

*"The twists and turns of Mindy's adventures made me unable to put this book down. The depth and secrets of each character are continually illuminated with the turn of each page! Perhaps the end of the first book is really just the beginning..." ~ L.S., New York*

*"I loved this story! It was very exciting to bear witness to Mindy's secret life. After the 2<sup>nd</sup> half, I could not put it down and read it all the way through to the end. Not to give anything away, but I especially loved what the connection was between Mindy and Vawn."*

*~ L.S., Massachusetts*

*"I really liked Mindy and Zack for very different reasons, and finding out how they were connected at the end was amazing. I loved Mindy's strength of character. She was always searching for the highest good. I liked that she was well aware of danger and could trust her own intuition. The plot was convoluted and quick-changing in ways that really kept me reading. I could not put the book down!"*

*~ S.S., Shelter Island*

*"The book is exciting and written in such a way that readers of many ages can enjoy it. I especially like hearing Mindy's opinions on all of the craziness in her life. She's hilarious, interesting, and VERY likeable!" ~ M.H., Virginia*



**The Secret Life  
of Mindy T. Barnes**

**BOOK 1 – Life Unraveled**

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# **The Secret Life of Mindy T. Barnes**

**BOOK 1 – Life Unraveled**

**By Lila Moon**



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Summary: Young girl, Mindy T. Barnes, awakens to her destiny as a  
leader with fantastic gifts, finds her first love, travels to an alien world,  
and confronts her nemesis while all things unravel behind the scenes

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*With Special Thanks  
to those who  
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*I could not have done it without you.*





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## A Message from Mindy...

Today we begin our journey together, and I am very grateful that you are here.

There are a few things I'd like to share with you before we take our first step in order to better prepare you for this truly, unbelievable story – which began innocently and unexpectedly a very long time ago.

As my story begins...

I am Mindy T. Barnes, and I am curious and independent. (They are, in fact, defining traits in my secret life.) But as I write these words for you, hundreds of years in the future with full knowledge of what it means to be a member of the Forever Bloodline, I go back to the beginning because you need to know my story from the beginning for it to make sense. I had a normal life before everything turned upside down, and the time is right for the secrets to be told.

As a child, I felt that life didn't make sense. By the time I was 10 years old, I was very angry with the

world because no one seemed to be able to answer my questions – and I had many.

On my 12<sup>th</sup> birthday, everything changed and something more fantastic than I could ever have imagined happened, something that forevermore changed how I envision life to be.

Then when I was 14, I got a glimpse of my destiny, and my world turned completely upside down.

My first boyfriend broke my heart at 16, and the life I knew broke apart – not because of who he was or what he did, but because of WHY he came into my life. (I will tell you all about my relationship with Zack because he is very important to how my life unfolded.)

My story is always boldly honest. Sometimes it is humorous; other times it is confusing and even flat-out tragic. While there are emotionally moving moments for me to share with you, there are also a multitude of challenges to share that I was forced to manage.

Expect to take detours because secrets hide in dark, unexpected places where things are rarely what they appear to be.

I must admit that in the beginning (before Zack), I thought I was much wiser than I actually was. What I have, though, come to know, manage, and accept – changed everything for the lives of millions. My life unfolded by design but also by default – but in the beginning there was no way I could have known to what extent this was true.

But before I get too far ahead of myself, and lose you in my mysterious implications, let me begin my story at age 10, when I was a normal girl on Earth who was angry and struggling for answers. It was also 2 years before I became The Key when everything changed ...and that was just beginning.

To the journey ⇒  
Mindy T. Barnes

.....

*(There are references to characters in the New Tessinian Alphabet in this book, but those used are explained in the context of their usage. See page 291 for a full list of the symbols.)*



## **Chapter 1 - Age 10**

My brother and I walked the two blocks home from soccer practice. He was a good soccer player, but I was very good – and I was the baby sister.

At 12 years old, my brother spent most of his time during practice staring at the girls on the team in the next field. What an idiot. It was like he was possessed. He would not have been able to break his focus even if someone set him on fire. Maybe not even then. I repeat, what an idiot. His mind was never on soccer or anything other than girls.

His name is Bradford. Everyone calls him Brad – a normal, strong name. Nobody said his name over again when they heard it. Nobody repeated it like they doubted what they just heard like they did when they heard my name.

We came to a corner. I looked both ways for cars. Brad had his ear buds in blasting music from his music player and did not even pause before crossing. But then there were no cars coming, of course. That's the way his life went. Everywhere he walked life was good to him.

On the other hand, my life was very different. First of all, my name was an issue. Mindy. Yuck. What was my mother thinking?

Just as we were getting to our house one of Brad's friends yelled to me from the window of their passing car, "Mindy Mindy Min-DEEEE!" It was a sarcastic barb meant to make me angry, and it did, but I held my temper. All 12 year old boys are obviously idiots.

Then he yelled "Mommy's little ANGEL!" and I started shouting and was about to run down the street after the car, when my dad grabbed my arm and whispered in my ear, "Get... in... the... house. When will you learn to ignore them? Now, get inside for dinner." Then he sighed. He did a lot of that when he addressed my behavior.

It was Friday, the only day we ate together as a family. Having dinner together was about conversation and sharing. I was expected to behave and chat about all things stupid. Why bother? What was the point?

I stared down into the spaghetti in front of me and asked my mother in a low controlled voice for the billionth time in my life, "Why did you name me Mindy?"

"Mindy, dear," my mother did her demure-sigh-and-smile-sweetly thing, "when you were born you looked like a button-nosed angel! You know this already. We were going to call you Madeline – but you came out a Mindy!"

(That was not an explanation. That was a brain freeze.)

She continued dreamily lost in her memories, "The name jumped into my head, and it was perfect." Then she



came back to the present and added, “Now stop fussing about your name again, pretty girl Mindy, and eat your dinner.”

I looked down at my spaghetti and meatballs, and poked my meal with my fork. My name sounded like a cheerleader’s name (which my mother was) – and I am as far from a button-nosed, bubbling blonde cheerleader as you can get. My hair is brown. My eyes are brown. Even my personality is dull, moody brown. I stare people down who annoy me, and I am rarely charming, and I would never be described as “cute” or a “button-nosed angel.” I looked up at my mother with a scowl. If she noticed, she ignored me.

There were no yellow sunshine smiles in me. My mother had a lock on those. Everything about me was anti-blonde and non-Mindy like. When people heard my name they smiled broadly and looked down at me, the little peanut at my mother’s side, and quickly recognized that I was no sweet angel. I actually heard them say to themselves, “Well, that is not a Mindy!” They expected innocent and sweet – and, obviously, those labels do not apply to me.

I often give people what my father calls the “stink eye.” I have no idea what that means; but, I think he is right because when I give them The Look, people do not talk to me anymore – which is exactly my intention.

I poked a meatball to look like I was eating rather than thinking, and this time my mother noticed.

“Don’t you like your meal, Kitten?” she asked.

I guess I’m lucky my mother didn’t name me Kitten. It was, after all, her favorite pet name for me. Double yuck!

“Yes, I like the meal, Mother.”

I actually hated it, but there was no point in saying so because her answer would always be the same – “That’s nice, dear.” She always said it. Oh, sometimes it could be, “That’s nice, Kitten” but no matter what I said, her answer was the same. I suspect she never listened to anything I said, but I was long past caring. Better to not respond than to make a barbed comment and have Dad notice and lecture me again about respect and kindness. I know what those values are. I just don’t want to waste time on expressing them.

My father interrupted my thoughts, “How was school, Mindy?”

“She started screaming at Jessica Thomas again in the lunchroom – and made her cry,” Brad volunteered.

I shot sharp daggers right into his face with my stare, but he just laughed at me.

