

Family Continues:Caroline  
Vincent and Catherine's Great- Granddaughter

by PearlAnn SnowStar

She stood looking in the mirror. Long blonde hair, blue- eyed and a face that was furry with lion features. Her blonde hair flowed loosely around her. She was debating whether or not to put it in a ponytail, as she usually did.

A phone rang and she sighed, turned and walked over to a small table where a tablet was vibrating as well as ringing a tune. She looked and saw it was Grandfather Jacob who was calling.

She smiled as she picked it up.

“Grandfather, are you ok? What are you calling about? Is it about the new tunnels?”

“Hey. slow down, remember I am not so young anymore. I just called to see how you are doing and,” paused “well, I know it was last week that we talked, but..”

“Grandfather, you sound...worried.”

“Yes, I am. You are so bold even for these times.”

“It's almost the 22<sup>nd</sup> century. Why not be bold? We have Moon Base Armstrong and Mars is now being set up, although they do not know if it should be called Rider or Spirit or Freedom Colony.”

“True, but...”

“Remember, it was my choice to take a chance and work toward and apply for the space agency. Now there is another course of action I have been thinking about and I just have not gotten a chance to discuss it with you. Grandfather, as I told you last week, this is something I want and needed to do.”

“Your mother is so concerned, as is your father. Are...are they..”

“Grandfather, no one is experimenting on me. At least not here on the space station. But, I can guarantee that if I go to certain places on Earth, well, let's just say the One Earth Union is still not widely accepted, nor its rules about respecting different types of intelligent species” Caroline sighed. “We still pride ourselves on being called Americans and not Earth World. It's as I told you, Grandfather, up here I am much safer than down below. And Grandfather, I would like to talk to you as there is a decision I need to make.”

“Decision? What decision? Another one that is daring? I thought being in orbit around the Earth was all the excitement you needed?”

“It is something so huge. The mission will be announced once details are straightened out and a crew is picked. With all the ecological disasters Earth has faced as well as governmental changes, this next step is going to make those pale in comparison. And I believe it must be taken, even if we are not really ready.”

“Can you give me a hint? You were so evasive the last time we talked and it bothered me.”

“Grandfather, you know they monitor us, even our private phones.” Caroline quickly added, “What would you say if I told you they possibly made contact with another, non-human species, who has invited us to the party?”

“Party?”

“Contact with? Other intelligent species.”

“Contact?”

“Yes, contact. And I am so pleased that our authorities did not attack it, nor dissect it or anything bad like caging it. They actually opened up a dialog with it.”

“Is it...like you?”

“I don’t know...but, well...I just have to find out. Look, I would like to chat, but I have my duties to do and later there are more tests.”

“Tests? What tests?”

“Grandfather...”

“Just be careful, please.”

“I will be fine, Grandfather...Really, and you sound so much like your namesake.”

“I am not a worry wart like he was. And actually, he did a fine job keeping our community together. But really, I still feel that if he would have accepted my mother into the community sooner, and if he would have not made father so insecure about having a life, a family... Well, let’s just say my parents would not have had to endure so much pain.”

“Grandfather, I know the stories, remember....Your mother came back and now you have a brother and a sister who love you and you have such wonderful memories.”

“Some memories are not so pleasant...”

"Grandfather, has anyone placed me in a cage? No. Has anyone conducted experiments on me? No."

“Still you are up on a space station. We can't reach you if something happens.”

“Look, tell everyone I am ok. And Grandfather, just to let you know, I just talked with my parents yesterday. And we had a long talk about all of this, yet they, too, keep worrying. I am telling you, once again. I am safe.” Caroline paused then continued. “You know I like to talk for a long time, but right now, I must attend to my duties and not be late. I love you and appreciate you calling. You do make me smile.”

“So it's bye bye, Grandfather, I have work to do. I called at the wrong time. But I was really concerned and could not wait to call during the evening hours, as you told us to.”

“Grandfather, I really do appreciate you calling me but, yes right now I do have things I must do. Please remind everyone I love them and I miss them, too.”

"It sounds like you have to end this call quickly. I just started it. Can't we talk?"

“Later, Grandfather, remember I told you I have job duties to do. And there is an appointment for a medical exam afterwards. Please, don't get angry or upset with me, but I have to call you back later today. Then we can continue this conversation.”

“Well, I do not like these tests. Why you agreed to them is beyond me. If my father were still around, he would not permit this.”

“It's required. And besides, I think your father would have let me make my own choices?”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“Well, mother would not have approved.”

Caroline was getting exasperated. She really had to go. But she calmed herself down.

"I love you, Caroline. I just worry so. You know, you were named after your great-great-grandmother on my mother's side."

"Grandfather..."

"Ok, time's a-wasting I know. Just remember, I love you."

"I will be fine. Grandfather...really I don't want you to worry, ok?"

"You know, there wasn't even a telephone in the tunnels; no signal could get through. Then this new- found technology using something called a, called a ..."

"A tablet. Look, thanks for checking up on me. Give everyone my love and convince my father he does not have to storm the gates of heaven, so to speak and bring me back down to Earth. Really, I am all right. I am not a prisoner." Caroline paused then continued, " I would like to keep talking but I do have an appointment to keep. Know that I love you and I do miss everyone all so much.."

Grandfather Jacob sighed. "No long talk, just hi and goodbye."

Caroline smiled. "Yes, we could keep on going back and forth about this. But, really, I must go."

"I hate that most of all. "

"Give my love to grandmother and Uncle Charles and Aunt Caroline And please let my parents know that you still could not talk me out of this course of action."

"Your parents? No, I was concerned too. I just can't talk you out of anything once your mind is set up. Why does our family keep wanting to climb to the highest branch on a tree?"

"Grandfather," Caroline tried to reassure him, "I love you, have a good day."

"Oh, ok." He got quiet.

"Grandfather, again, please do not worry. Have a good day. Love you."

"I love you too."

"Love you lots." He sounded so sad. But she knew he could keep repeating himself and she really had to go. She quickly said, "Bye" and then disconnected the call.

She remembered what Uncle Charles said about his brother. That he was just concerned for all of them. Being the eldest, he took over the responsibility that his father had and he led the community until Aunt Caroline took over this year. She sighed. If

she was accepted and she decided to accept and go on this new mission, it was going to be extremely hard not to feel like she had abandoned her family, her community. She recalled how once, when she left the community to go to school, so many people above, like now, stared at her and tried politely to keep from staring. Others quickly turned away when she looked at them. Still others suggested she even surgery. Or there was some type of procedure to get rid of excess hair. That was so strange. Even now, during this age, women were supposed to avoid being “hairy”. So much for diversity. Why couldn’t she be accepted, like she was in the tunnels below the city. Not to mention what they put down for her “Race”-Hybrid: part Human/Unknown Species.

She sighed and put the tablet back in the drawer and then walked over to the sliding door. She looked around the room. What did dad say? That it was like a nun’s quarters? At least it was not like the original International Space Station. That one was so cramped. Just modules to “fly” through and no nice quarters to sleep in and be alone. No areas to eat or to have meetings or to exercise. She was grateful that they built this new station. Plus, it had Earth’s gravity! Oh yes, and the Medical Room.

She took a look around her quarters. Everything was secured. Oops, left the drawer open. Walking back, she closed and then locked the drawer. Just in case gravity went out. She also moved the chair in and locked it to the table. Ok, now she was ready.

Walking to the sliding door, she pressed a button on an intercom on the wall by the door and the door slid open.

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She was sitting on her bed. What a busy day. She was so tired. A while ago she had called Grandfather Jacob and had a long talk with him. She wanted to sleep, but now, she had a major decision to make. Out of the ten people who came with her, only six would be accepted for this new mission. They advised her that she was one of the six, and that she should get ready to go to Moon Base Armstrong tomorrow if she made the decision to accept the mission. It was there she could communicate with her family and let them know she was not coming home but going to the stars. If she said yes. If she said no, she would go back to the Academy on Earth and would have to be quiet until the announcement of the mission would be made known to the public.

What amazed her was the gray alien lady. She was so small, her eyes so black and so delicate. Plus, she “talked” to you via telepathy. That unnerved her a bit. What did she say to call her? Terrana. And that it was ok to speak to her, but she would only respond via the mind. Caroline hoped that any attention from fellow Earth beings would now just go away so she could just relax and do her duties. But that did not happen. She sensed from Terrana that she was wanted on this mission because she was “different.” That Earth was trying to make an impression and used her for that. Terrana was very intelligent. And Caroline felt that Terrana was also sensing how other humans had treated her. Caroline tried to concentrate on the mission. She did not want

Terrana to know about her special community. In fact, the look on Terrana's face told her that she had succeeded. Terrana telepathed something to the Commander, who then told Caroline that Terrana found it amazing that she could not fully read her mind. That was a relief.

She thought about everything that had happened up to now. Four years of expensive college. Acceptance into the Space Academy as an Exo-Biologist. And now a decision had to be made. And by morning. That unnerved her. So quickly. How could anyone think this through logically? She needed someone to talk to. But her family? They all would want her to say no for their own reasons. Make a list? It would just deprive her of sleep going over and over it in her head. Then she thought of something. There were two people she could count on to offer advice and to listen. But they were dead. She got up and unlocked the drawer and pulled out the tablet. Looking through the various apps she had on the tablet, she found what she was looking for. The "Tunnel App". She knew the government knew how to get on computer devices, so she kept the App as generic as possible. No references of where her family was except for the home above. And the pictures. She avoided as much as possible any mention of her great grandfather and tunnels. Except for one special picture named Bluebird. That would make someone think it was just a "Beauty and the Beast" picture, not a "real" living couple. Found it. The painting of Vincent and Catherine that now hung in the new Grand Hall below. They were so young, beautiful Catherine in front of handsome Vincent. The outfits seemed from times much older than the 1980s. It was magical. You could tell by how he held her close and how she was so content in his arms that they truly loved each other. Perfect soul mates. For all eternity.

Caroline smiled as she studied the picture. She bore some resemblance to him. Grandfather Jacob said his parents told him of the trials they had to face. How his mom "died" and came back. How she stayed below. About their friend Diana who eventually became a helper. How she eventually found someone to love. All Devin had to do was take one look at her and that was it. Devin. Vincent's brother. She sighed. The tunnel world had survived so much. Hurricanes, flooding, pandemics, even the terrible ecological disaster of 2050. Her father said dad was always trying to look out for the community as his dad placed him in charge when he was getting older. He looked out for everyone. Especially for his brother Charles and sister Caroline. Uncle Charles. Even he did not understand her "boldness". The one person who looked like her besides Great Grandfather. He chose to stay below, rarely venturing on top. Grandfather Jacob and Grandmother Linda were always saying how much their children, as well as Uncle Charles and Aunt Caroline's children, were only like Catherine. Human. That was because they knew how the world on top, should they want to venture up, would treat someone so "special".

Then she was born. And she was trouble from the moment she cried out. At least, that was what she kept hearing since she was young. She had been schooled like most of the tunnel children down below until the Act of 2070. She insisted that she wanted to go to high school on top and after much discussion with the community, her parents relented and let her go. But, she had to be cautious. They told her it was like in the

1960s when desegregation occurred. There were going to be haters. She learned to control her emotions and avoid attacking anyone when they teased and tormented her with cruel words. Sometimes she braced herself for a fight, a beating, but that, luckily, did not happen. It all took a toll on her. To learn to back down. It was only when she decided to pursue science and took the classes did she feel like herself. Like she was following her heart. She survived. Got good grades. Got accepted into college then the Academy. No one kidnapped her and took her to a secret laboratory. But most of the people at school, at the Academy, still stared at her, and when she looked back, they averted their eyes. Silent condemnation, hate? She wondered why people mostly hated those who were "different." In college and at the Academy she was tolerated by most, accepted by few. But she did make friends. But they were not friends she could bring below. She could not fully trust them.

