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Written by Katie Khan

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Part One

One

'This is the end.' They lurch into focus: Carys is breathing hard, a gasping panic filling her fishbowl helmet. 'Fuck,' she says. 'I'm going to die.' She reaches towards Max, but the motion rolls him away, out of her grasp.

'We're not.'

'We're going to die.' Her voice is choppy with shallow breaths, the sound loud in the glass of Max's helmet. 'Oh, god—'

'Don't say that,' he says.

'We are. Oh, god—'

They are falling in space, spinning away from their ship, two pointillist specks on an infinitely dark canvas.

'We're going to be fine.' He looks around, but there's nothing out here for them: nothing but the bottomless black universe on their left, the Earth suspended in glorious technicolour to their right. He stretches to grab Carys's foot. His fingertips brush her boot before he's spinning away and can't stop.

'How are you so calm?' she says. 'Oh, hell—'

'Stop, Carys. Come on, get it together.'

Her foot tumbles up in front of his face, and his face swings down by her knees. 'What should we do?'

Max pulls his legs up to his body as far as he can, trying, through the panic, to calculate if he can change the axis on which he's rotating. The fulcrum? Axis? He doesn't know. 'I

don't know,' he says, 'but you need to calm down so we can figure this out.'

'Oh, god.' She flails her arms and legs, anything to stop their trajectory away from the ship, but it's fruitless. 'What the fuck are we going to do?'

Hit harder by the impact, she is spinning away at a faster pace than he is. 'We're being pulled apart as we fall, Cari, and soon we'll be too far to get back to one another.'

'We're falling on different trajectories—'

'Yes.' He takes a moment to think. 'We need to get back to each other,' he says. 'Now.'

'Okay.'

'On three, swing your arms towards me as if you're diving into a swimming pool.' He demonstrates the move. 'Bend your upper body as much as you can. I'm going to try to kick my legs towards you, so grab me. All right?'

'On three.'

Their audio crackles.

'One.'

'Two—'

'Wait!' Carys puts up her hand. 'Can't we use the impact to change our course back to the *Laertes*?'

With matt-black sides and no lights visible in the hull, the *Laertes* lies abandoned above them, a ship passing in the night.

'How?'

'If one of us hits the other hard enough,' she says, 'would it push them back?'

Max thinks. Maybe. *Maybe?* 'No. Let's get us tethered first, then worry about that. Before it's too late – I don't want to lose you out here. Ready?'

'Ready.'

'Now.'

Carys throws her body forward as Max throws his back. Her arms fly out as he kicks his legs up towards her; for a second they're suspended, like inverted commas, before the swing pulls them parallel and they come up level. She grabs his legs, hugging his feet. 'Got you.'

Now falling head to toe, they use their arms to rotate clockwise, cartwheeling slowly along the other until, finally, they're face to face.

'Hi.' She puts her arms around his neck. He takes a tether from the pocket on his thigh and gently wraps the floating rope around them, securing her to him.

Max catches his breath. 'We need a plan.' He looks back at the *Laertes*, lurking in the shadow of space as they fall further from it with every moment. 'We need to get help.'

Carys has pulled herself round to Max's rear, where she's rummaging in the back of his silver suit. 'Who's going to help us? We haven't seen a single soul for—'

'I know.'

'We have lights,' she says, 'rope, water – why didn't we take propellant? We're so stupid.'

'We had to try—'

'We should've taken the time. You should've let me go back and get the nitrogen—'

'It was an *emergency*. What did you want me to do? Watch your head shrink as you suffocate and die?'

She swings back round so they're helmet to helmet, and looks at him in reproach. 'That's not how it happens, and you know it. The EVSA said head-shrinking was a twenty-first-century myth, propagated by bad movies.'

'The EVSA said a lot of things. The EVSA said we'd be totally safe, and nothing would go wrong.' Max taps the blue European Voivode Space Agency badge on the arm of his suit. 'They also got us to sign a risk-assessment waiver, if you remember.'

'I can't believe this is happening.' She looks around. 'Shall we try Osric?'

'Yes. Of course. Yes!' He hugs her sharply.

Carys pulls her flex down across her knuckles and moves her fingers to type, the strip of mesh webbing measuring her muscle reflexes and finger movements across an invisible keyboard.

Osric, do you read me?

She waits.

Are you there, Osric?

`I'm here, Carys.` There is a *ping* in her audio and the words appear in blue on the left side of her helmet glass.