My father said to me, “We are going to have another talk tomorrow. Your soccer practice has already been cancelled. It’s going to rain.”

Damn. Rain and one of those talks with Dad. The weekend was looking up already. While Mother is oblivious, Dad is unrelenting and All Knowing. Damn.

“Do you hear me, Mindy?” he asked patiently.

“Yes, Dad,” I answered starring down into my meal. If he registered my annoyance, he’d address it in private.

I hated being a child surrounded by people who had control over my life. I glanced over at Brad. I would have liked to strangle him – right there at the dinner table. When I looked at Brad, he looked up and shot me his most charming smile. Yup, I hated him.

My mother was cleaning up the dishes and humming her happy song. What was really going on inside of her is a mystery to me. She took my untouched plate, said nothing, and scraped the meal into Sasha’s bowl. She was a tiny, little, fluffy dog who did not need any snacks. She was so fat she could hardly move. I had tried over the years to tell Sasha not to eat what Mother mindlessly put in her bowl, but she never listened.

Every morning Mother asked Sasha (who, by the way, should have been named Mindy and the name Sasha reserved for me), “How did you get so chubby, you sweet, sweet little dog?”

One time I responded and said, “She would not be so chubby if you stopped feeding her leftovers, Mother,” but my father gave me one of his looks. Maybe that was his “stink eye” because it was steeped in unspoken warning, and I did not repeat my question when my mother asked,

“What was that, Mindy?” She was already off doing something else, anyway.

My father, though, kept me pinned with his stare, and I answered as I usually did, “Nothing, Mother.” It was then, and only then, that he went back to the breakfast cereal in front of him.

Why shouldn’t my mother face the obvious? With that thought, my father would look up at me because he seemed to always know what I was thinking, and I would quickly look down and go back to eating my cereal.

“Why do you think you know everyone’s answers, Mindy?” my father had asked.

“Because I do,” I had answered quietly but with conviction.

He had not looked up from whatever he was reading on his tablet when he said with a sigh, “I swear you are a clone of your Aunt Tessie.”

Damn, I wish she hadn’t died before I was born. I excused myself from the dinner table, retreated to my bedroom, and threw myself down on the bed.

My eye caught the tiny, forest green-colored teddy bear with the big ears on the shelf. It was my favorite in my collection.

“Life’s easy for you,” I pouted. “You don’t have to deal with dumb stuff like I do. You get to live a happy life on the shelf.”

Aunt Tessie would have helped me to make sense out of life – and maybe she would have been able to explain why every time I close my eyes I see the same blue hand reaching for me.

Yup, I wished Aunt Tessie was here.





## **Chapter 2 – *The Dream***

It rained just as Dad predicted, and I was called to the front porch for a talk about my behavior at school soon after breakfast.

As the rain pounded the roof of the screened-in porch, I settled into the chair with the red cushions and Dad said, “So tell me what happened at lunch with Jessica Thomas.”

I knew he wanted to be smoking a cigarette, but since he’d announced he was quitting, he was making every effort to hold true to his promise to himself. It had been less than two weeks, and he did not seem to know what to do with his hands. He fidgeted in his seat to get comfortable, looked around the porch and then picked up a small twig on the floor that came in on someone’s shoe. He rolled it between his fingers, lost in the action then forcefully redirected his focus and asked patiently, “What happened at lunch yesterday, Mindy?”

“Jessica Thomas was born an idiot is what happened,” I answered.

Dad cleared his throat and went into what I call his lecture mode. It meant he was serious, and I was supposed to listen carefully and respond appropriately – which was hard for me. “Mindy, while it is true that some people lack intelligence or common sense that does not give you the

right to trash them at any provocation.” He paused then asked, “Do you understand what I am saying?”

“I am not to tell her she is stupid even if she says or does something stupid.”

“Look at me so I know you are listening.” I looked up from the thread I was picking at on the seam of the cushion, and he continued. “You are an intelligent, young girl, and I know you can run circles around poor Jessica and make her feel the fool before she even has an inkling she is being manipulated – but you cannot do it.”

“Why not? She deserves to be made to look foolish.”

Dad took a deep breath, twirled the twig between two fingers then said, “Being smart means you see things other people don’t see. It is flat out cruel for you to use what you see or know to victimize them. Do you understand?”

“Don’t mess with stupid people. Let them be stupid even if they aim their stupidity at me.”

Dad tried not to smile, but I saw the amusement on his face for a split second before he wiped it away. “I want you to respect people for who they are. You are not the sole representative of the absolute truth, you know.”

“But how is Jessica ever going to know when she is being stupid unless someone like me tells her?”

“Trust me, she already knows on some level.”

That was something to consider. “If people are aware enough to know they are stupid then why don’t they just make themselves smarter?”



“I think they do try to be smarter,” Dad said.

“No, I think they don’t try to be smarter because they don’t even know they are stupid,” I countered.

“Mindy, we are all born with a level of intelligence or an intellectual potential that will not change. We can work at acquiring knowledge, but most scientists do not think we can grow our innate intelligence.”

“Maybe all of Jessica’s intellectual potential went into making her cute,” I said.

“Maybe that’s what happened. I have, though, made myself clear about this? No more trash talk especially at the expense of others.”

“I heard you,” I responded.

“Good.”

We sat in communal silence as the rain continued to pound the roof. There was a rhythm to rain that always reminded me of Aunt Tessie. Even though she had died before I was born, whenever it rained my thoughts went directly to her.

“Dad, why does the rain make me think about Aunt Tessie?”

A full minute passed before he answered. I waited patiently as I felt him searching for an answer. What was so complicated about my question? Then Dad said, “Aunt Tessie also liked the rain.”

“I’m not sure if that answers my question,” I said pulling at a red thread on the seam of the seat cushion.

“It’s the only answer I have for you today.”

“But you like the rain like I do – and the rain doesn’t remind me of you.”

“Aunt Tessie liked the rain. I like the rain. It’s in your genes.”

“Maybe, but it feels like something else.”

Dad did not answer. He snapped the twig in half and tossed it to the ground. Then closed his eyes and rested his head against the back of his chair.

“Dad?” I asked.

“Yes?” He kept his eyes closed.

“Did Aunt Tessie have blue hands?”

His eyes flew open, but he was not looking at me. He was looking across the street. I could feel his mind spiraling in every direction for an answer – which was very interesting in itself. Then he said, “How about we go down to the candy store for something special?”

I raised my eyebrows at him questioning his diversionary tactic, but his warning stare to let it go came through loud and clear.

“OK, Dad,” I answered.

“Go find out if your brother and mother want to join us, and let’s get going.”

It was a feeble redirection on his part. He knew it, and I knew it; but, I obeyed the unspoken warning to not pursue the topic and got up to do as told.

There was more about Aunt Tessie that I needed to know. I think she was appearing in one of my reoccurring dreams where I'd be looking in a mirror and a bluish face (that looked a lot like mine) would superimpose itself over my face. Behind the face it was always raining. My Dad knew more than he was telling me, and tomorrow was another day.

That night I had another one of my all-too-familiar dreams again.

I am at the bottom of a hole. Ground level is a few inches above my out-stretched hands, but there is no way for me to get out of the hole. There is nothing to grasp or stand on, and I can find no way to climb up the sides.

Then a blue hand reaches towards me from above. I see the shadow of the person with this hand, but nothing more. My only way out is to grasp the blue hand and be pulled up to ground level. But because I am afraid, I refuse the hand held out to me, and suddenly I shrink down into a tiny, little person at the bottom of the hole. The opening is, now, way above my head.

I used to call out to my mother every time I had this dream, but I don't any more. I have no desire to go back to the doctor my mother took me to who I did not like at all. My mother said he was a "well-known, very reputable doctor" who I was supposed to respect.