But, if they were going into space, they had to learn to accept different species. She always felt that she was being used by the scientific community as some kind of alien bait. Look, come talk to us, we have changed. We are open to new beings. Yeah, right. Maybe things were changing real fast, but people, well, they still were prejudiced. Only the prejudices changed over time.

The portrait painted by a ghost. She recalled what Grandfather read to her about the painting..."Over our heads will float the blue bird, singing of beautiful and impossible things, of things that are lovely and that never happen, of things that are not and that should be." It was from Oscar Wilde.

Now she had to decide if she should go on this brave new mission. Travel with Terrana and meet her people along with five other brave souls. To represent the Earth and to travel in space, learning new things and coming back to Earth after many years, to bring new knowledge about new worlds and new discoveries. But, it would be at least 50 years, maybe more, before they would return. If at all. Space was dangerous. And they would be going through a portal, a wormhole that would take them to a new place. A new galaxy. However, they would have to take a different wormhole to get back and that would bend time and space, yet, they would not get back to the same time they left. Time would go by fast on Earth. For the crew on this mission, it would only be a year.

Yes, it was her looks that favored her. She sort of guessed she would be one of the six picked because of that. They still offered her a chance to "decide." She knew they wanted her to say yes. But what if she said no? And how to know if she was truly making a choice she wanted to make and not being influenced by anyone?

Going with a non-human, not as an abductee or experiment but as an actual crew member from Earth. To go out across space, a new star system. To learn and interact with those people. Maybe find people like her? And if she did survive and returned back to Earth, would the tunnels still be there? Would someone from the community be around to accept her back if she told them who she was and where she went and why it took so long to get back? Grandfather, her great aunt and great uncle, possibly her

parents too, and the other elders might be dead. And would her brother Jake and his lady still be around? Elderly, but still around? And the pathways would have changed. Would she get lost trying to find the new pathways? Would there still be sentries? Would even New York still exist, or civilization? What if the Earth had changed too much? Then again, would the Earth change? Or not. Heck, in the 20th century people thought there would be flying cars by the 21st century and that did not happen. Technology changed. But still some of the communities and countries were still around that were around as far back as the 18th, 19th centuries

This was a huge decision that needed to be discussed with someone familiar with her world, yet someone who would still leave the final decision to her.

She shut down the tablet and pulled out the drawer. As she laid the tablet down, she wondered. *Should I even attempt this?* What if this was still in her imagination? Then she would not be able to even have a different point of view. She closed and locked the drawer and laid down, and resting her head on the pillow, she closed her eyes.

“Ok, I am going to think about you two, as Grandfather Jacob told me to do,” she called out, but not too loudly, “Vincent, Catherine, your son, Jacob said that if we called out to you both, it might just be the time you are able to look through the veil dividing our worlds. So, if you can hear me, your great granddaughter, if you can see me here above the Earth, I am calling out to you. I need to make a decision by morning and I need to discuss it with someone familiar with the tunnel world. I don’t even know if you will come, but I am going to try. Come to me in my dreams if possible or come to me here. I hope you can feel my need to see you both.” Maybe this had to had to be done down below?

“Grandfather said that both of you are in the other dimension of the Spirit World watching over your family. I hope that it is not just in the tunnels. Can you feel me, see me? I am so scared, yet so excited. Grandfather said that he wanted what you wanted for all your descendants, to find someone to truly love, have a family if you want to, but at least to find love and if you can’t, to find some happiness. Well, I found happiness, but, well, it’s here, up above, in space. Of course, in the Spirit World, is there an up above? Down below? Space? Plus, I am not content like Uncle Charles, your son, to be happy staying below. Why? I just feel a calling to not only explore Earth, but more than Earth. Ever since I was young, I had plans. And that included exploring our ancestry. Vincent’s ancestry. To find the other half of me, what species is my other half? And I have had dreams of going to the stars.

“Once I realized the newly formed space program on Earth needed exo-biologists, I made that my major in school. The Space Academy needed and wanted bold adventurers as well. Like the ones that explored the Moon, Mars. Yet, I was so scared going to high school above. Even Uncle Charles did not like my request to go to school above, even with the new law.

“And they did tests. The first DNA test they did on me was just before I started high school. Those DNA tests. I was part human as well as part “Unknown Species.” They called me a Hybrid, a marvel, but sometimes I don’t feel marvelous.

“And my parents don’t like me being away for long periods of time and were not happy with me going to school. And now? Boy. are they upset with me going into space. With a dream to visit other planets. But, I am now 30. And I do want more than what Earth can offer. So my dilemma? I have to choose yes or no for a certain mission and it has to be tonight and I need unbiased guidance. I can’t get that with the family down there. And whatever way I go, someone is going to tell me I am selfish. Or might get angry at what I choose. I know that no matter which course I take, someone is going to not be about it. Yet, would it be all right for me to be happy?

“If I say yes, this would leave everyone I know unsure of where I will be. If I am well. I would like them to understand, but can they? If I say no, is it because I feel that it is what they want me to say? There are many times that I feel that they want me to just accept their plans for me. To stay as safe as possible. They want me to consider how it would feel if something happened to them and I could not be around to help them out. But, sometimes we can’t always protect the ones we love. Sometimes being safe is a death sentence, you die inside.

“I do want to dare to reach out to the unknown with faith I will find a landing spot should I falter, should I fall. There is a burning desire I feel inside of me telling me I can go out and be more than I dreamed possible. As T.S Elliot said, ‘Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.’”

She paused. “I have doubts. And I love my family, my community. I really don’t want to hurt them, yet, if I follow my heart I fear I may just do that. I need to discuss this with someone who knows what it is like to stand on the edge of a cliff and across is the place of your dreams, but to get there you must jump over a huge abyss. And I need to know if I should risk that jump or be safe. Maybe I am going to risk it all. Maybe I am going to fail. Am I being selfish? Delusional? Suicidal, even? Should I risk my loved ones being hurt by my saying yes. Or should I give up my dream to make them happy? I need someone to talk this over with who can know what it is like to risk it all. Because you two did, two worlds.” Carolyn sighed and then softly whispered,. “At the same time, I am so....scared. I really can’t decide. I can’t think logically.”

She turned on her side. “Can you even hear me up here?” She turned around and laid on her back, looking at the ceiling. “Remember their stories. Vincent, you accepted who you were. But me, I am just so curious. I am multi like you, part human, part what?

I feel as if to know what kind of ..being...I am I must know who we are. What we are. Where did we really come from? That way I can truly know who I am. Ok, I know we are more than physical, we are also spiritual. But I want to know and here I am now. I had so many questions since I was a child, since I could remember seeing myself in the mirror. Uncle Charles told me once that he, like his father, just accepted that he exists. I can't accept the idea that you, Vincent, were a lab experiment or something going wrong with our DNA, I won't. And I loved looking at the stars, reading about astrology and astronomy, even science fiction, fantasy. I could not stop reading, watching movies. Jules Verne to fairy tales like Beauty and the Beast to reading about spirituality, about angels, I read everything I could read and there is still so much to study. Carl Sagan, Sally Ride, Mae Jemison, Star Trek." She smiled. "You two may not have heard about the things I have discovered, read, watched. To look up at the stars and reach your arms out to them. To explore. To find my true place. So I studied science, exo-biology. Heck, in high school those teachers and some of the students thought it was so ..."perfect" a position for me." She closed her eyes.

"Vincent, you may have had ideas about who, what you were. But you just accepted that you lived. I can't do that. I wonder how you would feel about what I think about who we are. That there is a possibility that your parents maybe crashed-landed on this planet from somewhere far away. And then when they got here, of course they were captured and locked up. Maybe the government took them and experimented on them. Maybe our mother or father escaped. Or someone escaped. Maybe your parents were being held in some secret government lab that was in the New York City area. Maybe your mom as pregnant and about to give birth when she escaped. Maybe your father was killed and she had to escape alone. Or maybe she gave birth and then escaped. Or that there was a person who found her, barely alive, or maybe she died and they found just you and you were crying so much. Maybe seeing your mom and then you, they became afraid. Maybe they felt sorry for you because you were a baby and tried to keep you warm by dressing you in rags, then saw some government people looking around and did the only thing they could do at the time to hide you. I could go on and on."

She sighed. "How did the story go? Dressed in rags, found by St. Vincent's Hospital on a cold January night. You definitely were not meant to die, but live. But such a mystery for me to solve. The more I study science, the more I realize it must be balanced with unscientific thinking. I also realize we have to leave room for magic. Else how to explain ... .us? I have to go, to see who we are. I know that Earth has a lot of places to explore, but I really want to go to the stars. Like people in Star Trek. "To boldly go where no one has gone before."

She paused and thought about all that she had learned, about being here. Now. Maybe

she should just settle down and explore Earth. There were many things about Earth that were still mysterious. What did Grandmother Caroline say to her? “The spark, the seed that makes you want to explore, that could be because you need an excuse for finding who you are, instead of accepting that you live and that you are all that matters.” You want to explore the stars if you can because you want someone to tell you that you are special. Not realizing you are already special.

She felt tears falling down her cheeks. She clenched her fists into a tight ball. “Once in a lifetime, maybe many lifetimes. A chance that may never come up again.” She yawned. “I need sleep. But I have to make a yes or no decision. And yes, I will say it again, I am afraid. I will be in space with Terrana and others, humans. And those humans. They try to be polite, but none of them are my friends. Humans are not so kind to what appears different and frightening to them. Maybe that is why Terrana wants me, or maybe Terrana and her people are like that too? Maybe I am like that?”

“Catherine, Vincent, can you hear me?” She noticed she was talking very loudly now. But she did not care. “Am I more alien, beast than human? With our tunnel world changing as is the rest of the Earth, should I stay and help my family? We might soon be just another city on Earth, a spot no longer hidden. I could tell you things that have happened since you went into the Spirit World. Disasters, space, AI. How hard it is to have helpers now as everyone is having problems. Maybe I have to say no and sacrifice my dream to save a community of people who still care about each other. Maybe I have to trust that things will turn out ok. But maybe there are other grandchildren, other family members that can help out our community, so maybe it would be ok for me to go?” She was tired. Sleepy, yet not sleepy. She looked around the darkened room.

Think about the stories. That would help. Maybe there was a lesson, an insight that she could discover. Quietly, she said, “Perhaps I should be like my brother. He, too, is named Jacob and is a congressman, he helped passed a law that gives all sentients the right to exist on Earth without fear of being captured, tortured, experimented on. He is a few years older than me. Staying, living on top with his girlfriend. Mom and Dad love him so much and are so proud of him. He and his gal are helpers and love it. Mom brags about him all the time. I know she loves him more than me. Dad told me how nervous she was meeting Uncle Charles. I think she even saw both of you before you both died. I am so tired.”

Caroline paused, then continued. “I was told Mom was so happy my brother was normal. When I was born, I came suddenly. Mom wanted to have me on top, at home, but there was something Dad wanted to do for the Tunnels. I was told Mom insisted on

coming down with him, as she did not want to be alone, because she was going to give birth soon. The doctors above told her something that made her worried about the pregnancy. But, she came below and as she waited in a chamber for Dad to get done with whatever he was doing for the community, she went into labor.