'Thank god. Max, I've got comms with Osric.' *Can you call for help?*

`Certainly, Carys. Who would you like to call?`

Base? The EVSA? Anyone?

'Ask if there are any ships nearby,' says Max, 'just in case.'

Is anyone within distance to rescue us, Osric?

`No, Carys. Sorry.`

Are you sure?

`Yes, Carys. Sorry.`

Can you talk to Earth?

`No, Carys. Sorry.`

She screams in frustration, the sound distorting inside her helmet and through their audio. *Why not?*

`My receptor was damaged in the accident. I`

believe Max was trying to fix it when we lost oxygen, Carys.

Fuck.

Pardon, Carys?

Sorry, Osric. Typo.

No problem, Carys.

We've got a big problem, Osric. Can you help?

How would you like me to help, Carys?

She sighs. 'Max – I'm going round in circles talking to this thing.'

He rubs the sleeve of her suit. 'I didn't have time to connect my flex, Cari, so you'll have to, for now. Find out anything you can. Any vehicles in the neighbourhood?'

She shakes her head.

Osric, she flexes, *can you send the* Laertes *to us?*

Negative, Carys. Navigation systems are unresponsive.

Can you move her?

Negative. Navigation systems are unresponsive.

Turn her?

Negative. Navigation systems are unresponsive, including the guidance system that would allow me to rotate the *Laertes*.

If she could bury her hands in her hair, she would, but they're held captive in gloves, her tawny plait encased in the glass fishbowl helmet. The small daisy tucked behind the helix of her ear has fallen slightly out of place. *Can you help us calculate how to get back to the ship?*

Carys? If I might suggest, something more urgent is pressing—

Calculate how to get back to the ship, Osric.

Situational Analysis is telling me the trajectory you're on allows no path back to the *Laertes* without nitrogen thrusters, Carys. Have you got nitrogen thrusters, Carys?

Can you stop putting my name at the end of every sentence, Osric?

Certainly.

Thank you. No, we don't have propellant. Any other way?

Please wait while Situational Analysis calculates.

Hurry. 'Osric says we can't get back to the ship without thrusters.'

Max grimaces. 'Definitely not?'

Carys? Something more urgent is pressing—

Hang on. 'What else can we try? Osric says the navigation systems are offline. Shall I ask if—'

Carys?

What, Osric?

Situational Analysis is showing that your air canisters are not full.

We were outside on the Laertes *for quite a long time.*

The sum of the remaining air and the used oxygen does not equal the cumulative total.

What do you mean? Speak European, Osric. Please.

Your air canisters were under-filled.

What?

Additionally, Situational Analysis detects they are leaking.

'What?' Surprise makes her forget that Osric can't hear, so she quickly types again. *What?*

You both have damage to your oxygen canisters, Carys.

How much air do we have left?

'Cari?' Max says.

Calculating . . .

Hurry, Osric.

I'm afraid you have only ninety minutes of air remaining, Carys.

Two

Ninety minutes

'Cari. What happened?' Max grips her shoulders, but she cannot be calmed. 'What did Osric say?'

`Sorry for saying 'Carys', Carys.`

'Ninety minutes,' she says, taking big, racking breaths. 'We've only got enough air to last us ninety minutes.'

He reels back, stunned. 'Can't be. It can't be. We should have at least four or five hours. We—'

'We're going to die, Max. Really soon.' She holds back tears as he searches for the right words.

'We'll have to get back to the ship right away,' he says finally. 'First things first, you need to stop panicking. You're using up your air more quickly.'

'Our air is leaking.'

He jolts. 'Is it? Now?'

'Now. Osric says there's a leak in the tanks.'

'Both?' he asks.

'Both.'

'Fuck.' This time it's Max who swears. 'We'd better patch them immediately.' He looks at her, gauging the extent of her panic. 'Shall I find the hole in yours while you catch your breath?'

'No, it's okay,' she says, her heart clattering, 'I'll do yours first.' Carys loosens their tether and they roll away from one another almost balletically. 'Make a shape like a snow angel,'

she says, taking him by the wrist and ankle. The single layer of fabric that sits against his skin and forms a pressurized, resistant surface against the vacuum of space, like a wetsuit crossed with chainmail but completely malleable for human movement, feels soft beneath her touch. 'Don't let go of my hand.'