It wasn't long before I decided it was far better to pretend my dreams were gone. The doctor did not believe my dream story, anyway. He thought I was making it up to get attention.

But I knew that my dreams meant something, and I was determined to find out what that was. My answers were out there. I knew they were.

Maybe I needed to confront Dad one more time about what he knew. We were bound to have more of our little talks in the future.



## Chapter 3 - *The Key*



My story jumps ahead two years in this chapter to the day when my life on Earth began to unravel, and the truly fantastic life I was meant to lead began.

It was the afternoon of my 12<sup>th</sup> birthday when I found the key in my top dresser drawer.

I had run upstairs to get a sweatshirt to wear to the mall, opened the drawer, found the key, and everything (I mean everything!) changed.

If my life had been a succession of information and events that were confusing and unexplained to date, how the key impacted my life was absolutely beyond anything I could have imagined – and by my 12<sup>th</sup> birthday I could imagine some incredibly fantastic scenarios. My childhood innocence was about to fly way out the window. (Needless to say, I never did get to the mall that day.)

Since the key had not been there earlier in the morning, this meant someone had put it in the drawer – or it had somehow materialized nestled in the center of my rainbow

colored, tie-dyed t-shirt. It was my favorite shirt, and it somehow felt significant that the key was there.

The key itself was not very remarkable. It was simple, tarnished, and looked old. It was a bit larger than a common key, about two inches long and one inch wide at the top and bottom.

Over the past two years, I had gotten more perceptive and smarter about hiding what I know. When the key appeared, I had no intention of telling anyone about it – except maybe Dad.

Things happened in my life that did not happen in other peoples' lives. Over the years, I had learned to be more tolerant in regards to what I perceived as the shortcomings of others, and I was far wiser about what I shared. Dad had told me once to “walk more softly through life,” and I think I was finally getting what he meant.

My fingers closed around the key which was surprisingly heavy when I lifted it from where it lay. When I placed it in my left palm, it felt very warm. That wasn't natural, and I attributed it to being just another one of the many unexplained things that happened in my life – like my dreams ...or the dog that told me not to take the shortcut down the alley to school ...or the sycamore tree that scolded me for peeling its bark ...or how I knew that my history teacher's daughter was deathly ill.

I shouldn't have told her how sorry I was because that set off a firestorm of concerns. She thought I had gotten into her email or text messages. (Like I had the inkling to do such a thing. Technology was unnecessary if you just know things like I do.)

What I know intuitively cannot be explained, but hacking into someone's computer or phone can be – which I had to admit to and accept punishment for in order to explain away my carelessness. Even if my intentions were good, the truth could not be accepted. Oh, I have learned the hard way to not say or admit what I know.

Only Dad understood – and sometimes my mother. Although she often seemed clueless, there were times when she surprised me with her actions – like last year when I badly broke my ankle falling off my bike.

I saw the bone sticking out – and she ran down the street to me and waved her hand over it, and it was completely healed, instantly. She'd never done anything like that before, and acted flustered after she did it hurrying me to my feet and walking us briskly back home.

Our neighbor had seen my ankle and run to call 911 – and came running up to us. By way of explanation my mother said, "Thank you for offering to help Mindy, but you were mistaken about an injury. She's fine."

"I saw a bone sticking out," she said in disbelief.

"Thank you, Nancy," my mother had said waving over her shoulder as she hurried me home.

My mother offered me no explanation about what she had done. I assumed she had not realized my injury had already been seen by someone else when she arrived at my side at the bottom of the neighbor's driveway. Obviously, my mother had some mad skills that I did not know about that she kept safely hidden.

After all, it was not hard to keep secrets in my family because we did it all the time. It was necessary that we kept secrets or the healing of my severely broken ankle could create some real problems for all of us. People were very suspicious of what they did not understand. Hell, I didn't even understand – and I was used to the fantastic happening.

The key was becoming hotter and hotter in my left palm so I switched to my right palm, and it immediately began to show me pictures on my mind screen.

I was seeing a long flight of steps that went down. They went in spirals many stories down until I came to a metal door where the key jumped out of my hand and into the lock – and turned itself with a loud click. All that was left for me to do was to push the door open.

It was in that moment that my mother walked by my open bedroom door humming one of her happy songs. She glanced inside as she passed then quickly doubled back to stare at the key in my hand.



“The day has arrived!” she gasped more to herself than me. Then she quickly exited my doorway and rushed down the hall.

“Mom!” I called, taking off after her with the key clutched in my right palm. “What are you talking about?”

*Damn. What now?*

I caught up with my mother as she was speaking to my father reading the news on his tablet. “Mindy got the key! Our sweet, little baby girl has the key!” she said in a rush of words.

I had come to a halt in the doorway, and he looked up at me.

“Well, she’s twelve today. That’s about right.”

“I thought she had to be thirteen to get the key. She’s too young. She doesn’t even know the story yet.”

“No, she doesn’t know the story, but she must be ready. The key only arrives when the time is right.” Dad smiled at me. “Come here, Mindy. Sit down. I have some things to tell you that you are ready to hear.”

I crossed the room, sat down on the sofa, took a deep breath to steady myself then said, “Okay, I’m ready.”

*Maybe I was finally going to get some answers to my questions.*

I heard the key say in a low whisper, “Yes, you will.”

Startled, I opened my fist to look at the key, and it was gone. As I was anxiously searching for it around me on the

sofa cushion, I heard the same low whisper say, “No need to worry, Mindy. You did not lose me. You are The Key now.”

*Damn. What did that mean??*



## **Chapter 4 - *The Story***

Dad began what was to be the most fantastic story I'd ever heard.

I sat still, listening carefully while inside my heart was beating with wild anticipation. What I did find out was totally unbelievable. It was information that answered many of my questions about our lives while creating more questions about my own. At least, some of the gaps were filled in.

I tried to stay focused on Dad's words, but my mind kept racing in different directions trying to make sense of the specifics and attempting to integrate them with the impressions I already had about life. The story confirmed my feelings but also created more questions.

Here is what Dad told me on my 12<sup>th</sup> birthday, the day I became The Key:

"You are part of a very special family, Mindy. It is actually a royal family of sorts. Our lineage and your role is through my mother's sister, your Aunt Tessie. Your mother is from another powerful family, but that is another story to be told on another day."

Then he suddenly changed the subject and asked, "Do you feel alright? Aunt Tessie said that when you became

The Key you may experience some dizziness or disorientation?”

It was disturbing to think that everyone had been talking about me. How did they know these things?

“Mindy, are you alright?” Dad repeated his question.

“A bit dizzy,” I answered, the question finally reaching me. “Actually I don’t think I can walk right now.” I opened and closed my right hand which felt numb and tingly.

Dad noticed my hand movements and reassured me. “Aunt Tessie said it would pass in an hour or so.”

“Should I get you something, Mindy?” Mom asked suddenly concerned. “Water? Hot chocolate? I could take your symptoms away, but I am not permitted to. I cannot interfere with the process. I don’t like this at all. I’ve worried and worried about this day.”

My mother could take symptoms away? No wonder I never got sick. Ever. AND she’d healed my broken ankle. Obviously a lot more was going on with my family than I knew about.

“Laura,” Dad addressed my mother, “Everything is going to be fine. This is Mindy’s destiny.”

“Yes, I know, but Mindy is my daughter.” Then she turned to me, “You will tell me if there is anything I can get for you, won’t you?”

“I will,” I managed to answer. It even felt difficult to form words. So much for asking the endless questions that had begun to form in my mind and were now fragmenting.

I did not like this at all. I let my head drop forward in frustration then raised it. When I used my hand to push my hair back from my face, I could not feel my fingertips touching my hair. My face and the fingertips on both of my hands were numb. *Did Dad say anything about numbness?*

“Let’s continue then,” Dad began again. “I am going to tell you what I know which is more than you know in this moment, but not as much as you will know through your own discovery.”