“The others had to go and get a doctor and midwife to assist. Dad was also there to help out. He was so happy when I was born. He accepted me. I found out from others that when he handed me over to Mom she screamed in terror and did not want to even hold her crying daughter. Somehow my brother, who was very young, managed to get a chance to get into the room but he was concerned about mom with her screaming. Then he saw me crying in Dad’s arms. As others were calming my mother down, he asked Dad if he could come and see what he held in his arms. Dad brought me over to him, telling him this was his new baby sister. Mom had calmed down and watched as Dad showed me to him. Aunt Linda said the first word out of his mouth was, “Kitty.” And he smiled and then he gently touched my face, my hands. His acceptance of me got Mom to realize that this was her daughter, like it or not, and that she would have to accept me.

“Others told me she finally consented to hold me, nurse me. But even Dad told me that Mom gave him such a terrible look, yet he was relieved Mom accepted me at last. Dad was so happy I was not born on top. He was afraid that I would have “disappeared” from the hospital.

“Over time, Mom had adjusted and had gotten used to my “looks.” She got used to me. Dad kept telling me as I grew up that Mom did learn to love me, but every time I had questions or needed a hug or something, Dad was the one who was there. Mom kept telling me she was busy with my brother.

“Uncle Charles was there for me, too. He and Mom though, have a strained relationship. Even now. Dad keeps insisting that Mom loves me. But I always felt as if there was and will always be a big distance between us. I think she looks at me and wonders why I had to be the odd one among a family that seems normal except for a few “unusual types”. She was not cold but it was always so strange to see how Mom judged everyone by their looks.”

It hurt to think about that. Then Caroline thought about something else. Her Mom did meet the unusual family when Vincent and Catherine were in their late 90s. Didn’t she realize what could happen should she get pregnant? Was that part of her reason to say to yes, so she would not have to keep dealing with that part of her life? To run away from it all? Why keep going over and over about it? Yes or no?

Caroline went on aloud, "I know Charles was my Grandfather's first child and worried about the fact that he truly did not find someone until his 40s. He was wondering if he was going to be single for the rest of his life. Wondering if he would find love. He worked as a lab technician. Then he met Martha at a hot dog stand. She, too, was a lab technician for another company. So much younger than my Dad."

She smiled. "Uncle Charles told me that when Dad was born and named him Charles, he joked about how the family went from Vincent to Catherine to Jacob to Caroline to Margaret. Same names. The younger ones nicknamed Chuck or Vinnie or something like that. It made me laugh.

"I remembered being told how you, great grandmother Catherine died at 99. How Catherine died at 99. How great grandfather Vincent, roared so loud that they thought the roar was also heard up above, that was how the story went. Everyone came into the chamber and saw you on the bed sitting next to her. She had died peacefully in her sleep. No one was able to get you to leave the room as they confirmed that she had died. They finally got you to sit in a chair by the bed as they took her away for a proper burial down below where there were two spots, one for her and one for you. You just said nothing, watched as they took her away. Finally told your children to go and take care of Catherine. They left you and an hour later when they came to check on you, you were gone.

"It was said you could not endure the second and final time she died and had to go join her. It was such a double loss for the community. Sad, but accepted. As you two went through so much. Could not let her go before you, again. You had to follow her to the other side. I heard the story about the first time Catherine died and how she came back. That story still gives me the chills.

"Grandfather Jacob. One of the few besides Uncle Charles, who were so happy I looked like you, Vincent and his brother. I wondered if you both noticed before you both died that there were no grandchildren who looked like Vincent?"

"Memories. Ok Caroline, enough, you are getting as bad as Grandfather Jacob. Going over and over other things to avoid the main question. Should I follow my heart and say yes, go to the stars? Is it running away from facing those who would not accept me?"

"Not everybody is going to like you. That is life. That is what Dad said. Why can I not be as calm as Uncle Charles? Why is this part Human part Beast so desperate to find answers to her heritage? Maybe I want too much. It seems the ones that do love me want me to be accepting of the fact I just am and just only go so far in life and then

“settle down.” But I wanted to climb the highest branch, even to risk a fall if it should break. Maybe I just want someone’s approval should I say yes?”

She called out again. “Catherine, Vincent, truly I need to talk to someone who accepts that I have dreams. I need a guide. Guidance. Ok, some of us may never get a chance to fulfill some of their dreams. But maybe this dream can be fulfilled. I am calling out to you, as I agree with Grandfather Jacob. I know that if our ancestors are still around they can be guides to help their descendants out. No, I know that ancestor guides exist. Like guardian angels. Maybe they come to us in our dreams. Please come to me, even if just in my dream. I need your counsel, your advice, your opinions. Maybe just someone to listen to me. Maybe someone strong enough and convincing enough to stop me if this is wrong. I know you would accept me and respect my dreams.

“Please help me, advise me, give me some reassurance. Discuss this with me. Help me to make a wise choice.” She closed her eyes and said a prayer. “Catherine. Vincent, please come, please come.” It was a prayer she kept repeating until she finally fell asleep.

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She was in the tunnels, but not the ones she knew now, these were much older. She heard the banging on the pipes and knew they were communicating back and forth. So old, yet so familiar. She traveled down the passageway and then paused. A couple was walking toward her. Could it be? Vincent? Catherine? Her great grandparents? And they looked so young, like they were in their 30s. Catherine was wearing a white gown with a low neckline and Vincent was wearing a brown tunic over a white knit shirt. And brown pants. A hooded cape was over his outfit. They smiled at her. They saw her!

“Caroline,” Catherine said softly as she walked up to her, Vincent close behind. Catherine reached out to her and they hugged. “Hard to believe how our family continues on. And you look so beautiful.”

That amazed Caroline. Catherine thought she was beautiful. She took a deep breath. This was a dream, remember.

“You...know who I am?” Caroline asked.

Vincent said, “Yes.” God, that voice. So strong, yet so gentle.

“When Samhain came that one time, both Vincent and I decided to visit our three children. You were around 13 or older.” Catherine smiled. “If you would have known me when I was a lawyer. So many certainties I held onto. To think of even being here in the Spirit World. Here with Vincent and still able to cross over to the world I once knew. To look in on the family we started.”

“How could I have missed you both? Wait, I was in high school.”

“We saw the pictures of you that Jacob had,” Catherine said quietly.

“Grandfather Jacob, your son, told me that eventually your ‘certainties’ disappeared somewhat. Yet, that you also continued to cling to certain beliefs and realities.”

“Catherine still has a hard time believing in magic, even in this realm,” Vincent said with a smile.

“Maybe that is why we can’t choose our next lifepath yet?” Catherine asked, looking at him.

He just smiled, amused. “Perhaps we can stay here a long time, even here, we are still learning something new.” Caroline wondered if the thought of ever leaving Catherine was always in his mind and he just did not want to leave her, ever.

“Maybe our life would be a little less hectic and we could enjoy some more wonders in the physical world we would go to.” Catherine had a twinkle in her eye.

“Perhaps.” Vincent turned to Caroline. “We are not sure of what you ask of us?”

Caroline breathed deeply. “I am going to make a decision that will affect not just me, but everyone. I don’t know if you heard me before I fell asleep. It’s just that I do not have anyone to discuss this with, they all try to impose their ideas of how I should live my life. I want to find someone who will give me a chance to think things through, to just talk to me. Give me suggestions, advice, but let me have the final say. This decision will change my life in drastic ways. It will affect my family, Mom, Dad, Jake, my tunnel community.

“I know my parents, should I tell them about what happened tonight, about meeting you both, would just politely remind me it was only a dream. They don’t believe in any spiritual side. But I wanted to not only think rationally but to pray about my decision. I know I would get reminded by them that I have duties important to our community. That is why I needed someone to talk to who is open to many possibilities. Yet the risk, the price for this dream, desire, is immense.” She paused, then continued. “I know that Grandfather Jacob would be sad, maybe even feel hurt that I did not discuss this with him in our last conversation, but I could not say anything until now. And I have to give an answer by morning whether I will go or not go on this mission.”

“Oh, I hate last minute decisions like that,” Catherine said firmly. “They sometimes lead to wrong choices.”

“That could be true,” Caroline responded. “To say yes to this mission means that I will only be able to say my goodbyes to my immediate family. They would have to relay my farewell. There may be hurt feelings that others did not get a chance to discuss this with

me. Uncle Charles may even be so sad about this. To say no, I would be back on Earth and at the Academy down on Earth.

“I had an inkling about what was to happen. I heard things, but to get the actual confirmation, it came quickly. I went through so much to learn and prepare for something like this. I majored in exo-biology in college, got accepted into the Space Academy. Then I got called to come up to the space station. So many classmates I left on Earth are upset that they were not called upon for a special mission. But I doubt even they would know what was involved. There will be only six from Earth. One said yes, four are right now weighing whether to say yes or no as I am. In case any of us say no, they would have to find someone to take our place who would say yes.

“There is such an urgency about this mission. It’s as if it is Earth’s last grasp to rise above and be more. To soar among the stars with other species.” Caroline paused. “Well, at least with two other species. If I say yes, go with the others tomorrow, say my goodbyes with a video chat from the moon, right after that we will be off to the stars. They want us to leave before any announcement will be made on Earth, moon and Mars about what happened.” She looked at Vincent. “I feel that because I look like you, my family and community are trying to shelter me from the outside world. To keep me safe. I keep hearing from everyone, even Uncle Charles, that I should temper my dreams with reality. To not dream so high. Be realistic.”

“Sounds familiar, doesn’t it, Vincent?” Catherine glanced at him. He nodded. She turned to Caroline. “It seems you have been ready for something like this all of your life.”

“Yes,” Caroline said. “When my brother Jake had a special law passed to protect me, as well as Uncle Charles or anyone among our family, I grabbed at it and jumped at the chance to go to high school on top. Uncle Charles still stayed safely below. But I was lucky Dad convinced Mom to let me go. But what happened below. You would have thought that I was bringing great danger to not only myself, but our special world. Mom and others were upset that I went for it. If it were not for Grandfather Jacob and Dad reminding them over and over how close I would be, how careful when I return from on top, so that no one would follow me. And brother Jake would also keep an eye out for me, but he was so happy I used the Act of 2070. He felt like he probably scored an important political goal. And how the people reacted when they found out about his ‘mysterious’ sister...well...they at least knew why he fought for that law to be passed. It was so hard to get everyone accepting my choice at that time, what would they do now?”

“I do know how that feels,” Vincent calmly said. “But they love you and wanted no harm to come to you.”

“And sometimes that can stop you from your dreams,” Catherine spoke up.

Caroline sighed. “The secrecy of this mission was so that it would not be in danger. There are still people on Earth that act like they are from the 19th century or earlier.

Those people would get together and try to stop this. So even if I had wanted to say something before I came here, I swore not to. I just explained that I would be on the space station and that it was part of my education for the future. The reaction down below was worse than high school. And they could tell I was holding something back. I have been here for four days now, waiting to see if I would be accepted for the mission and waiting to see what was so special about it.

“I was told if I say yes, once on this mission, there will be no going back home or even communicating with the ones I love. We will be truly on our own. If I called Mom and Dad after talking to Grandfather Jacob, they might be alarmed. If I wake them up now call them, it would just make them more worried. Plus, there could be so much debating and arguing. They would also know I am not telling them everything. Yet, I just need to feel not so alone in this big decision. I wanted to call you both, as I felt you would listen to me, help me to decide, debate with me without trying to influence me one way or the other. I might even say no, but if I do, I want to feel that it is because I wanted to say no, not because I accepted someone’s decision for me.”

“What do you want to do?” Catherine asked. “If this did not come up, where do you see yourself years from now?”

“Great Grandmother, I would continue to study exo-biology, hoping to meet non-human species. Maybe they would be more intelligent than us. Maybe I would never get a chance to meet an intelligent species who was non-human. Also, I would want to risk flying out into space, literally, and see the stars, even if it is from this space station or on the moon or Mars. And should there be a chance to go beyond our galaxy, no matter how old I would be, I would want to go. I want to explore who and what I am.