Max stretches out his hands and feet, hovering at her waist height. Carys bends so the surface of his suit is at eye-level, still holding his hand. It's not the easiest thing to do, as they're not still – they're falling in perpetual motion, in darkness, in what feels like a godless place outside Earth.

Moving quickly, she runs her hand and her eyes across his metallic silver pack. Each section is divided into smooth, moulded grooves, the blue readouts on the side the only dash of colour. Carys searches all the way round, until she catches sight of it, right at the bottom: a small puff of escaping air molecules, almost imperceptible to the naked eye, were she not searching desperately for it, and were the molecules not floating in their newfound freedom from gravity. 'Got it.' She pulls tape from the pocket on her knee, a patch kit always within reach, and smooths it over the canister, making sure the molecules can't escape round the sides.

'Done?' Max asks.

Osric, she flexes, *did that fix the leak?*

The blue text appears on her glass, accompanied by the somehow soothing *ping*. `Affirmative, Carys.`

'Done.' She nods to Max, exhaling hard.

'We'd better do yours.'

She hesitates. 'It wasn't meant to be like this – we're not even supposed to be here.'

'Come on, Cari.'

'We've only got ninety minutes of air remaining.' Finally a

sob escapes, a short burst drowning out his reassuring talk, his air of calm – because this is what he does under duress. Detaching himself from confrontation, from stress, from her overwhelming emotion: this is what he does. He'll make a joke in a minute.

'Well, I don't know about you,' he says, 'but I'll be putting a very bad review of space travel on the MindShare.'

'Shut up, Max,' she says, though his predictability soothes her somewhat. 'This is no time for your shitty sense of humour.'

'I know.'

His jokes always appeared at the worst times: during astronaut training; at funerals; the first time they'd met.

'What are we going to do?'

'We're going to calm down, regroup, and then I'm going to save you.' He smiles. 'Like I always do.'



They'd met three months into Rotation when, as a new resident in a new European city, Carys was picking up more languages in the region's language lab. 'My colleague has moved here from Voivode 11,' Carys had said to the instructor, 'so I need to learn modern Greek, please.' Styled like a retro coffee-shop chain, the Voivode's language lab had generic downlighting, faux-leather sofas, and the smell of a thousand low-quality Arabica beans over-roasting in the skillet. A jaunty poster behind the counter declared: 'Learning five languages lets you talk to 78 per cent of Earth's population.'

The instructor emitted a beep and green light, then guides and courses promptly started projecting at Carys's workstation.

'Thank you.' She pulled the flex across her hands and began the thankless task of copying out the Greek alphabet over and over. Halfway through her third go, she remembered dinner. A waterfall of real-time information moved across three walls – 'Wall Rivers' displaying a constant, scrolling feed of news, weather and updates. Carys quickly flexed a short query on the MindShare, the local channel. *Does anyone know where you can buy goose fat in Voivode 6?* The words appeared in perfect Spanish, where they pulsed for a few seconds on the wall before being lost in the river of comments, questions and anecdotes in multiple languages taking place all over the Voivodeship. She reached omega and reversed back up the Greek alphabet.

Ping. Carys looked up; someone had answered.

What do you need goose fat for, in this day and age? It was written in French.

Feeling rebellious, she flexed back in Catalan: *Cooking.*

Ping. Romanian. *Why are you cooking, in this day and age?*

Roast potatoes. Portuguese.

I said why *are you cooking?* German.

Her Germanics less strong, Carys switched to Italian, the start of a smile twitching the corners of her mouth. *New neighbours. I'd like to serve them crispy roast potatoes. Any ideas?*

Italian, again. *About your new neighbours? None. Sorry.*

In a game of linguistic one-upmanship, this language repetition was a small victory, and she smiled openly this time. *Perhaps you're one of my neighbours. Maybe later I'll serve you a roast potato so rubbery it will be like chewing a bouncy ball. Then would you wish you'd helped me track down some goose fat?*

Ping. *I don't trust strangers to cook for me.*

Surely strangers cook for you at the Rotation restaurants? she flexed.

Not really. I'm a chef, so it's easy.

Carys paused. *You work at the RR?*

Yep.

Great. Perhaps you can help me with some cooking advice. Do you happen to know where I might find some goose fat around here?

No answer.

Please? She added a smiley face to soften the tone.

Ping. *Try the classic supermarket just off the Passeig.*

Thank you.

They even sell food in tins, if you can believe that, in this day and age.

You're obsessed with 'this day and age', Carys flexed back. *That's three times.*

Who isn't? So much has changed.