He cleared his throat and began. “We come from a place called Tessina (pronounced  $\text{\textcircled{T}}$ essina) hence your middle name. All of The Keys carry the name  $\text{\textcircled{T}}$ essina as a vibrational reminder of their roots – usually as a middle name, but pronounced Tessina.”

As he spoke, I marveled at how I knew exactly what he meant. When I listened to the word  $\text{\textcircled{T}}$ essina with my physical body, it felt like a heavy vibration in my heart. Was it sadness? No, not exactly. I actually longed to go to  $\text{\textcircled{T}}$ essina – or was it to return to  $\text{\textcircled{T}}$ essina? There was something about the word itself that created a longing in my heart that hurt.

Dad was still talking so I centered my wandering focus on his words again.

“We’ve all been here for many generations and have lineage that stretches back about 1,000 years, but we all know through oral traditions that we are not from here. We do not fit in exactly but make do, and most of us are quite

happy – as your mother and I are. It has been our greatest joy to raise you and your brother here on Earth.”

I must have looked concerned or disturbed – although all I felt was a growing numbness because Dad quickly added, “Please don’t worry, Mindy. We are not going anywhere. This is our home now. As to why we are here, that may be for you to discover. We are not sure.”

Mother nodded in agreement as he continued, “There are very few Keys like you. In fact, we know of no others (except for Aunt Tessie) – and your role is yours alone. We do not know what you will discover as you fully embody your role.”

A thought occurred to me so I said it out loud. I had to carefully form the words because I felt very far away. “Once again...I wish... Aunt Tessie...hadn’t died...before I was born.”

“But she didn’t die, Kitten,” my mother said. “She went BACK to ⊕essina.”

“How... is... that... possible?” I asked still dazed and trying to focus on the information being shared with me.

“I’m sorry. We don’t know the answer to your question,” Dad admitted with concern. “The Keys have a very different destiny to fulfill than anyone else, and what they do is kept secret from the rest of us. What your mother and I know is only what we were told by Aunt Tessie – which is very little. It seems a shame that we cannot assist you

with this. We do know that Aunt Tessie went back to ⊕essina.”

He paused before continuing, “We don’t know where ⊕essina is exactly. That’s not information we have been given. As your parents, it gives us great pain to not be able to help you more with all of this, but we can’t. I’m a Guardian and your mother is a Healer. Our roles are clearly defined as is yours – as is Bradford’s – but we all know others with the same roles, traveling the same path, and we come together for support.”

He paused again, and I could feel him gathering his thoughts. “We knew this day would come, and we have trusted that you have everything you need to be who you are meant to be – but we are also worried, and that is because we love you. We truly hope that makes sense.”

I let all of his words wash over me. There were so many questions in my mind, but one in particular was rising to the surface of my slow moving thought processes.

“Brad? He....has a part...in this?”

“Of course, he does! He’s our son born of ⊕essinian blood as you are.”

“My idiot brother...has a role...in this?”

Dad laughed, “Yes, ‘your idiot brother’ as you call him has a role he was born into – an important role.”

“Why hasn’t he ...told me about it?” My head was clearing a bit, and I felt like I was emerging from out of a long tunnel.

“He was not permitted to do so – and has fortunately been obedient in that regard.”

“What is ...his role?”

“He will be 2<sup>nd</sup> in Command of Civilians when he turns 21. He is training now and an excellent student.”

“Are you sure we are talking ...about my brother... Brad... with that impressive... job title?”

Mom and Dad both laughed at my question.

Then I added perplexed, “He spends all of his time... listening to his music player.”

“That is where his lessons are. As soon as he completes one lesson, the next one is downloaded directly to his music player. We don’t know where they come from. They just arrive. You remember we got him the music player on his 12<sup>th</sup> birthday? The lessons started downloading themselves, and Brad started listening with rapt interest. It is his destiny so the seed was already planted and sprouting began with his lessons. He does have a gift with people and leadership. This you must see. He is the captain of his soccer team, and has been president of his class for every school year. Most recently he developed an exercise program for the elderly that has been implemented at the local nursing home. He does have gifts in this area.”

“Yes, I know... all of that is true... when I think about it... I guess I am just finding all of this... absolutely incredible. My head is spinning.”



My mother got up quickly and brought me a glass of water from the kitchen. I took it and drank a few sips to steady myself. “Thanks, Mom,” I said. She sat beside me and gave me a hug and a kiss on my temple.

I was thinking about how nice it was to feel loved when Dad asked, “Do you have any questions so far?”

“I don’t even know... what to ask,” I answered.

“Well, let’s go a little bit further into the story. Is that alright with you?”

I laughed unevenly. “Yes, let’s do it... Maybe you’ll answer the questions...I can’t find words for.”

Mom and Dad laughed, the levity and alignment with my unsteadiness felt good.

“We don’t know why we are living here in this location or this neighborhood. Nobody knows. We get assignments via email or text messages – or even through regular mail, and we are told to do certain things or even to move.”

“Dad... that sounds awful.”

“No! No, Mindy, it’s not. Whatever we are told to do, has served our well-being for all of our 1,000 years of history. As a large sort of nuclear family, we always move together. We are never alone – and have no history of ever being misguided. There has never been a single individual who was misled or asked to do anything that was not within their capacity to do.”

He paused and got very serious. “Something is changing, though. There have been predictions. Something

is expected to happen in the next 10 years that has been nicknamed the Great Event. The messages allude to it, but there have been no details or assignments specifically related to it yet.”

“I have a question,” I said, my head clearing a bit and my equilibrium beginning to return.

“What do you want to know?”

“Who are these people who are our ‘nuclear family’? Are they...our neighbors?”

“Good question! No, they are not our neighbors, but we all live within a 100 mile radius of each other. Some of us even live in the same town, but we are never neighbors. I think our closeness would be suspicious to others if we were direct neighbors. Also finding housing for all of us in close proximity would be difficult. The same area is perfect. We are not really sure exactly where each other live, though.”

He paused then continued excitedly, “You will meet our family very soon. In fact, I received an email message this morning that our family – Family 703X – will be gathering next Saturday at the state park. I suspect it is in honor of you becoming The Key, but I am not sure. The timing seems right. You have met some of these people before, but without you understanding our connection to each other. We come together, but we are not permitted to associate other than at the gatherings. It would draw too much attention to us.”

Immediately I felt myself resisting the implication that I attend, but had enough presence to be tactful with my response. “I’m not sure how I will feel about attending the gathering. What if I don’t want to go?” I asked.

(The idea of being unquestioningly compliant or agreeable was actually repugnant to me on a multitude of levels, as was the idea of a ‘nuclear family.’ This information was not a source of excitement for me. It obviously was, though, for Dad and Mother.)

Dad was quick to acknowledge my hesitation about the family gathering, and said, “You can, of course, choose to not attend; but, the gathering is a week away. Many things could change by then. Have you been seeing things or getting messages yourself? Aunt Tessie said the Keys receive direct communications.”

I flashed back to the vision I had when I first held the key in my right palm – the downward spiraling staircase, the metal door, and the key jumping into the lock. Sharing it made me feel uncomfortable for some reason so I said, “I’m not sure. Maybe. I did hear a voice.”

“A female voice?” Dad asked.

“Yes.”

“That was probably Aunt Tessie speaking to you,” he assured me.

“You look tired, Kitten,” my mother said and placed an arm around my shoulders pulling me towards her. She looked at my father and said, “It’s time for her to rest.”

“Yes. Rest,” he agreed. “You will need to sleep more in the first week then things will be completely back to normal.”

Dad smiled at me and crossed the room as I rose. He gave me a hug and a kiss on the top of my head and said, “Mindy, we are very proud of you. I promise, everything will come back to normal. Just wait and see.”