“Where did we come from, Great Grandfather? I want to find our ancestry from your side, too, Great Grandmother. I want to know how I came to be.” She paused. “I was on Earth when this mission came up. And only a few people were selected to come up here and go through certain tests and exams to see if we were qualified and healthy enough for this mission. It was all so sudden. I knew the enormity of what the mission would be even if they did not give us full details.”

Catherine smiled. “Sounds like you have a plan.”

Caroline nodded. “I know our plans can change, adapt. But this huge sudden chance coming up and saying to me, hi, are you sure you really want this? I had to fight my own fears of what could be. What could happen to me. But whatever I choose, I really want my loved ones to accept my choice. And I really feel they might not. If I say yes, the pain might be so immense, I might not be forgiven for saying yes to the mission. I would not have wanted to cause such pain, but I must see things through. If I say no and let them know of what I was contemplating, it still might cause them pain that I did not reach out to them. I am even wondering now if my choices are because maybe I am selfish. Maybe even foolish. If you both can just give me some type of advice, guidance, help me out with trying to figure out what I should do. Yes or no? I really am in a

quandary. Saying yes makes me wonder if it is wrong to not want limitations and to risk it all. To be curious, wondering if there is more out there than we currently see. If I say no, is it because I am afraid?"

Caroline looked at them. "When Grandfather Jacob told me that if I truly believe, that it may be possible to contact you, that you might respond, I went for it. I just felt being on the other side, you would have a much better perspective on things. That you both would have a sense, an intuition about what might happen with either choice. Am I in grave danger if I say yes? Am I walking on a path that would lead to me being greatly harmed, even killed? Or maybe by saying yes, despite the dangers, is this what is meant for me to do?" Caroline had tears in her eyes. "Should I say no and would I have regrets about saying no for the rest of my life? I look at you both. Seeing you here, in my dreams, am I just dreaming that you both are our ancestral guides and that you are watching over our family? Is this just part of my imagination?"

"Caroline, we would have the same concerns as our family. And while we may be able to sense, perceive what could happen, even here, we do not know how things will turn out for you. There are so many paths that are always available to everyone." Vincent looked at her as he continued, "We cannot choose your lifepath, that you must do. Whatever choice you make, you have our blessings. Even now, Catherine and I can only observe, listen, we must never interfere in what course our children will take, no matter if that brings us pain should they get hurt."

"Yes." Caroline nodded. "I needed to know someone who would say it would be ok to follow my heart." She looked at them both. "My parents, even my brother, Jacob, told Grandfather Jacob that he should not encourage me to be so unrealistic. That angels and guides won't fall out of the skies to say here is the way. But, like Grandfather, I wonder why there cannot be spiritual beings to at least point out possible ways to go. Sometimes we need to feel there is more to life than what we see. I really wonder if anyone back in the community believes anymore in anything spiritual. They all seem so dead set on being realistic, especially when we have conversations about what I am going to do with my life, even now, as an adult. My father keeps telling his father, Grandfather Jacob, that because he is so old, he has forgotten the realities of the real world. That he believes too much in miracles and the paranormal."

"I can understand that point of view." Catherine looked at Vincent. "I had so many certainties. I accepted that there was no life without limitations. I could not even accept such things as ghosts." She smiled. "I worked in a world of hard cold facts."

Vincent smiled at Catherine. "Yet not to believe in dreams, in miracles, that would truly be a sad life." He turned toward Caroline. "I understand your need to voice your concerns without someone judging you, making you feel as if you are doomed to follow a certain path so that you can be safe. You want to follow your heart and to be accepted for that. I can understand that, but I also know that our loved ones only want to protect us from harm, as they do not want to lose their beloved. So, they try to protect us as best they can. They want us to always be close to them. The very

thought of losing their beloved....” Vincent paused. Catherine gently touched his arm. He looked at her and held her hand. “The thought of you getting hurt is painful to them. At times, such love could turn to be over-protective....”

“It’s not easy to watch your children get hurt trying to find their way.” Catherine looked at her. “Vincent had to tell me many times that even if it hurt us maybe more than them, our children needed to fail at times, to get hurt, as that leads to strength by the fact that they had to keep getting up after each fall. That our children not only needed us to protect them, but to know when to let them go and follow their own star. They needed to be strong.” She looked at him. “It is not easy to be a parent. Trying to know when to be cautious and when not to be. Sometimes we fall down, too. It’s hard to know when to let go, even when we want our children to be close to us. I am sure your family is going through that right now, with you, even if you are an adult.”

“I just want people not to judge me, my dreams,” Caroline said.

“Are your dreams truly harmful to yourself, to others?” Vincent asked.

Caroline paused. “There have been times I have been too bold and I got hurt really badly. And then there were times that I let my family talk me out of something they thought was dangerous and it really was not that bad.” She looked at them. “ But don’t I have a right to my dreams and as long as the dreams I have do not really harm anyone, why can’t I have them? Just because I am...different.” She paused. “Look, I listened to Grandfather, I called out and you are here. I believed. Even if this is just a dream. I need someone to say it’s ok no matter what.”

Vincent gently took her in his arms. He gently hugged her, then he looked at her.

“Many times I would think Father was being so restrictive and sometimes it turned out that he made a wise decision and kept me from harm. Then there were risks that I took that he did not want me to take. And....”

Catherine smiled as she leaned against Vincent. “And if you, even I, did not take those risks, where would our family be? Our Dream?”

Vincent and Catherine looked at her. Softly he said, “Caroline, we cannot know what risks would endanger us or what risks would not. So, we must weigh our choices carefully and listen to advice from those who love us. Yet, we must be true to our hearts and we must make that leap of faith if we feel we must.”

“But we can never know for sure if the risk is worth the price or not. Sometimes,” Catherine paused, “sometimes we really make bad choices.”

Caroline smiled. “I am so glad you both are here now. I feel comfortable talking with you both. I also know that we can never know where life will take us. It is hard to know when to truly leave our safe places and embrace the unknown. Here, now, I feel so accepted for who, what I am, even if I am not as perfect as they want me to be.”

She felt like crying.

Catherine gently touched her arm. “No one is perfect. When you called out to us, we sensed your dilemma, your need for love and understanding. Whatever type of decision this is, you must also make sure you are doing this for yourself and not for approval. If this is truly what you are meant to do, even those opposed to it will not be able to deter you. When you are ready to proceed, then you will.” She gently stroked Caroline’s hair. “Surely, you have a friend, someone you can talk to that you feel won’t impose their judgments on you?”

Vincent spoke up. “Catherine, I have had times when no one could truly know how I felt, to be objective enough to let me be me and not fear that because I was “different” I would be placing myself in great harm. That it was all right for me to go outside the lines.” He looked at Caroline. “ While we have memories of our life in the physical realm, know that our lives are each our own. Catherine and I can hope that our advice will help guide you, will help you as you, yourself, choose the path that you must take. We can only hope you live a full, happy and rich life. Being here, in this place, does not make us all knowing. You have voiced your concerns. Yet I feel that there is more than wanting love, approval. Besides this decision, you have a need to be accepted for who you are. That you need someone to say, once in a while, that you made the correct choice, the best choice at the time, no matter what transpires. You are looking for someone with an understanding heart. I do know what that feels like. Caroline, know this, to base your life on the fears that others have, to avoid harm, you might not take an adventure that will lead to a glorious discovery. I’m not even able to tell you if your course of action will have you enter our world sooner than you were supposed to. We cannot see and know everything that goes on in our previous physical world since there is a veil between the worlds preventing us from fully interacting with that realm. And that is so that others can live their lives and grow and become what they were meant to become. Yet, sometimes the veil comes down and if we want to, we can walk over to that world. Sometimes, like now, we can hear someone seeking our guidance, or just a chance to see us, to be with us. We must be open to when such times happen, as the door does close quickly and it will be awhile before we can return. Sometimes, we have other lives that we have walked over to and we are not present in this realm, but are living a new adventure. We all have to learn, grow and be. I do not fully understand how this all happens and works out but I do accept it as a wonderful mystery of the universe.”

“My husband, the philosopher.” Catherine smiled. “There must always be rules and limitations, even here. Even if we know what may happen, you might choose not to follow our advice. And if we tell you for certain what is going to happen, we could also prevent you from fulfilling your destiny, no matter how painful. I want you to be accepted and loved, to grow strong, better. To live is to accept all the confusion, all the agonizing over decisions, to make a choice and then to fully embrace what comes. To truly live is the only thing you must do. For such a decision that feels so huge, so momentous, we will counsel you, let you listen, choose, converse with us, but it hurts me to feel that there is no one you can do this with in your world.”

“But in the end, when you choose,” he smiled, “even if we never meet in dreams or see each other again, know that wherever we are, we are a part of you for you are a part of us. Life is not always joyful, there is pain, but I would not have traded what Catherine and I shared for anything. Our lives have been so wonderful and beautiful as well as painful...”

“And there were sacrifices,” Catherine said. “But we lived. We loved. We learned.”

“I just hope that things will turn out well for you,” he said. “Our advice for your time may not apply to you, as we do not know how much that world has changed. Our advice is based on what we have learned. So, you must realize that it could maybe cause more harm than good.”

“It just may be out-dated,” Catherine said softly.

“Still, we are listening, giving you a chance to weigh the choices before you. To give you our counsel based on our experiences. But, you can keep asking for more advice, yet in the end a decision must be made. So now I feel you must search your heart and make it. You must decide what you want to do and then proceed.” Vincent looked deeply into Caroline’s eyes. “Know that besides us, you have a guardian angel, lots of loving caring angels and they might not be what you thought they would be. They will watch over you, at times care for you. So now you must proceed down a path. If it will be hazardous, you may find a safe way. If not and you want to proceed, then proceed.”

“Be brave, stay the course, be hopeful, and it just may all turn out for the best. Caroline, there will be someone in your world who will love and accept you. I found Catherine.” He looked at Catherine and gently gave her a kiss on her forehead. Looking at Caroline, he said, “I can keep saying you are amazing, but it is you who must believe it. You are so beautiful, so courageous. You made us so happy meeting you, talking with you. And although you may not believe it now, I am sure that your family does accept and love you, otherwise, they would not care what happens to you.”

“And young lady,” Catherine looked at her, “make sure you have a backup plan, just in case whatever you decide does not work out.”

Vincent smiled. “Yes.”

Vincent looked at Caroline and she gave him and Catherine another hug. “Thank you both for being so amazing, so loving, so open to listen. I even feel more deeply now about what I am about to do. I have more certainty, some doubts, but I feel more confident that with God’s help, I will make the right choices.” She looked at the two of them. “I should let you know that as we talked, I could feel your love for each other. For me, I really don’t know if I can find that kind of love in my world. I can only hope. Just as I can hope my family will forgive me for any pain my choice will give them. You two should know you are an inspiration to all of us. Your stories sometimes

scared me and amazed me - how brave you both were. You were willing to risk it all by truly living your dreams. And by following your hearts, here I am.”

“We have our ideas how others should do something. But in the end only you know your heart. It is your judgment of yourself that matters. It may be hurtful that the ones we love turn out to be our harshest critics. But if you realize they are only afraid that their loved one would be harmed and that they care so much for you...”

Vincent paused.

“Love can hurt at times,” Caroline quietly said.

“But love is worth it.,” Catherine looked at her. “You are so adventurous, so smart, so beautiful. I am so happy that our descendants are growing and being and living and are so courageous and caring.”