True. Thanks for your help, I'll head to the supermarket later. She finished six iterations of the Greek alphabet and removed the mesh from her wrists, roast potatoes in seven languages on the brain.

Carys stepped out into a beautiful September evening, the tickle of a breeze drifting through the ruins. Smooth glass and steel structures erupted out of bricks and foundations from buildings long gone, their ghost-like shells preserved and structurally supported with all-new interiors. Here and there, the remains of narrow alleyways and tall, plastered walls jutted up and out, strengthened by steel girders. Inside, the ruins contained rooms formed from vast sheets of glass: a gleaming modernity Russian-dolled within fractured, ancient structures.

The light was fading to an orange hue as she walked across the café-filled squares, hugging bare forearms to her chest as her chip lagged behind, pausing her on a corner. 'Cheer up, love, it might never happen,' came a call, and she turned her wrist over with irritation.

'If the meteors start wiping out humanity, I know who I want to be first,' she muttered, as her chip finally updated her on which way to go.

Reaching a wide, cobbled street lined with trees, Carys turned off into a row of shops, the fronts sagging with age and propped up by steel girders. A multi-coloured curtain of beads marked a small entrance, with *Fox Supermarkets* illuminated above the window. A newspaper placard stood outside, the headline flashing: 'US fallout finally at safe levels'.

Old-fashioned wire baskets and trolleys lined either side of the doorway. She pushed aside the beads with a rhythmic crackle and headed into the supermarket.

In aisle eight, a man was kneeling on the floor stacking canned goods. 'Sorry to bother you,' she said, 'but can you point me in the direction of goose fat, if you have it?'

He turned. Dark, slightly curly hair, falling down in front of blue eyes already entertained, like she'd missed the joke. 'You must be Carys.' He finished stacking a small shelf with tins and, standing, handed one to her. 'We spoke earlier. Hi.'

She stretched out her hand, baffled, and took the tin. 'You – wait. What?'

'On the MindShare.'

'But didn't you say . . . Aren't you a chef? At the RR?'

'No. Yes. Nearly.' He had the grace to blush. 'At least, I will be. I did all the training on my last Rotation, so I'm hoping the restaurants here will take me on. As soon as someone helps

me with the family business,' he gestured at the shop around him, 'I'll be off, I hope.'

'Right,' she said, turning the tin of goose fat in her hand. 'I hope you find someone.'

'Thanks,' he said. 'What do you do?'

She hesitated. 'I fly.'

'Kites?'

'Shuttles.'

He made an impressed face. 'Cool.'

Carys took a small step backwards. 'I hate to run, but I'm late getting this dinner started. Thanks for your help, and . . . it's nice to meet you.'

'No problem. I'm Max, by the way.'

'Carys.' She stuck her hand out awkwardly, and he shook it. 'How did you find my query?' she said.

'Queries with food keywords are routed here, on the MindShare. They're flagged for the shops and restaurants to answer.'

'That makes sense.' She nodded, turned and started to walk away. 'Thank you.'

'And,' he called, at her back, 'your profile picture is cute, so that helped.'

Carys looked over her shoulder. 'Shop manager, chef *and* online stalker? You must be busy,' she said, though her tone was light.

'Three full-time jobs,' he said. 'Plus you responded when I wrote in French – the language of my last Rotation.'

She raised an eyebrow and turned back to face him. 'Really? I presumed you were using the translation chip for our conversation.' She gestured at his wrist.

'Nope.'

'Me neither,' she said, and they both smiled. 'I was based in V8, too. Two Rotations ago. Down in the south, by the sea.'

'I spent three years in Paris. It's where I learned to cook – I make a mean soufflé.'

After a beat, she said, 'Listen, I'm having a few of my new neighbours over for dinner tonight. Just a bunch of people, to help us make friends. Nothing fancy, I don't know any of them from Adam. Would you like to come?'

'I'd love to. Who's Adam?'

'It's an expression. But I can see from your grin that you know that, and you're teasing me. I'm adding teasing to the list next to light stalking. So tonight – eight p.m.? I'll flex you the address. Bring something. Anything.' She repeated the nodding-turning-walking routine. 'Good. See you later.'