*Normal? That was never going to happen.*

I excused myself and went upstairs to my room to sleep. I could not even seem to rally the anger I felt for being manipulated in this way. I had not asked for this.

As I was dragging myself up the stairs, my dad got a text message that said, “Very good, Mr. Barnes” – that I saw very clearly on my mind screen.

Yup. Normal was gone – and I was going to be really pissed about all of this after I got some sleep.



## Chapter 5 - *The First Week Begins*

As I look back at my beginnings, I realize how young and resistant I was to developments. But all of this happened so long ago; and as I now know, I traveled my journey exactly how it was planned. Well, almost as it was planned. (The individual spirit is always unpredictable.)

Back to my story...

The word pissed did not even come close to describing how I felt when I finally woke up.

I was furious that no one had gotten me up earlier. I was going to be late for school, and that didn't even compare to my other frustrations about what had most recently transpired in my life.

"Hear me out there," I said out loud. "To whoever is pulling the strings: I hate being jerked around! I hate not knowing what is going on! I hate being told what to do! I hate things happening to me that I don't choose myself! I decide what I want to do! I decide my future! I am not a pawn in a game. I am an independent, young woman who

makes her own choices. I am Mindy T. Barnes! NOT The Key – whatever that means!”

Okay, that made me feel a bit better.

I was standing in the middle of my neon green room with the bright-white trim and closet doors. Everything seemed to be in very sharp focus. Odd. I blinked my eyes a few times to see if it was my imagination, but it wasn't. I could actually read the small type in my history textbook on the floor next to the bed across the room. It had to be 10-12 feet away. It was hard to stay angry because I was so intrigued with the discovery of my visual acuity. When I glanced over at my collection of teddy bears on the far shelf, I could see the whiskers on the miniature, forest green-colored teddy bear with the big ears. Wow...

My attention shifted as I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror over my dresser. I looked surprisingly refreshed. Hey, I even looked good! My brown hair looked neat after sleeping on it. (How was that possible?) My brown eyes were clear. Maybe even a bit luminous – in a word. The pimple I had on my left cheek, that I had been agonizing over, was gone. In fact, my skin looked perfect. I didn't need any cover-up at all today.

I felt less awkward in my body than I usually did. It was like I was better balanced or something. I stood on my toes

and lifted one leg off the ground, and my balance never changed. When I jumped to the toes on my other foot, my landing was perfect and my balance unaffected by the maneuver. *Interesting.*

I felt older – or maybe more mature. Was I taller? Yes. I think I was about an inch taller. *Interesting.*

Then a familiar bluish female face tried to superimpose itself over my own face in the mirror. It was the same face I saw in my dreams and sometimes on my mind screen that I thought might be Aunt Tessie, but I did not have time for this today. And I surely did not want to deal with yet another distraction!

“Go away! I have to get to school. Come back later!” I whispered to the bluish face floating in the mirror, and it vanished. *Good.*

I turned and went into the bathroom to get ready for the day. *Damn.* I hated being late for school.

I had a small bathroom to myself with a shower stall. It completed my private space. My needs were simple – a bed, a desk and chair, my books, and a private bathroom. My clothing was an eclectic combination of new and old styles because I had no interest in clothing, and my mother had purchased everything in my closet for me. That made me stand out at school, but I didn’t care. There was no part of me, not one single cell, that cared what my peers thought of me. Not that I felt superior to anyone else. I just didn’t

care. At best, I could be personable if I had to be, but only pulled out those skills for my parents' sake when I didn't want to embarrass them. My parents were good people, and I loved them very much.

As for Bradford – what was he doing being 2<sup>nd</sup> in Command of Civilians. *What the hell did that mean, anyway?* I reserved my right to continue to label him an 'idiot' until he proved otherwise.

I turned on the shower and stripped down glaring at myself in the medicine chest mirror. I looked angry but, had to admit, I still looked pretty good. Between the time that I put the toothpaste on my toothbrush and looked up, the bluish face had drifted into the right side of the mirror.

"Go away!" I whispered through clenched teeth and the image disappeared again. Good. I had no time to deal with my distractions.

I brushed my teeth quickly then went to step into the shower when my eye caught my leg, and I realized it looked different. I put both legs together on the floor and looked at the lower part of my body. Damn. I looked older and leaner. My legs were definitely longer and shapelier than they were. My eyes traveled up my body, and I noticed that my breasts were larger than they were when I went to sleep. Double damn and weird. And this was going to create attention – another thing I hated.



Annoyed, I stepped into the shower and realized immediately that the water was too cold and almost jumped back out of the shower; but, as soon as the thought registered in my mind, the water changed temperature to exactly how I liked it. This was not weird, anymore. It was rapidly moving towards disturbing.

Tentatively I tested my ability to alter the water temperature and sure enough as soon as I thought of a temperature change, it happened instantly. That didn't even make sense. The water had to mix with more water of the temperature I chose then move through the pipes. At least a few seconds had to elapse for the water to change temperature in the shower. Yup, disturbing.

Stepping outside of the shower, I wrapped a towel around myself and went to find some clothes to wear. I managed to make my bra fit. Thank goodness it was made from some miracle stretch fabric. My favorite tie-dyed t-shirt turned out to be tight across my breasts (how annoying), and my favorite jeans were short but still wearable. These physical changes were going to attract attention. The absolute last thing I wanted right now was a body that was attractive to my male classmates. Argh! I had no time or interest in dealing with this.

“Mindy?”

I heard my name whispered softly but couldn't tell the direction of the voice.

“What? Who said that?” I asked scanning the room.

“I need to talk with you,” the voice said.

In an attempt to ignore the voice, I focused on making my shirt fit more comfortably. I pulled it down and stood up to look at myself in the mirror on the dresser. The bluish face came into focus in the mirror beside my reflection. I watched in fascination rather than surprise or fear as it spoke. It had never done that before.

“Mindy, please listen to me. It is very important. You have a destiny as a Key that I can help you achieve.” The voice was soft, calm and respectful.

I stared at the face trying to figure out what my response was supposed to be then said, “You know what? Maybe if I were smarter or less angry, I’d be afraid of you, but right now all I want to do is forget all of this. I have a life to live, school to attend – “

“You must explore your ⊕essinian roots.”

“Why?” I snapped. “This is all crazy. Who do you think you can tell me what to do?”

I turned away to find my shoes and when I turned back the bluish face in the mirror had expanded into a shadowy figure standing in front of my dresser – in my room!

I physically jumped back at the sight of the small woman. It was mildly disturbing, to say the least, to have her materialized in my bedroom.

“This is MY space,” I said. “You have no right to be here! Who are you?”

The shadowy person responded in the same quiet, respectful tone. “You know who I am – your Aunt Tessie.”

“Aunt Tessie. It’s really you. I suspected, but I wasn’t sure,” I responded in disbelief. I swallowed hard, and slowly looked her up and down. She was bluish like she was in my dream, and the same color of the hand that seemed to be reaching for me in my other dream. Maybe I needed to stop running. Aunt Tessie probably knew the answers to some of my questions.

Oh, my life was getting weirder and weirder.

“And the day has just begun,” Aunt Tessie added responding to my thoughts, then smiled.





## **Chapter 6 - *The First Week – Day 2***

“Mindy,” Aunt Tessie continued. “I’ve waited a long time to make direct contact with you. I have appeared to you occasionally so you would be used to my appearance. We must talk before you leave this room.”

I heard my bedroom door lock itself. I looked questioningly at Aunt Tessie, and she shrugged and said sweetly, “You have to listen. It’s important.” Then she materialized beyond a shadowy form to an almost solid presence.

I stared at the small, bluish woman in front of me – awed. My annoyance at being manipulated again was replaced by curiosity. “How can you be here? Like this? How are you doing it?”