He looked at Catherine. “The veil is starting to close. Our time with Caroline is short.” He looked at Caroline. “We wish you well.”

Caroline nodded. “I want to say thank you. You have given me a confidence in myself that I did not have before. I must go and experience my life, follow my heart, realize my dreams. I must hope my loved ones will understand and forgive me if I cause them any pain. I feel now that I will go forth and take a hold of this adventure. Even if I must leave home forever.”

“Then you must climb that highest branch and trust that your course is a true one,” he said softly. “And know that someday you will find that home has never left you. It is in your heart.”

Caroline felt happy and sad: there were tears in her eyes. She did not want them to leave. She was so loved, so appreciated, there was no condemnation, no anger toward her. They did not tell her she was selfish, they encouraged her to follow her destiny. Why couldn't her family do that? “Thank you for your opinions, your thoughts, your being here, letting me think things out. To reason things out and be accepted no matter what choice I will make. For respecting me, my feelings.”

There was a moment of silence as Caroline looked around at her surroundings.

“You should know Caroline, that I have to ask, it is just so hard not to,” Catherine softly said. “What is going on out there in your world? I am curious.”

Vincent looked at Catherine, speaking very gently with her, “It is almost time for us to leave Caroline and let her go live her life. This is not a time we should ask her about her world.”

“I know, Vincent, but I am so curious.” Catherine turned to Caroline. “Sorry about that.” Catherine softly said.

Caroline smiled, "It's ok. If I were you, I would want to know what is going on as well. And I do not mind. Right now I am on a space station, sleeping in my quarters."

"A space station!" Catherine called out. "Vincent, imagine !"

Vincent gave her a gentle hug. "Times do change."

"But a space station! When we were still in that world...how cramped is it?" Catherine turned to her.

Caroline smiled. "There are no cramped quarters...Space Station Terra is comfortable, with gravity, an exercise room, medical bay, and the quarters...rooms are small with just a bed and a table and a chair. It's sort of comfortable and we do have a small cafeteria, a main control room, engineering and a meeting room that substitutes now and then as a place for our classes and tests."

"Did they rebuild the International Space Station?" Catherine asked.

"No, it was scrapped, this is a new station."

"Catherine, so full of curiosity about the former world we knew," he said.

"Of course, I am curious about a lot of things." She smiled at him lovingly.

Caroline felt their love, she was still amazed at how strong it was.

Catherine looked at her, concerned. "Did you mention tests? School exams or ?" She hesitated, looked at her, and added, "I am so sorry about asking this, but you remind me so much of Vincent. Are they treating you well?"

Caroline smiled. "Your son Jacob asked me that very question."

"I feel he will soon be with us here," Vincent spoke gently. "I wonder if he is ready for this next transition?"

Caroline's heart sank. "I know he is very close to 100. And that I will not be able to say goodbye and be with him when he crosses over to your world. My parents, my brother, they, too, might pass over here and I will be far away. Not able to say goodbye. My father, who is named Charles, after my uncle, your son, said he married Mom just a few years before you both died. And he said you both died almost at the same time. He heard the stories, saw the mementoes, just as I have. We have the painting of you both in the Grand Hall. I cannot stop mentioning how inspirational your stories are. We are keeping those stories alive. I am also grateful that Grandfather Jacob told me that you might come and help us out. And you have given me such wonderful guidance. I know it will cause me pain, as well as them, to see me go. but I can hope that in time,

they will be accepting of what I chose.”

“Where do you think your path will take you? Why would your decision, that you are about to make, cause you to leave your family? That you would not return in time before they die?” Vincent asked. “Devin, my brother, was gone from us for a long time. It was painful not knowing where he was, but he did return back to us and it was so joyful.”

Ok, “ Caroline took a deep breath.” I always was the brave one...I wanted to find out who our parents were, Great Grandfather Vincent, what planet they came from. For I cannot accept that part of me, that you, were some kind of lab experimentation. I have a different theory, which started in high school, where I learned more about what our country, the USA, and other world governments kept from the people about aliens, other beings, and I thought that your parents maybe crashed on Earth, were discovered and taken by some kind of government agency. That your mom may have been pregnant with you when that happened, so she gave birth in a lab and that someone kidnapped you to save you from those people, who may have eventually killed your parents. Or maybe it was just to get rid of you, that you were evidence. I am not sure. I can just image what the government was doing at that time.”

She looked at Catherine. “I know this brings back painful memories, but that is what I thought, am thinking. I always loved space and science as well as stories that are called science fiction, fantasy and I love history, so I started to wonder what, who the other half of my family was .I wanted to find the non-human species side of our family.”

Vincent looked at Catherine, who looked at him with wonder. Then she started to smile. She turned to Caroline. ”That was not ever one of our ideas. To think,” she looked at Vincent, “you could have been someone from another world, maybe another time.”

“I still do not know where I came from.” Vincent smiled. “I had my ideas, but never would I have thought that.”

“Another planet.” Suddenly Catherine softly laughed. Vincent looked at her, then he started to laugh, too. He turned to Caroline. “Why be so concerned about our, my heritage? You are obviously doing very well. You are in the world above, you traveled to space. I could never have hoped to dare live above without realizing the dangers that could happen -in fact, have happened when I did venture above. That, in itself, is so remarkable.”

“I want to know;” Caroline said firmly. “I dreamed of space since I was little. I studied the history of Earth, but I wanted to know more than just our world. I know now that that involves a sacrifice that my family and friends may not want me to make.” Caroline looked at them. “My choice, my decision...I know, know it’s not going to be accepted by anyone. It may hurt so much, they may hate me...but...”

“Caroline, you must do what is in your heart. I must have hurt Father plenty of times in my choices. In time, with love and understanding, all was forgiven.” Vincent paused.

Catherine looked at him and said, "Especially when it came to me."

"'She will only you bring unhappiness' he said." Vincent spoke softly. "That was true, Catherine, but you also brought me more joy than the pain. You gave me so much."

"And there was so much that you gave me." Catherine gazed at him with so much love. "Plus, not to mention how the family has grown."

Caroline had tears in her eyes. She wished she could find someone who loved her like that and to whom she could return that love. Did they know how lucky, how blessed they were? She looked at Catherine, as well as Vincent. "You do not know how I needed to hear your words, see your love for me as well as each other. I have not felt that at all until now. I am loved, but it's like I feel that it is sometimes just a duty for the others, except every now and then Uncle Charles and Grandfather Jacob, seem to understand somewhat. But no one, no one knows my heart. No one listens as you both did."

"Caroline, perhaps what you sense from them is how you feel about yourself. It's just that until now, you were not ready to receive love, forgiveness, understanding. Now you fear not being forgiven for following your dream. Is that perhaps a fear inside of you? I know that no matter what happens, you will be forgiven for following your heart. You are loved, not in the way you would like, but you are loved. It is you who also have to open up to others and understand them, love their faults and all of who they are. If I must say it again, I will. You are truly loved." Vincent said.

Catherine spoke up, "As Vincent once said to me...."

"You have the courage, Catherine, you do." Vincent and Catherine said that at the same time, smiling at each other. They turned toward her.

"Caroline, if this is the path that you must take, if this is something you must do, if this is truly your dream, then don't let others, or your own doubts, cause you to hesitate. Take the chance, follow your heart." Vincent paused, and looked deeply into her eyes. "Never deny yourself your happiness. For when you deny yourself a chance to have any type of joy, it will be one of the things you regret when you grow old: when you are finally getting ready to transition to the other side, you may wonder about the road not taken." He had tears in his eyes.

Catherine hugged him. "Maybe we have our regrets. We are human after all." He looked at her. "But they should be few and far between. Now you are listening to me." She had a twinkle in her eyes. "If you did not dare to come over to my place and bring me Great Expectations, even after Father did not want you to, you definitely would have a serious regret." She kissed his cheek. "So be happy, my love, that you at least overcame some fears. As Shakespeare said, 'It is not in the stars to hold our destiny but in ourselves.'"

Caroline could not help but smile. She looked at them. "I suppose we all sometimes forget to reach for the stars and settle for what is comfortable."

"Caroline, there are times to be safe and times to take a risk and I have to strongly mention that if there is any doubt, it could be a blessing. Sometimes it is more courageous to say no then it is to say yes, but you have to go deep within yourself and follow what your heart is telling you. You must also balance it with reason and then after much thought and prayer, go forth and work at your dream. Then if you realize it must be no, then say no. But if it is yes, then let nothing stop you from pursuing your dream." Catherine paused, looking at Vincent with a grin on her face, "If you don't do what feels right, you could wind up looking wistful and feeling regret."

Caroline chuckled. "So, follow my conscience, listen to advice and listen to the stories others tell about their lives and the courage they had to do what is right and go and do, for no one can ever know what others will feel: if we think they may not forgive us, then it is we who are not forgiving ourselves. Or, if I follow others, I may one day start thinking about what might have been at times."

Catherine nodded her head. "Yes, even though I hope at the end of our lives, even with the regrets, we have a sense of appreciation for all the good we have been given. Some dreams do get lost, sometimes we do wonder what could be, but we should snap back to reality and realize we did pretty good. After all, missing a few dreams and the correct path to follow, that's the human way. But we all do the best that we can."

Caroline smiled at the two of them. "Seems your son was right. You two are truly blessed. So much love, overcoming so much." She would have liked to have known them in real life, instead of in a dream.

"So many times, Vincent told me to find someone to love, but the one that I truly loved, the one that was meant to be for me, was standing there in front of me all the time. I let my world and its rules and logic almost take me away from that glorious man. It was even painful, Vincent, how much you just could not believe that I would stay with you, by you. You are the love of my soul, here now and always."

"And you are mine." He smiled at her.

"Caroline." Catherine looked at her. "I will not for one moment believe that any of our descendants, your family, does not love you for who you are. Maybe it does not seem like they do. But, as a parent, I can tell you it is so hard to stop from meddling with your children. You love them so much, you want to protect and shelter them from any pain. But, sometimes, your baby has to fall to learn to get up again: the difficulty is in knowing when it is right to let go. I believe your family still finds it difficult, even as they watch you become a young adult, to let go of sheltering you. It's because you are extra special."

"Why, Catherine, you are still so amazing, so beautiful, so intelligent." Vincent added,

“Well after having our children...it was hard to not want to rush in and save the day. But how else can our children learn to be who they were meant to be.” Vincent said. “And besides, I am sure they would be just like us and resent anyone telling them what to do.”

They all became silent, lost in the moment, in thought. Caroline realized that maybe her family did love her and she just rebelled against their wanting to keep her safe from harm. But the love that Catherine and Vincent had was so powerful, it radiated out from them and you could feel so blessed being in their presence. She never felt anything like that in the other world. People there in her community did love, did marry, did have relationships, but something like this? It required two people who had the courage to dare dream despite the odds. To be a part of each other, where one could not live without the other. Their dreams joined into one powerful force of love.

Yes, Grandfather Jacob, she thought to herself, I can see why you talked about your parents, it sounded like you were idolizing them. Even her parents, much as they loved each other did not have this kind of rare passion. That was it. Soul passion, transcending physical love, life. Very few could ever find such a special love. A true soul bonding. A connection so dear, so precious. It made you feel as if you were in the presence of the Angels of Love.

They started walking down the old tunnels. Happy just to be present with each other. Vincent looked at Caroline. “Think of this as just dreaming, if you want, but I want you to know this, learn from our mistakes. Do not resist following the course your heart takes. But, do not do this just to find out who I am, who a part of you would be. We are. We make mistakes, we learn from them. But above all else, once you know what direction your heart is pointing to, do not resist following its guidance. Separate your desire to know who, what, where we, I came from. Ask yourself after that, if you should pursue this dream. Realize what must be done to achieve it. If it is your destiny, the way will be clear, no matter what you must do. When you follow your heart, your heart tells you who you are and who you will become. Might become. Just be prepared for some surprises along the way.”