Candlelight echoed off six crystal wine glasses and water tumblers – the dinner party was in full swing. Two of Carys's living-room walls were given over to Wall Rivers: huge, in-built screens, one showing a stream of news, the other the chatter of the MindShare – she had turned the text on both walls a warm orange. The building's former barrio front cast shadows of balcony bars into the room, the noise of the sea snatching through the ancient shutters. Serving dishes offered a buffet of roast chicken, vegetables, Yorkshire puddings and Carys's much-heralded roast potatoes.

'Yorkshire puddings with chicken?' said Liljana, one of Carys's new colleagues. 'Isn't that a little . . . ?'

'Unconventional,' said John, a structural engineer and her new opposite neighbour, as he reached for the serving spoon. 'Where I'm from you eat what you like, and sod the conventions.'

'Where are you from, John?' said Carys, shooting him a look of gratitude.

John shifted uncomfortably. 'Well, like all of us, I don't really know. But my first memory is from Voivode 3. I was five. My nana took me to get fish and chips, but I only wanted pudding. I was fussy, I hadn't eaten a full meal for *ages*. The chef at the RR put the two together and gave me a deep-fried chocolate bar, with chips.' Everyone round the table started laughing. 'I know. But I was young, and it did the trick – it got me to clear my plate. Nana rewarded me for finishing a meal, so I cleared my plate for the rest of the month.'

'I'll drink to that.' Liljana raised her glass, and the table followed. 'To clearing your plate.'

John beamed as the group clinked glasses. 'What about you, Liljana, where have you moved here from?'

'It's pronounced "Lil-*i*-ana",' she corrected. 'I know it looks different written on the MindShare.'

'Apologies, Liljana.' He got it right this time. 'It's a pretty name.'

'My parents were on Rotation by the Adriatic when I was conceived, hence the name, though my heritage is pure African. I last lived in Voivode 1.'

'Heritage,' mused Olivier, whom Carys had met at the language lab and invited along on a polite whim. 'Us third-generation Europeans don't really get to talk about heritage all that much.'

'Voivode 1?' said Carys to Liljana, ignoring Olivier's interjection. 'How did you find life in the central Voivode?'

'Utopian,' said Liljana, and the table laughed. 'Very proud, still.'

'And so we should be,' said John. 'Living freely, independ-

ently, in ever-changing, mixed communities – lots to be proud of.'

'Hear, hear,' said Liljana, before gently posing the utopian pledge: 'In whose name do you act?'

'Not God, not king, or country,' the group responded.

'In whose name?'

'My own.'

Olivier took the opportunity to pour himself more wine. 'But it is interesting, is it not,' he said, swirling Pinot Grigio in his glass, 'that we no longer talk about where we're *from* but where we have been?'

'That's the joy of Rotation,' said Max. 'Seeing the world, living in different places, no three years the same . . .'

Astrid sat forward. 'I was named in the northern Voivodes, and on my sixth Rotation I was sent back there. It was beautiful, living once again in Scandinavia for a little while. But very cold.'

The group laughed. 'Where's the coldest place you've lived?' asked John.

'Russia,' said Liljana, 'V13. The Space Agency offices there frequently hit minus ten.'

Olivier shivered. 'Ireland.'

Carys raised an eyebrow. 'Ireland? The coldest?'

'Lightweight,' tittered Astrid. 'I've been there and it was positively balmy.'

'I lived in Voivode 5 three Rotations ago, and it was freezing,' insisted Olivier. 'Did you go to a bar on the River Liffey, where they sing folk music?'

Astrid shook her head.

He was undeterred. 'Truly a fantastic place.' He glugged some wine and slid from his chair. 'Carys, I think you would

like it. I sang a song there once – a classic love song. I will sing it to you now.'

Oh, god. 'Really, there's no need. Max brought pudding—'

Olivier picked up a guitar and, as Carys cursed her mother for making her look after the damn thing, he began strumming and walking towards her.

Oh, god, oh, god. She prayed fervently that he wouldn't sing directly at her. As he opened his mouth and began to sing—

'Let me help,' said Max, moving to clear the plates in front of Carys, subtly shifting between her and her admirer. Looking around the table, he asked, 'Anyone for dessert?'

'What a great idea,' she said.

'Perhaps you could give me a hand,' he replied, as Olivier strummed violently on the guitar behind them.

'Certainly.' She tried to edge out from where Olivier was still performing but he leaned in, wine fumes swirling on his breath.

As Carys recoiled, Max reached across and put his fingers over the frets, and the sound fell away with a muted metallic *waaaah*. Carys's suitor stopped in confusion. 'Dessert?' Max asked sweetly.