Aunt Tessie laughed, and I was reminded of water trickling lazily over rocks in a stream. “The Keys are always more curious than anything else,” she said. She paused to smile at me then continued, “To answer your questions, I am here in front of you through a sort of projection process. I am, for lack of a better word, tethering myself to ⊕essina and making myself visible here, in your room.”

That answer did not fully appease my curiosity. “But where are you really? Here or ⊕essina?” I asked.

Aunt Tessie laughed again. “Good question. One befitting someone who is designated a Key. They are curious, and they are thinkers. In addition, they question everything. That is what makes them good leaders. To answer your question, I am both here and on ⊕essina. Well, a bit more on ⊕essina, I guess.”

“I am not a leader. This I know for sure.” I folded my arms across my chest defiantly then became painfully aware of my larger breast size. Damn. I unfolded my arms.

“Ah, but you are a leader. You have just not acquired the leadership skills you need, and you have no one to lead yet. You are going to grow into your role – and I am going to help you.”

“Like Bradford is getting help?”

“Yes. Sort of.”

“What does that mean?”

“Let’s sit down, and I will explain a few things to you. Can we sit?” Aunt Tessie raised her eyebrows questioningly and gestured towards the chair beside my desk. I hesitated then sat. (A part of me really did want to get some answers.) Aunt Tessie sat on the end of the bed.

She began, “I am going to assist you as needed. Most of your lessons will be downloaded to you directly, but if you have any questions or problems I will appear and assist you. Today, I’m here to introduce myself and inform you about some basic information.” Aunt Tessie folded her hands in

her lap. It seemed like an old fashioned gesture, like she was being polite or proper.

“I’m not sure if I want to be a part of this. Somebody made a mistake making me a Key,” I said grumpily from the chair.

“Not true!” Aunt Tessie did her bubbling-brook laugh again. “There are never any mistakes.”

“I’m not getting out of this room until I get the ‘basic information’ as you call it, right?” I sighed.

“You are correct.”

“OK, then let’s get started. ...Am I supposed to offer you water or something?”

“No. I do not need anything, but thank you very much,” she answered politely.

I resolved myself to whatever was next and said, “I’m ready then. Begin.”

Aunt Tessie smiled, pleased with my response and began brightly (which made me cringe), “You are about to embark on a truly fantastic journey, Mindy, one I am very proud to assist you with.”

“Is yours the blue hand that keeps reaching for me in my visions?” I interrupted.

“No, but I’m sure that answer will come to you in a future lesson.”

I exhaled forcefully and said with resignation, “I am not a patient person. Just tell me what I need to know from lesson one.”

Aunt Tessie laughed again, “First of all, Lesson One has already been downloaded to you. I don’t know the details of your lessons. I am here to assist you in getting started and understanding what your role is all about – and to answer questions about lesson one.” She paused then asked, “Do you have any questions from lesson one?”

“No, because I have not received lesson one yet.”

“Oh! Well, that surprises me. I am sure it will arrive shortly. May I continue then?”

I nodded. *Why not? Did I have a choice? Why was I so annoyed?* Maybe I was just uncomfortable in my new body.

Aunt Tessie began, “When young Ⓟessinians come of age, which is usually when they are 12 or 13 years old, they are made aware of the role they will play in life. This role is determined before birth – and most Tessinians will be somewhat prepared and made aware of their role before the lessons begin to download. (All parents are informed of their child’s role at birth, but are not permitted to share that information until their child comes of age.) I have been trying to contact you to inform you but, and as would be expected, you have ignored me.”

(That was true. There were many times that Aunt Tessie had appeared in the mirror or on my mind screen, and I had ignored her every time.)

She continued, “Students begin to receive lessons, like Bradford via whatever format best meets their needs – mp3 downloads, text messages, emails, through the music they



listen to, between the lines of what they read or their friends tell them, through their favorite video games or television shows. The materials will perfectly match who the individual is and that is why they will participate with rapt attention – “

“I am not apt to participate in anything with ‘rapt attention’ unless I choose it myself.”

“ – except for the Keys who will resist because of their intelligence, independence, and innate curiosity. Someone like your brother will be introduced to others who are moving into leadership roles similar to his own. He will find support in our family – Family 703X – and amongst his peers. His role is quite specific, but he will find support. The Keys are very rare. You will never meet one amongst your peers. There is, in fact, no other Key alive on Earth at this time.”

“But why me? Why am I a Key? Which, by the way, I find disturbing and an affront to my free will.”

“You have been born with some very unique skills that are extremely valuable to ⊕essina.”

“Whoever gave them to me can take them back and give them to someone else,” I answered miserably.

“Not possible,” Aunt Tessie laughed. “You are who you are – and that’s it.”

“So what happens now?”

“You take all of this one day at a time, Mindy dear.”

“Are you a Key, also, Aunt Tessie?” I asked.

“Yes, I am – but with very different responsibilities. A Key is someone who is in a position of leadership. We are independent and work in close association with the top level leadership of Tessina – something called the Supreme Leadership Level.”

She paused, I guess to see if I had a response to what she had just shared – then asked, “Do you have any questions so far?”

(Not about any bogus Supreme Leadership Level, I thought. That was for sure. I considered asking about the downward spiraling staircase, the metal door, and the key that jumped to unlock it – then rejected the idea. I was not exactly sure why, but it did not feel right to share the vision.)

Instead, I said definitively, but politely, “I am not impressed with your story nor am I convinced I want to play this game,” and stood up. “I am ready to leave this room and continue my life as plain old Mindy T. Barnes.”

Aunt Tessie laughed at my declaration. “Mindy T. Barnes, you are quite powerful. Did you know that? I cannot read what you are hiding from me – and no one has ever been able to do that. I guess I will have to wait for you to trust me.”

My response to her comment was to cross the room, put my hand on the door knob to leave and say, “Would you please open the door?”

“You need to know one more thing before you step out of this room,” she countered.

I let my hand drop and turned to face her.

She continued, “Only one day has passed on Earth, but you are now two years older.”

*Damn. No wonder my clothes didn't fit.*

“Am I still in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“The powers-that-be couldn't have jumped me to 8<sup>th</sup> grade?”

“It doesn't work that way. Time is what it is on Earth. It is remarkable that this phase of your development was completed in one day. It usually takes a full week for that to happen. Are you sure you don't want to rest a few more hours?”

“No, I'm ready.”

For what? I had to idea. But I could not stay in my room another minute longer hovering between two worlds. I obviously had no control over the Tessinian journey I was supposed to take, but I did over my life on Earth – the one outside my bedroom door.

Aunt Tessie smiled and faded from view. The lock clicked, I turned the door knob, and stepped into my life as the new me.

Oh, it was going to be a very interesting day.



## **Chapter 7 - *The First Week - Day 2 Continues***

As I walked to school, I considered what I knew:

- 1) I have been told that one day has passed, and I am 2 years older....
- 2) ...which makes me 12 years old in a 14 year old body.
- 3) Aunt Tessie can appear and disappear using some sort of projection process.
- 4) Supposedly, I am a Key and there are no other Keys alive on Earth today.
- 5) According to Aunt Tessie, I have “unique skills extremely valuable to Tessina.” (Those words stuck in my mind, and something about them disturbed me. Why should I have skills that benefit ⊕ Tessina? Hey, I live on Earth!)
- 6) We are all members, including Aunt Tessie, of a family called Family 703X.
- 7) Aunt Tessie’s story is bizarre, sketchy and unbelievable – but then I only allowed her to tell me the

barest outline of it before escaping. (What is the Supreme Leadership Level, anyway?)

8) I am being forced to go to Earth school, as well as, ⊕essinian school. (Great.)