Caroline nodded. “Ever since I was a child and finally got a chance to go further down the tunnels, even after the flooding, the beautiful waterfall and crystal caves were still there...and I marveled. I was in a special cavern and I looked up and saw the stars. Then I saw the water and how the stars were reflected from above. Oh, how I wanted to reach up and sail on a special ship among those stars. To see and know more than what Earth could teach me. It has been hard. To keep fighting for what you want. I was so afraid. When I was in high school there were kids who stared, who laughed at me or even ran away. Some even suggested that I get cosmetic surgery. I started to feel that maybe there were some who might want to kidnap me and take me to some place that was horrible and torture me, experiment on me. But, I kept going and also, I have one of your journals, Great Grandfather Vincent. You had so many. Great Grandmother Catherine, you also had a few as well. Grandfather Jacob decided to share them among

the family members, each one, from Aunt Caroline to Uncle Charles, to the parents, even us, the grandchildren, got one or two. He thought that should something happen, a journal or two would survive. And, should any one of us travel far away and come back to the tunnels, should the ones who knew us be gone, the others in the community would recognize those journals by what they told, and would welcome us back to the tunnel community. It especially would help if the pathways down were changed and the place would be so different. In a way, even if the people were unfamiliar to us, our family heritage would be a way to share stories and get to know one another. We might even meet people who would have the other journals and it could be like some literary code to welcome us back in. That after such a long time away, we have come back home to our family.”

“Then, know this,” Vincent gently said. “I had dark moments feelings that were from parts of myself that I was afraid to face.” He paused and they stopped walking. He looked at Catherine, then at Caroline. “Sometimes those dark moments came because a dream of mine was destroyed. It was only love that healed me and helped me to rise above the darkness to the light. And that love came from Catherine mostly, but also friends and family. You must reach out to make that connection, to love. We all need it. Not only to help us through the dark times, but also for times like now, when facing decisions of grave consequences.

“I was blessed to have this bond, this love with Catherine, who loved me despite the darkness, as I have loved her for all she is. Love is so very important, whether that be for a dream or for someone. So also base your decision on love. Even if there will be pain involved. it will heal in time, if love is involved. If your passion, your love, is flying to the stars, then so be it. But wherever you are physically, no space and time can keep you from spiritually touching and feeling your family inside of you and possibly letting you feel what they are feeling. I learned that even when it was so painful at times, to not have Catherine near me, close to me, when I thought I had lost her and I felt as if I as if I was dying, I grieved, mourned, but then when peace finally came, even as a part of me died another part had her love inside of me to continue on.

“Your family will grieve, will feel hurt, angry, if you choose yes, but they will never lose you for you will always be in their hearts. Just as you would never lose them, for they will be in your heart. Their love will still help you as you travel strange paths and be with you in all your travels until you come home.”

“Denying something that you feel strongly about can become physically as well as spiritually painful, so you must reach for that dream, even if someone tells you to find something else, someone else.” Catherine looked deeply into Vincent’s eyes.

They looked at Caroline and said at the same time, “North of Oz and south of Shangri-La.” They laughed and said, “Devin.”

“Your brother.” Caroline smiled. “He did eventually come home, at least for a little while.”

“And brought another friend, another brother, too,” Vincent said.

Caroline felt a peace in her. They were amazing. She could continue talking with them, basking in their love and the love they felt for her. “I am not afraid anymore of what I will choose,” she said softly. “I can imagine how others would feel about my choices. I can hope that they will forgive me. But, if I make the choice out of love, even if it is only a dream that I love, love will find a way. And people will forgive me, I hope. All I can do is just pray that I choose rightly and continue on.” She looked at them both. “I know an opportunity like this comes once in a lifetime, maybe never. Even if I am chosen for this mission because I can be some type of show case for Earth. Someone they can point to and say that this proves we have finally risen above petty prejudices and can be shown to be a ‘superior’ race, I would know that I was given a chance to do something that no one else would be able to do for a long time. I would know that despite any opinion it was something that not only would help me, but maybe inspire someone else like me. Maybe it’s time for me to become more universal. To not listen to anyone but me.”

“And that is all that you can do,” Catherine said. “Work hard, be happy but most of all remember love. Whatever you do, do it for love. Whether of someone or of a dream.”

Vincent and Catherine reached out to Caroline and she could not resist hugging them. A mist started to gather, enveloping her great grandparents and Vincent and Catherine stepped into the gathering mist and were gone.

Caroline woke up crying. After a moment, she turned on the light and reached into her drawer for an old laminated journal that was under her tablet. She carefully turned the pages until she came to one marked by a laminated rose. Uncle Charles insisted all the journals of Vincent and Catherine be laminated as they were so old, almost worn out. The two journals, one written by Vincent and one written by Catherine, were written 30 years after their first meeting, when they had settled down in the tunnels and had raised their three children who, at the time, would have been in their 20s, late 20s. The delicate rose was on a page where Vincent was describing how Grandfather Jacob and his new bride, Linda, had decided on having Vincent and Catherine celebrate their anniversary at a special cottage by a special lake, despite the raging pandemic above. It was the perfect time. No one would be around and precautions could be taken. Catherine’s journal was written at that time and about 10 years after that. These two journals and the tablet were going with her. It would keep them close. She was given a gift. No matter what anyone said, they did come to her, even if it was just in her dreams. For the first time, she felt as if she could understand everyone, even her Mom. “We are ‘human’ after all.” She said a prayer of thanks. Now that she had made a decision, the hard part was coming up.

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It was afternoon and here she was in her Musk space suit with her precious space backpack. It contained her tablet, charger, the two journals and her diary, along with

the small pod that contained sticks that fit into the tablet. Those had a total of 1000 hours of music, 1000 hours of movies and 20,000 pages of stories, books. Hopefully the pod would work in space. Everything was enclosed in an EMF box before she put those items into her backpack. She pulled her helmet onto her head and took a deep breath. Here she was. On Moon Base Armstrong, waiting for her turn to communicate with her family on a video chat. She was the last one to do so. Her family had to get to a special office on Staten Island. She knew they were advised that their chat would be only one hour and that they were to stay there until about 5pm. No other explanations were given except that they would be talking to their daughter. It would only be Mom, Dad, Jake and maybe his girlfriend. No one else. In fact, knowing her family, they would not want to endanger the community with anyone else. And they were going to have to take a message down below that might not sit too well with others.

She started to pace. There were three others there watching her. Janet was a white woman with blonde hair. The other woman, Raven, was a native First Tribes woman who had eyes that seemed to look into your soul. Then there was Akio, a man from Japan. All of them were in their specially made Musk space suits and each one-piece suit was made from a special material that would make it hard for Terrana and her kind to easily read their minds and use their telepathy to get them to do certain things. To communicate telepathically to them, Terrana had to send a sort of a hello to the person to accept. All three of them looked like they were crying a lot. They also looked. All three of them looked like they had been crying a lot. They also looked ... concerned. Maybe even... scared?

That's when the Mission Commander walked into the room. She was such a pretty black woman, dark-skinned, and her black hair was in a neat bun. She was the leader for the humans. She was the one who also communicated the most with Terrana. She walked over to Janet, Akio and Raven, who were sitting together and started a conversation with them.

It seemed that Salvator was the one in the meeting room right now. He was a Latinx. four women, two men from Earth, representing Earth and its races, and a possible hybrid. *That's me*, Caroline thought, a possible Earth hybrid. Every one of this crew had special skills. She was an exo-biologist. Mission Commander Juanina had good good leadership skills, as well as being an artist. Janet loved to sing and had a good operatic voice. She was also a great engineer. Caroline smiled. She recalled stories about a person named Mouse, someone who Grandfather Jacob loved to talk about. How everyone was concerned about this genius who was a little eccentric, to put it mildly. But he did become the best person to go to, to fix and to make things. Also, as he became older, Grandfather Jacob said he was the best engineer they had. Mouse would have loved meeting Janet. Raven, she was a spiritual counselor and skilled in exo-botany. Akio was a warrior. God, he could really do Tai Chi, martial arts, he was a great security person. Plus, he was a good cook.

Salvator scared her. He was quiet. A navigator, as well as a pilot, she could tell he

did not like her. But he was tolerating her for the sake of the mission. She sensed something about him. She did not know what it was, just that he did not feel right. Maybe he was planted there by the CIA or some secret military organization or the FBI, NSA, or the Earth Protector Group. But it made sense he was here. It would be just like the governments of Earth to have an operative. Someone to protect the Earth's "interests." The whole crew were single, no children, never married, and not with special that could have become their mate. There would only be friends, family left behind, no one else.

The crew. Caroline realized it looked good for the press. It will also calm down most of the humans on Earth, who would want a representative for their group. She wondered if this mission will really help humans to rise above petty prejudices. Maybe not. Maybe humans are the species that would have to still learn to grow beyond judging by appearances and had to learn to look at a being and accept them for what they were. Well, one good thing about humans, we do form communities. We do love. We do care. Good and bad. Day and night. Something to contemplate.

When the meeting room door opened, Terrana came out followed by Salvator. He was stoic and there were no tears showing. That guy was scary, seemed as if he had no feelings. She would have to keep an eye on him throughout the year-long mission. Just to protect herself.

Terrana nodded toward her. It was her turn now. She walked toward her and Terrana spoke into her mind. "I will respect your privacy and will not go further than need to. Your scientists have a device, where I can project my thoughts into and 'speak' as it were to your loved ones. To assure them that this is real and that I and my crew will try our best to keep you safe on this journey." She wondered why Terrana came now with this request and offer.

"Terrana," she thought back. "I know space is not safe and that seeing you will only scare some in my family, particularly my mother. But I thank you for this, as Mom and the rest of my family might not have believed this mission was real."

Terrana only had a small slit of a mouth, but was she smiling? No matter. This was going to be as private as it could be, so she would have to cautiously choose what she was going to say. She knew her family would be doing the same.

The room was set up like a typical conference room, with a huge screen on the wall. The screen right now had the Earth Space Agency logo. She took a deep breath. This was definitely going to be hard. But is anything worthwhile easy? Think of Vincent and Catherine. You can do this.

She sat in one of the four chairs. Terrana chose to stand. Pressing a button on a device on the table, she spoke. "Caroline Chandler Wells, Space Cadet, Serial Number 15313969222397 Birthdate 4/60."

“Identification acknowledged,” a voice came over the intercom.

The screen came on and there was her Mom, Dad, Jake and his girlfriend, Malana. And Aunt Caroline? Caroline did not think she was going to come. She was in her 90s frail and very pale. Aunt Caroline was sitting next to Malana, who provided quite a contrast. Jake’s girlfriend was a black woman with very dark ebony skin and deep black eyes. Her black hair was short and she was looking up at Jake, her brother. Jake looked worried. They were in the back seats. In the front seats were her Mom, Martha, and her Dad, Charles. They looked like they were crying.

Terrana walked over to stand by Caroline. And Mom, of course had an astonished look on her face; her mouth was wide open. She wanted to chuckle and say, “Hey, Mom, look I found a gray alien.” She controlled herself and hoped Mom would not pass out. She looked at her family. Now everyone was looking straight ahead at them, at Terrana.

Her father broke the silence. “Caroline, who, what, is standing next to you? Who is your friend?”

“I am Terrana.” the voice came out of the intercom and was almost mechanical. “My thoughts are being relayed through a machine as I speak through telepathy. Please, do not be concerned. Caroline, your family member, has a message she wishes to relay to you. I am only here to confirm.”

