually listened, because as her friend Oshn Watr often said 'Ti shonu caoul ta lakg' meaning 'Even humans can make sense.' The translation did not do the Oshn's words justice. The intended humour became lost. Harry smiled in fond remembrance of her friend who officiated at her and Mathew's separation ceremony. Harry often wondered if Watr had left pieces of Mathew's energy within her. After the separation she still sensed other thoughts and feelings which were never part of her original package or JM, but how could she have remained the same? Within a short period of time five years before, her mind hosted several personalities. One couldn't hope to remain original and intact with the bombardment. So perhaps her suspicion that a part of Mathew remained with her was just that – a suspicion. Walter called her brush with forced schizophrenia an identity crisis. No kidding!

Dear, dear, Walter. What would she have done without him? Her memory snapped to with Walter's impending visit. She glanced at her wristband. He'd be here soon. Harry finished the ship examination and once satisfied with SharTa's condition she exited the hangar, leaving the doors open wide to allow the ship fresh ventilation.

Christian barked and sat, staring up at the sky over the harbour. Harry followed his gaze. A faint dot appeared in the west, but as the dot expanded into an identifiable image, she could not recognise the intruder.

Her inner protection grid came on line, and she strode back to the house. Snatching up the shotgun Harry marched back outside and waited.