9) Brad is in training to be 2<sup>nd</sup> in Command of Civilians. (Whatever the hell that means?)

10) If I didn't have a resonance with the word '⊕essina' itself, I would discount everything that happened in the past two days.

11) I have absolutely no idea what lesson one was about – or if I ever received it.

12) All of this sounds crazy, and I am really, really pissed off!

Did these ⊕essinians (or whoever they are) think I am a gullible fool?

“Hey, Mindy.” Matthew Sanders interrupted my inner rant. He fell into step beside me as I rounded the final turn to school. I ignored him, but he continued awkwardly, “You look different this morning. Uh, how are you doing?” He paused then added, “Want to eat lunch at our table today?”

Damn. Damn. Damn!

While Matthew was an 8<sup>th</sup> grader and quite attractive in the tall-dark-and-handsome way, I had no time for his ‘interest’ in me. I just gave him my best stink eye – and he threw up his hands and dropped back into step with his friends behind me.

“I was just asking,” he offered as an apology.

I heard him and his three friends talking about my body, and I could see the perverse things they were imagining they would like to do with it (or me to do to them) on my mind screen. *Damn!* I hated this. I did not like being noticed in this way. I was a moody loner. People stayed away from me, and I liked it that way. I definitely needed some new coping strategies. How could some girls actually crave this type of attention from boys?

And here’s another question: How could my mother have so casually said after looking me up and down at breakfast, “We’ll go shopping for new clothes this afternoon”?

This was catastrophic – not a mere change in size!

Then Mom had whispered in my ear, “You look beautiful, Kitten.”

How clueless could she be?!

(I wished Dad wasn’t at work already when I got up. At least, he may have been able to offer me some realistic words of support – like he always managed to.)

Then idiot Brad had looked up from his cereal bowl and said, “Whoa! What happened to you in a day?”

“Lesson One happened to me,” I said angrily without looking up at him. “I think.”

He grumbled something about how unfair it was that he wasn’t the big brother anymore, then said, “At least, I’m still taller than you.” Then he added mischievously, “But then who knows what you will look like tomorrow.”

I looked up at his words, gave him a venomous look, and he just grinned at me. I wanted to strike him dead on the spot not because he deserved it just because I was very, very angry with everything – and he was in striking distance of me.

Brad just threw back his head and laughed at his own joke again. Like I wanted to look like this overnight. I turned back to my cereal distressed, and Brad noticed and addressed my concerns in a serious tone.

He said, “Mindy, do your best to let it go. There is nothing you can do about it. Enjoy your new body.” Then he couldn’t seem to help himself and added, “The boys at school surely will,” and burst out laughing again.

I put down my spoon forcefully trying to contain my anger. “Mom, make him stop – or I swear I will vaporize him,” I threatened.

That made Brad laugh even more uproariously – but I could tell that somewhere in his mind he was a bit concerned about my potential to do so.



Mom addressed Brad in a calm, patient tone, “This is hard for Mindy. Leave her alone,” she said simply.

He managed to smother his amusement and asked with sincerity, “Want me to walk with you to school and be your protector?”

“Get out of here, Brad!” I yelled at him madder than ever. He laughed again, but it was tempered with concern for me which was sweet. Then he put on his backpack and left saying, “Bye, Mom. See you later, Min-DEE!” he teased mimicking the way his friends said my name when they wanted me to get angry. “This is going to be one fun day at school!”

“Bradford, behave. No more teasing. Do you hear me?”

“Yes, Mother,” he promised as the door slammed behind him.

If I could vaporize him, it would have happened right then. Maybe it was a skill I’d acquire. The thought made me smile.

It turned out that Matthew Sanders was just the beginning of my problems at school. Before I even got into the building, the “cool girls” from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade who ran the school, noticed me. Every morning they perched themselves on the front steps of the school in order to survey us peons as we entered their domain. They considered themselves to be the example of all things right in the universe.

Amazingly, despite the distance and the loud conversations around me, I could hear their entire conversation when I focused on them.

“What...happened...to...Mindy Barnes?” Chloe asked Mia whose head whipped around quickly in my direction and took me in.

“Wow...” Mia responded stunned.

Chloe said, “That is not right. How did she get like that overnight? She is going to be a real problem for us.”

I saw Ruby join them and heard her ask, “What are you looking at?” Her gaze followed theirs – to me – and she said, “Oh! What happened to Mindy Barnes – the super geek of the school?”

“Exactly. What happened to Mindy?” Chloe was staring at me as I made my slow walk through the crush of students entering the school. The bell was minutes from sounding. I passed within shouting range, and she yelled, “Mindy, hi!”

I pretended to not hear her. While trying to figure out what to do with me because now I was considered competition (ME?), she was trying to keep me close as one would an enemy. An admirable strategy on Chloe’s part, but it was not going to work on me. My concerns were way beyond middle school nonsense.

The school day was horrible. The attention I got was so disturbing I vowed to never go back to school again.

My math teacher kept glancing at my body and tripping over his words. It was like he could not help himself. Although his reaction was understandable, it made me very uncomfortable.

By lunch time, I heard myself being the source of everyone's conversation.

To her credit, when the principal called me into her office near the end of the day, she was very kind and sincerely concerned about what she was hearing from the teachers. She looked at my new body with complete respect, and asked how I was doing.

I told her, "I am not feeling very well." (That was close to the truth.)

She accepted my answer and told me to let her know, personally, if there was anything she could do for me. I thanked her, knowing she was planning to call my parents to offer support – or something – and that my mother would be vague and clueless. It suddenly occurred to me as I was leaving the principal's office that maybe my mother pretended to be clueless to avoid this type of questioning. That was something to consider.

After the final bell sounded, I pushed past the other students to get home as soon as possible. I felt exhausted. I heard Bradford call to me in the crush of students walking home and getting to their buses, but I ignored him. He did want to offer me support, but all I wanted to do was to get home.

A moving van was in front of our house when I got home. It looked to be almost fully loaded. Wonderful! I had already vowed to never go back to the same school again.

I crossed the front lawn and flopped down in one of the three folding chairs next to Dad who seemed to be supervising the movers. He did not look at me when he said, “We received an order to move and the truck arrived.”

“We’re moving?” I asked a bit concerned about such a radical shift in our lives that had never been a part of any of our family discussions. “Dad?” He did not seem to be listening so I repeated my question, “Are we moving?”

“Yes, we are moving.” They were loading Dad’s golf clubs into the large truck and he was watching carefully. He winced at one point when they were dropped, but did not say anything to the movers. Then he offered me a bottle of lemonade from the cooler.

I took a long swallow then asked, “We’re moving because of me, right?”

“Yes, that’s why,” he answered simply.

“Well, I’m glad about the move. There is no way that I could go back to school after today – “

“I know.”

“Dad?” I asked in a whisper. “What is going on in our life?”

“Mindy, we do as we are told. Our life is very good – and it always will be.” He paused then added, “There was an apology in the message about not having notified us sooner.

It was not anticipated that you would be up and off to school in one day.”

“I feel older, you know. More like what I imagine 14 should feel like.”

“You definitely seem older than when I last talked with you.”

“I think that maybe my first lesson was teaching me the rest of 6<sup>th</sup> – and possibly 7<sup>th</sup> grade – because I knew all of my lessons at school today.”

Dad sighed, “I would not have wished this for you. This must be very hard. There is not much we can do but support you. You will let us know if there is anything you need?”

“You and Mother have been wonderful. I could not ask for better parents.”

Dad smiled proudly at me then said, “Promise me you will let us know how we can best support you.”

“I will,” I promised.

Dad paused and thoughtfully took a sip of lemonade then changed the subject. “A new birth certificate arrived for you today. You are officially 14, and we can enroll you in 8<sup>th</sup> grade as Bradford’s twin sister in our new location.”