“Terrana.” Her, brother Jake spoke up. “First at nine I meet Kitty, now I meet ET. I love my life.” He was trying to lighten the mood, but it did not go over well, as Dad shot him a look. “Sis, what is this about?”

Taking a deep breath, she spoke as calmly as she could. “I have accepted a mission. It will take six Earth beings, which includes me, to the depths of space. We are going with Terrana and her crew on a journey that will take us a year.”

“What!” Aunt Caroline spoke up. “Where? What do you mean depths of space?”

“Yeah, sis, explain,” Jake immediately said.

“Caroline, we did not know, we were not informed of this, “ her father said. “What...”

“Please, let me finish, then we can say our goodbyes.” Caroline noticed her Mom had settled down. Somewhat. At least her mouth was not open.

“This came up very suddenly. The past month we heard rumors from MUFON, which is the Mutual UFO Network and other groups that an offer was going to be extended to humanity and those who dwell on Earth. An offer that would change our lives forever. At the Space Academy, working with NASA, Space X, and other space agencies around the world, selections were being made. There would be six people chosen, one would

the Mission Commander for the small group, working with the Commander of the ship. We would join a group of other beings, what are called Grays on Earth. We would travel to the stars, learn new things, meet new races, species.

“The group of Grays we are with are only one of many races of Grays. They, too, have different groups, races, just like Earth. Terrana belongs to the group that associates with the Nibiruans. I could go on and try to explain the different groups, but, that is not what this meeting is about. There was an offer made and this offer was amazing. Terrana’s group contacted someone on Mars via telepathy and started the process that led to this special mission. They realize that we are quickly advancing to the next stage of star travel and wanted to arrange a meeting so that a select few of us would come travel with them. To learn about what is out there in space and to come back and teach their fellow Earth beings what they discovered. They realized that we are now past the point of just sending robots and probes. We will soon be going ourselves out to the stars, encountering other species. They hope that our adventures and our stories will help those going out into space to respect other beings and to accept different species. Also, we would be aware of what would be dangerous to us out among the stars. While we are doing scientific research, we have to come to the point of doing no harm to other sentients. We have to learn to even work together with ourselves or our violence can lead to dangerous consequences.

“Terrana does know how in the past there were abductions of humans by other species. But, she is one of the races of Grays that think of us as children ready to begin a new lesson. Her Grays are scientific and when they think a species will advance to close to their level they reach out and try to assist that species to better itself. They also know how very unstable our civilization is at this time and hope this contact will help us to stabilize and reach our potential. So a request was made. The Earth Space Academy got together with private space agencies and a mission was quickly planned. Even MUFON as contacted. Needless to say, after scientists made sure we would not contract some infection or virus from them nor they from us and that all seemed doable, it was decided to take one week only to pick six persons who were healthy, open and intelligent and who did not have connections like spouses, children. This was to prevent sabotage and other things that could possibly happen to endanger the mission.

“A week is a very short time to pick from millions, so they used computers to pick out selected persons. The Grays had a chance to accept or deny the ones that were chosen.” She paused, took a breath and quickly continued. “As you are well aware, four days ago I was advised to get ready to go up to the space station. There were tests to make sure I was healthy and I can remember the night before I left how all of you told me not to go. Begged me. But I was determined so I left the next morning, leaving only a note for goodbye.”

“You insisted,” Jake added. “So real quick goodbyes and then, here you are.”

“Yes, but the last three days were further testing to make sure the six were, as they

doable. We came with 10 people just in case some of the six chosen first said no. When the announcement to the press is made, you will see who the others are. They are a perfect representation of all the human races.

“There were many tests to take. Many examinations over these past three days, and last night, I was advised I was one of those six. Probably chosen because I was unique. I had to make a decision by this morning. I could not discuss it with Grandfather Jacob last night, as I could not be this explicit and he would have continued to argue it out with me. Plus, it would only confuse and alarm him. So, I discussed it with Great Grandfather Vincent and Great Grandmother Catherine.”

“Oh, come on, “ her mother spoke. “That must have been a dream. It would have been better if you discussed it with your real family.”

“Mom,” Caroline spoke up. “They are my real family. As much as you all are. They would have provided a different insight.” Before anyone could say anything else, she quickly raised her hand. “Let me finish. I chose to say yes. This is the only goodbye you will receive from me and must relay to our friends, family, our community.” Tears were forming in her eyes.

Terrana then calmly spoke up. “Please, be aware, that this is to make sure all of the crew, our species, Earth would be safely traveling before any harm could come to them. Some on Earth as well as some non-Earth species would be very disapproving of this action. And your world still has a majority of persons who would want to harm us, try to kill us. I believe from my telepathy with Caroline that she has had a hard time being accepted, even with new laws. The fear of abduction, being forcibly taken somewhere to be tortured, experimented on, is always on her mind. I want her to realize, as well as you, that she is a remarkable and a wonderful being. I will try to keep her safe as much as is possible. I sensed that her fellow human travelers are just tolerating her and not fully welcoming her. Their reactions when dealing with me, with her, are very strong. Unaccepting. But, they are trying to be open, learning to be tolerant and accepting. That is why we accepted them. In time, they will mature. We are leaving soon. Please realize...”

“Terrana, let me explain this, please.” Caroline looked at her. She was trying very hard not to cry. She turned to her family. “A year in space is not a year for return.”

“What do you mean a...” Dad was about to ask a question then stopped.

“A year in space could be 100 years our time,” Jake said quietly. He crouched down next to Malana. They hugged each other tightly. Aunt Caroline just put her head into her hands.

“How could you do this to us?” Her mother spoke up. It came out so cold, so mean.

“How could I do this to you?” Caroline looked at them. “This is my dream. My once in

a lifetime, maybe many life paths, moment. And it might be less than 100 years; it could be 50, but either way, I have to follow my heart. It is the only thing I can be sure to rely on. I must go and be and do..."

"God, you do sound like your...Great Grandparents.." Dad looked at her. It seemed everyone had tears running down their cheeks except for Terrana and her Mom. Her Mom looked so angry.

"Sometimes we must leave our safe places, that is what Brigit said to Vincent and that is what I want to do. I want to go out there. I want to explore. I am sorry it is going to cause much pain and sorrow, but only when a chick leaves the nest can it truly fly." Caroline wiped away her tears. "I will be safe. I will be on a starship that is not made by human hands, but by other beings, Accommodations were made on the ship for what we need. We will be exploring the stars in a starship, what some would call UFOs, but no matter. I will be in the stars" She added with more enthusiasm. "The stars!"

"Would Vincent and Catherine, would our family even now, dare to imagine that one of their family would walk, travel among the stars? Our descendants that will be in the future will be using their own starships to go out in space. We are at the starting point. I want to be one of those who started our journey toward something better. Yes, I know there is a lot to do for Earth, yes there is the politics and the environment. There are others who are called to take care of that. I was called to participate in this glorious adventure."

"Of course, you did not even think of your family. All you thought about was yourself." Her mother was visibly upset. "No chance to think through this rationally. You were always the different one."

"MOM!" Jake practically yelled at her. "Who is the selfish one? Did you ever in her 30 years on Earth ever considered Caroline's feelings? Did you even care about her? Just because she is so different from your perfect ideal daughter..."

"Jake, enough," her father spoke up.

"Stop this, all of you," Caroline said firmly. "I know Mom never loved me because of the way I looked, I know you are all hurting that this was not discussed with all of you. But am I to always get a glimpse of a dream and then have it tossed aside for my safety? There is no safety anywhere, Ok? But know this, it was our family's history and our community's love and courage that made me want to go out and be brave and take this first step into space. And I know that in time that same courage will help you all to accept my decision. I am going to miss you all. I would not be crying so right now, but this was why I could not discuss it with you. You would have stopped me and all I would have for the rest of my life is regrets. I have my items from home that will remind me of home. And...if I can communicate with Vincent and Catherine, I can sure enough communicate with you spiritually from the stars. It cannot be easy or done all the time,

but I can let you know I am safe.”

“And we, too, will provide updates for your communities via your leaders,” Terrana added. “It may not be often, but it will comfort the crew to know their families are aware of how they are doing.”

“Only messages given to us, that most likely will not be in real time, only messages. Messages.” Jake was wiping away his tears.

Her Mom had a different look now on her face and she was...crying? “Caroline, how could you say that I did not love you?”

“I heard the stories,” Caroline said quickly. “You did not even accept me as a baby.”

“Kitty,” Jake said. “She eventually did. Right after I said, ‘Kitty,’ right, Mom?”

“Well, not exactly, but, eventually.” Her mother spoke softly.

“Eventually? Mom, Dad was the one I found who could comfort me when I got hurt. You always seemed to shy away from me. Dad was the one who comforted and encouraged me when high school got bad. You were busy in the lab or talking to your friends or...”

“It did not mean I did not learn to love you. You have to understand, you....are...so...” Her mother paused.

“Different, oh, God, Martha.” Dad looked at her. “She was right, but... I always just accepted that you dwelled in the world of appearances.” He looked at Caroline.

“Caroline, your mother has her faults but deep down she is the most wonderful caring person I know. I love her and I know she loves you.”

“Dad, I know you do, but..” Caroline got a grip on her emotions. “But this is not the time to discuss this.”

“This is the perfect time, Kitty, to discuss this.” Jake said. “After all, we will not see you again, and if we do we will be so old and so forgetful at times. And,” Jake broke down, “I am going to miss my Kitty.”

They were all crying now, even her Mom.

Terrana did something Caroline did not think a being of her kind would. She walked over to her and gently touched her shoulder.

“Caroline, I may not have been the perfect mother.” Her Mom was now crying really hard. “I tried.”

“Not enough,” Aunt Caroline spoke up angrily. “You could never accept this...part of

the family.”

“Please, can we just wish each other well and say our goodbyes without all the drama,” Jake spoke up. “Caroline is leaving us. LEAVING us. Kitty is going away. She will never be able to say goodbye to Jacob. Never be around if Malana and I agree to marry and have a family. She will never be around to see you all get old and never be around to make us smile and laugh with some strange item she found or learned about. We won’t...”

“I might see you in the spirit world,” Caroline spoke up softly.

“It won’t be the same, Kitty.” Jake looked at her. He stood up. “Somehow, something told me that when the government agents came to take us here to ‘talk’ to you and they were not even saying much, something was about to happen I would not like. I was so afraid..but...now this, this is worse than I could imagine.”

Caroline for some reason smiled. She shook her head. “Jake, there are worse things.”

“Ok, maybe, but...” Jake looked at her.

“You are going to be terribly missed.” Her father spoke up. “We won’t be there to help you should you get hurt. We won’t even know how your life is going to turn out. Updates are not the same as having someone in front of you.” He looked at her. “Is there any way to...”

“Change my mind?” Caroline looked at him. “No. I am asking you to trust that I feel in my heart that I am making the right decision. I am asking you to love and accept me enough to let me fly. Please let me go.”

“No wonder birds cry through the trees so much in summer, their nestlings are taking off.” Jake was trying to bring a sense of lightness, but his voice betrayed a deep sadness.

“I have a request,” Caroline said. “Please do not turn on each other and blame each other for what I chose to do. Please comfort and love each other and know your little ‘nestling’ is happy soaring through the stars and that she will think about each and every one of you and say a prayer that you will all live long and prosperous lives. And when I come back, for I do intend to come back, even if you are not physically around, I want to hear stories about how your love helped our community go on. And...I might bring a new friend or two.”

“God, this hurts,” her father said. “I kind of now know how....Vincent...felt when....”

“Dad, I am alive, well.” Caroline looked at them all. “Besides, death has no dominion.”