Defeated, Olivier slumped back into his chair, and Astrid patted his wrist. 'Some people don't understand great art.' She topped up his wine glass, turning her body towards his. 'They just don't.'

Max and Carys carried the plates into the kitchen, and she pulled the door shut behind them. She leaned back against it and exhaled. Max joined her. 'Bloody hell,' she said, looking up at the ceiling. 'That was intense. Thank you.'

'I can't believe people do that at civilized dinner parties. Do you think,' he went on, 'he wanted us to join in and . . . jam? I

could've jumped in on some bongos, Liljana could've clacked together some spoons as a makeshift maraca . . .'

'Olivier's head could be rammed between some huge cymbals . . .'

'That could certainly be arranged.'

'I could leap on the keys . . .'

'You play the piano?'

Carys nodded.

'That's cool. Where is it?'

She stretched her fingers, still holding the plates, and smiled.

'Oh, of course. You can play the keys anywhere. It's just – you had a traditional guitar. In the other room.'

'That's my mum's. We swap, depending on who's in the cooler climate. She says humidity wrecks the instrument, or something. She's obsessed by it, actually. I'm the guardian of Gwen's guitar, for a limited period only.'

'So she'd be sad if she knew the abuse it's seen tonight?' They laughed again, quietly, and Carys put the plates by the sink. Max flicked out a cotton tea towel and placed it over his shoulder as he laid out six dessert bowls, humming Olivier's tune, and they both giggled. 'Where's your family now?'

She propped herself against the counter, watching him fill and dress the bowls. 'My mum and dad live in V14, this time. My brother is working on the aid teams in the former United States—'

'Shit. Really?'

'Yes. We haven't heard from him in a while – as expected, I guess, but it's hard. I suppose comms isn't as important as getting food and water to survivors. My sister is in the Portuguese Voivode.'

'Ah,' said Max, as he ran the tea towel around the rim of the bowls with his finger. 'Hence your mad Portuguese skills earlier, on the MindShare.'

She smiled. 'You caught that, huh?'

'How many languages can you speak, anyway?'

'Five, maybe? Six? Soon to be six. I've started learning Greek. Can you really speak all those languages?'

'Do I look like someone who relies on their chip to translate?' He raised his eyebrows.

'No,' she said, appraising him. 'You look like someone who works hard.' She reached out and turned over his hand. 'A grafter.' She realized how cheesy this was, and blushed. 'Someone who earns their keep. Who keeps a shop running because you promised you would.' She paused. 'Am I close?'

'Closer than most people.'

'Really?'

'Yes. Mainly because you're standing about a foot away from me.' She rolled her eyes, and a clank of laughter from the next room brought them back. 'So,' he said, in a different voice, 'you fly shuttles, dislike being serenaded, and ask people who've lived on Rotation their whole lives where they're from?' He tilted his head, looking at her speculatively.

'Ah,' she said, starting to wipe the counter. 'I always forget that when I'm around people like Liljana I have a huge tendency to put my foot in my mouth.'

'What do you mean, "people like Liljana"?'

'Proud. Utopian. Believers.'

Max tilted his head. 'People like me, then.'

'Yeah?'

'Yeah,' he said. 'My family . . . We're passionate about Rotation, and why it matters.'

'Moving around, living alone in different cities matters?'

'Yes.'

Carys shrugged, her face neutral. 'Then my upbringing was probably a little different from yours.'

'How so?'

She moved the roasting dish, stirring the fats and oils, and the smell of roast chicken rose up again in the kitchen. 'That's a whole other story for a whole other time. Shall we get this dessert out?'

Something played across his face, as he deftly picked up four bowls and balanced them across his wrist and forearm. 'Sure. And perhaps later you can tell me about your heritage.'

'Perhaps,' Carys said lightly, heading towards the kitchen door with the other two, 'but please don't say "heritage" around Olivier. You'll send us third-generation Europeans over the edge.'



'That's right,' says Carys. 'You've always saved me, Max. A real white knight.' The dusk of stars surrounds them as they fall, suspended like puppets on the string of space. 'But this is more serious than my roast potatoes.'

'At least you're a little calmer,' he says, 'and using the air more wisely.'

'All right,' she says, 'you can stop patronizing me. I'm back. I'm here. I'm breathing.' She looks around at the darkness, then back to the blue readout on their air supply. 'What the hell are we going to do?'

'Don't worry,' says Max. 'I have a plan.'