“Ok, Kitty, don’t you dare start quoting every single piece of lines from our ‘stories’

about the past, Ok. Just tell your older brother that you will take care of yourself. That you will love and live free and that you will eventually come back. As I intend to make darn sure the community is around for that return. And forget that spirit world thing. You can't just communicate with the other side when you want to. It is not a sure thing. Ok? Right here right now is the last time I am going to see my Kitty." Jake looked at her, tears streaming down his face. "My sister, the most bravest loving fiercest beautifulest person I have known."

"We will all miss you," Aunt Caroline said. "Now I know what father meant. Goodbyes are hard. I am too old for this."

"Aunt Caroline, I am glad you did come. I will miss you. Give...my...Uncle my love."

Caroline looked at her.

"Still my cautious darling," her father said.

"Caroline, let us not part with you thinking I never loved you." Her Mom looked at her. Tears were coming down her face. "Yes, I do only see by...appearances. Yes, I did not want to suckle you when you were first born...You...were...different....But Jake running in, holding you, calling you Kitty, did help, but...I had to calm down. I had to take care of you...you came from me. Are a part of me. Yes, it took a long time. But do not ever think I do not love you. I ..." she looked at her husband. "I am so sorry you felt that way, but I learned so much. It is hard for someone like me to accept the unusual things in life. I am so...sorry you felt as if I loved your brother more than you.....I am...I ...I am only hoping that you are not saying yes to this to find someone who cares about you, but before you leave us know...I do love you. I am sorry it did not come immediately. I am not like your father. Strange things scare me, still scare me...." With her voice breaking, her mother grabbed her father and held him as she started to cry.

"Mom, it's Ok now. I know you and Dad and everyone loved me. I will take that with me," Caroline softly said,

"I love you, Kitty," Jake said.

"We all do and we all wish you well, and this is the saddest family meeting I will ever have in my life, Malana said. "I would have loved to have seen you in a bridesmaid dress."

"You would have wanted my sister?" Jake looked at her. "You want to marry me?"

"Hell yes, damn hell and high water, hell yes. To both questions. And what is wrong with the way she looks?" Malana looked at him and they both kissed passionately.

"Do you two need a room?" Her father asked. Jake and Malana looked at him blushing.

It was a question that made everyone smile a little. She thought to herself, *Leave it up to Jake to find someone with the same warm heart and love as Catherine.* She now knew that whatever happened Malana and Jake would marry, possibly start a family, and the legacy would continue on.

“Keep pictures around, please?” Caroline asked.

“Always,” her father said.

Someone appeared in the room next to her family. Caroline also noticed that her Mission Commander came in. The hour was up. She felt a peace in her heart, as well as a sadness. All of them still had tears running down their faces, except for Terrana. The Mission Commander looked very emotional. The last meeting with her family had been so revealing.

“Everybody now,” Jake spoke up.

All of them, even Caroline, yelled out, “LOVE YOU.”

Then the crying started again. Hard. This was painful, worse than anything she had ever known. But, inside, Caroline felt a sense of acceptance and peace. It felt right. Sad. But felt right.

“Goodbye.” Caroline stood up.

“Kitty.” Jake looked at her.

“I know, big bro, I know.” Caroline looked at her parents. Mom did love her. Vincent and Catherine were right. She was loved. She just finally realized that. In between her fighting to be free, that what she thought were restrictions and rules to fence her in and not allow her to do things, were safety measures to protect someone they cared about. She just could not see it, as she herself was stuck on her being “different”. Even Terrana cared. That was all that mattered. She was loved. And now she was going.

They gave each other virtual hugs and then the video was over with. She felt someone holding her hand and looked at Terrana.

“We may not be from the same culture or society and how we care for each other may be different,” Terrana said. “But all of us ,need acceptance and caring. What you call love.”

She nodded and let Terrana walk out of the room with her, still holding her hand.

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Caroline was inside a starship in a room where you could see the stars all around you. Her fellow Earth travelers were next to her, all six of them noticing how Earth was a distant blue globe in a dark sky. They were soon going to pass Mars.

Terrana advised them that the EMM (Earth, Moon, Mars) Alliance wanted to have a small press conference once they reached Mars. It would be the last communication with Earth for a long time.

She noticed how Earth was soon getting smaller and smaller. She looked at her fellow crew members. All of them were in their Musk space suits, with the helmets on. And each of them had a small shoulder bag around them. She noticed they had tears in their eyes. Just as she did. Even stoic Salvator. It was the realization that this was really happening. That she was never going to actually see her family, friends, community ever again. Except unless in the spirit world. And that was iffy. All she could do was carry them in her heart.

Terrana walked up to them. Mentally talking, she calmly said, "We do not have any sleeping quarters, as you noticed. We only need an hour or two of rest, per what is considered Earth Time of 24 hours. I hope the resting pods will be comfortable for your eight hours of required sleep. The few items you have taken with you will be in a small storage container by your pod assigned to you. Right now, we would like you to get used to our craft. Each of you will be assigned a place to go based on your duties."

"And we can still communicate with each other wherever on the ship we happen to be," Mission Commander Juanina spoke up.

"The simple tasks will have assigned training to acquaint you with various species we may encounter." Terrana looked at Caroline. "There will be times for private prayers and meditation. We will learn what you need to feel a bit more comfortable."

"And we will learn to adjust to new things that you will show us," Caroline telepathed back.

Terrana smiled.

"Caroline?" Mission Commander Juanina looked at her. She seemed to know that the reply from Caroline was telepathically given to Terrana.

"Commander, I just telepathed to her that we will be learning to adjust to new things that will be shown to us. We are going to have to all learn to accept telepathic communication and just do the vocal communication between us."

Mission Commander Juanina responded, "I suppose it is hard to telepathically talk to all six of us."

“Yes, Commander, it must be,” Caroline responded. “But it can be done if we are open to that communication.”

“Well, welcome to a new way of life and living. There will be so many new things that will be shown to us. We are going to have to get used to our different species and accept each other, flaws and all. This is going to be one big school for the next year.” Mission Commander Juanina spoke. “Seems that Caroline is used to telepathy already. We must also adjust to this type of communication. Yet, unless it will be a private conversation, let me remind you that until all of us can make the adjustment, if it involves our crew, I need to know what has been communicated between us and Terrana’s people.” She looked from Caroline to the others. “This is going to be our first rule among the Earth crew. I need to make sure we are all following certain guidelines. Once we do get used to this mind contact, we can then get used to being contacted as a group and responding and understanding as a group. Also, I want to remind everyone, this is not a vacation. You will be required to do your duties just as if you were on Earth. Terrana’s people will at first, accommodate our Earth time to their time, so we can accomplish the various duties we will be as assigned to on this mission. We will be also learning and adjusting. I am grateful for their consideration of our needs. Do your duties with honor and attentiveness.

“We will have scheduled time off, if there are no emergencies, just like on Earth. Our workweek will be six days, but we will have moments of time to take mini vacations, where we can take three days off in a row. So know that even on your days off, you must be mindful of who you representing and you must always be aware of your surroundings.

“I am going to require your best behavior on this mission. While I know at times, being human, we may have fights and mistakes made, we must quickly make amends and continue onward being the best we can be. Any hurt feelings you have after a disagreement, you must quickly get over. Learn from your mistakes and do your best no matter what.” Mission Commander Juanina looked at all of them.

“You must conduct yourself befitting a Space Academy officer. You must feel that each time you are awake you are in front of the leader of your country, in front of council leaders. You are the Space Academy now. You must be the best you can be. That also means physically, so to keep up your physical health, there is a place on this ship which will have Earth gravity to go to each day. A requirement of 30 minutes of exercise will be part of your daily tasks. Know this and never let it leave your minds, our new...friends have been very accommodating and we, in turn, must be just as accommodating. We must try to accept them no matter what. Just as if they are human. They have reached out to us and we must reach back out to them with an acceptance of their needs as they are of ours. There will be no us versus them. Am I clear?”

“Clear,” Caroline responded with the other five.

Raven spoke up. “We are with the Star People and this is our first day of class. We

are so blessed.”

Caroline nodded. “I can’t wait to see the new worlds.” She wondered about those worlds. With the vastness of space, would there be a chance to find others like herself? Terrana spoke of hybrids that were part human, part gray of the different species of gray, green, reptilian, insectoid and other humanoids. But none, so far, like her.

“Well, fellow classmates, time to look at our schedules and see where we are to be.” Akio said.

Mission Commander Juanina nodded. “I have in my backpack small devices, one for each one of us. They are like our tablets, let me show you.” She reached into her shoulder bag should and pulled out a small silver ball. Waving her hand over it, a huge holographic screen appeared in front of her. She waved her hand and the holographic screen disappeared. “If you recall one of the medical tests that each of you took, where blood was taken as a sample, we used the DNA from that sample and assisted the Grays with loading that DNA into these silver devices. If any of you happen to ‘accidentally’ take another person’s device, it will not work.” She moved her device from one hand to the other. “I am going to ask each of you to come up and take a silver ball from me.”

One by one they came up to her. Once everyone had a ball, she said to them, “Try them.”

They waved their hands over their balls, but nothing happened.

“Now,” Mission Commander Juanina said, “think telepathically of finding your device.”

One silver ball lit up. It was in Janet’s hand. “Let it go, Janet.”

The ball moved from Janet to Caroline.

Caroline smiled. “Hi, I’m Caroline.” The silver ball made a tinkling sound.

“Oh, that’s how it’s going to work,” Salvator said.

“Correct. Concentrate on your device. See it coming to you. Then when it tinkles and lights up after gliding over to you, identify who you are. Like Caroline’s did, it will respond,” Mission Commander Juanina said.

Caroline waved her hand over her silver ball and a holographic screen appeared in front of her. As she used her hand, just like she would on her tablet, a schedule appeared. This was so cool.

“Where are you going first?” Janet asked her.

“Looks like something called the observation station,” Caroline responded.

“Wow, that is what I have, too,” Raven said.

“Mine as well,” Salvator responded.

“Me also,” Akio said.

“Apparently they are going to keep us in a group at first, until we feel comfortable.” Mission Commander Juanina said. “I, too, have the observation station.”

Another Gray, not Terrana, approached them. Telepathically the Gray asked them to follow her to the location. Mission Commander Juanina went first, followed by the others. Caroline took a moment to take a deep breath, then followed the group. Thinking to herself she thought, *Vincent and Catherine did you ever think that one of your descendants would be here, on a starship, in space, with a new ET species, on such a grand adventure.*

What did Robert Frost write? Yes, that was it. “Two roads diverged in a wood and I, I took the one less traveled by and that has made all the difference.” Well, not exactly a forest, but similar. Maybe she could write up her own journal and make up her own words. She said a silent prayer that her family would be all right and that they would eventually understand why she had to go. She could even imagine in the future that the tunnels would buzz about the story about one of them traveling among the stars. Again she directed a thought to her ancestors. *Did you ever think that such a love story could end with the lovers having a child that would be traveling to distant worlds?*

She felt another mind asking for permission to inquire what her thoughts were. It was Terrana. She turned and saw that she was following them. “There are so many wonders to see, are you open to embracing this new path? Are you still sad?”

No, Terranas” she telepathed back to her. “Should I let the Mission Commander know about this conversation or should we make this private? If private, I have questions.”

“Private.”

Caroline was happy. “Terrana, did you tell us everything about the species out among the stars?”

“No,” Terrana replied with a strange smile on her face.

That was all she needed to say. Caroline had hope that she was going to find out who she truly was. This was going to be the greatest adventure of her life.

“To unpathed waters, undreamed shores...” William Shakespeare, *The Winter’s Tale*.