*Wow...* It did seem like whoever controlled these things took care of everything. It occurred to me that I should be angry because everything was so out of my control, and I hated feeling this way, but I was too tired to respond. Tomorrow was another day. Today I was actually glad that

the details of our move and my immediate problems were being solved.

I let my head fall back on the chair and closed my eyes. If I had some rest, my mind would clear. I'd sort this all out tomorrow.

Bradford arrived, plunked himself down in one of the chairs, and Dad offered him a bottle of lemonade.

"Where are we moving to, Dad?" I asked.

But I never heard his answer because within a split second of asking the question, I was lost to my dreams.



## Chapter 8 - *The First Week - Days 3 and 4*

To my credit, I kept trying to figure things out back then. But what had begun couldn't be stopped and was so much bigger than I could ever have imagined during my life on Earth. Of course, I had none of the knowledge I have now, and no choice except to keep moving forward, one day at a time. That did not change the fact that my life had officially changed and there was absolutely no way of turning back.

It was my independence and curiosity, though, that changed what I came to realize was a damaging predestined trajectory to the lives of millions. And it was my compassion for others and willingness to act on my concerns that made all the difference. But I get ahead of myself.

These early days had to unfold as they did, and the confusion had to continue because if it had not, I would have denied the truth, and all would have been lost. Again.

For now, back to my story...

I woke up in my room and sat up to survey my surroundings. *Was this my room? No.* My things were here, but this was a new room.

Sasha was sleeping beside me. That was odd. She'd never done that before. Maybe the chaos of the move had driven her into my room. That was an explanation, and this was my new room. Yes, I could see that it was.

I patted Sasha's head and said, "Good morning, Sasha" then glanced around and fully took in the room.

All of my things were here. My teddy bear collection had been put out on display. It didn't interest me as it had. I felt as if I'd out grown it except for maybe the miniature, forest green-colored teddy bear with the big ears. That one was special to me.

My gaze continued around the room. My dresser was on one wall, and the mirror hung above it. My desk and chair were in a nook where there was a small window. The same curtains were hung.

I could see that I even had my own bathroom again, and hanging over the bathroom door on a plastic hanger was a larger size of my tie-dyed t-shirt. That made me smile. Where had Mother found it? It has been purchased from a vendor at a street fair more than a year ago.

I flung my legs over the side of the bed to get up then decided to get a good look at them. My legs were like I last



remembered them. That was a relief. I checked my breasts under the pajamas Mother must have dressed me in – and they were also the same size as yesterday. Thank goodness! The day was starting out well.

Aunt Tessie suddenly appeared in the mirror over the dresser, and I said easily. “Good morning.”

She smiled and materialized in my room.

“I don’t get much privacy, do I?” I observed.

Aunt Tessie laughed her bubbling-brook sound and said, “You have been asleep for quite a while, and I did not disturb you – not once.”

“How long have I been asleep?” I said stretching up over my head and yawning.

“Let’s see... You slept the rest of day 2 after school then all of day 3, and this is the late afternoon of day 4.”

“Amazing.... Why didn’t anyone wake me up?”

“They couldn’t – even if they tried. The movers made a lot of noise unloading everything into the house. I guess, you needed the sleep to properly integrate lesson one.”

I could not help myself from yawning. You would think that sleeping for about two days would be enough sleep. “So where did we move to?”

“About 100 miles from your old house. You are now on the other side of the circle.”

“The other side of the circle? Dad mentioned that our family lived in a circle. I think. Why am I so tired?”

“You have done a lot of growing, Mindy. Be patient and kind to yourself,” Aunt Tessie said.

“I’m trying.”

“Should I continue about where you moved to?”

“Yes, please do,” I said, pleasantly. I really did feel good – and I wasn’t even annoyed with the world. Unusual and amazing!

“Well, all Family 703X members live within 100 miles of each other in sort of a circle pattern. They meet regularly to remain connected, all of them driving to a central location. Only in certain situations will family members live close together – like yours. Your mother will tell you about it.”

“OK. I’ll wait to hear the story from Mother. See how patient I am?” I answered. Patient? That did not sound like me.

“Ah, sleep does you good, Mindy.”

“I’m very glad you have come to support me, Aunt Tessie, and that I have gotten to know you.”

“Likewise,” she answered smiling, broadly.

“What exactly was lesson one, anyway?” I stood up and stretched my arms first over my head then I touched my toes.

“Oh, I have no idea what your first lesson was. I already told you that,” Aunt Tessie began. “Mine was about learning to be more independent. I was more of a follower than you. I had rather poor discernment skills and had to learn what to say and to whom. Maybe that was Lesson

Two. I also learned all about Family 703X. You are supposed to meet them all on Saturday.”

I got out of bed and moved slowly to a lunge position with my right leg forward. Then I angled my body to my left, and extended my left hand over my head and stretched. “I have no interest in meeting Family 703X,” I responded.

Where did I learn yoga? Lesson One? Interesting.

“Mindy, but they are your Family! I guess we will see what happens.”

I changed my lunge to my left leg forward, angled my body to face my right, and extended my right hand over my head and stretched in the new direction. “You know what?” I began, “I don’t think I have to do anything unless I want to.”

Aunt Tessie looked concerned about my insubordinate comments, but I ignored her and continued, “When did you learn how to teleport – and make doors lock?”

“Ah, those were advanced lessons. Nobody gets the same lessons you know. I can see the lessons of anyone else – but not a single other Key’s lessons.”

I caught her implication immediately and asked, “You know more Keys?” That was interesting!

“Yes, on ⊕ Tessina. There are 20 of us. You make 21.”

“I would very much like to meet them.” Those would be people I’d like to talk with.

“I assume you will meet the Keys someday,” Aunt Tessie assured me then she changed the topic. “Now, what about

your unique skills? Did you notice anything during your day at school?”

“It seems I have very good hearing when I put my mind to it.” I flashed back to hearing the ‘cool’ girls’ conversation then I remembered the pictures I saw on my mind screen that Matthew and his friends were thinking about and added, “And there seem to be times when I can see what people are thinking on my mind screen.”

“Great!” Aunt Tessie clapped her hands together with delight. “You are going to be so much fun to work with!” She reached out and hugged me – and I could feel her! I thought she would not be solid. Very interesting! Then she added, “You are very far ahead of where I was when I came of age.”

There was a sudden knock at my bedroom door, and Mom said, “Mindy, are you awake in there?”

Aunt Tessie said nothing just raised her eyebrows questioningly, “Don’t you want to answer her?” she whispered into my ear.

I took the bait, curious as to what would happen. “Come in, Mother,” I called and kept my eyes on Aunt Tessie who did not fade away.

She burst into the room and exclaimed, “Mindy, you are awake! It has been a while, and there have been many changes in our lives.” She seemed more excited than I had ever seen her. “The new neighborhood is wonderful! We have already met a few people.”

I was watching Aunt Tessie who smiled at me. Mother obviously did not see her. *Interesting.*

She was still talking. “There is a young girl who is your age. Well, she is 14. The best part is that she is a member of our family and lives only a few houses down the street. She’s been in training for two years now – and well, she can tell you everything. I think, our Supreme Leader wanted you to have some form of support.”

“It will be nice to have someone to talk with,” I responded with less enthusiasm than Mother expected.

(Meeting another Key would be something to be excited about, but there was something else I didn’t like. Why did some Supreme Leader get to pull our strings?)

“Mindy, in time you will come to know that you are (in fact, all of us are) always being taken care of!” she exclaimed responding to my lack of enthusiasm. She pulled me close and gave me a hug then holding me at arm’s length so she could see my face, she added, “I have waited for you to come of age so there would be no secrets between us, but now I don’t know how to best support you.”

“Mother, I know everything is going to turn out well.” (That was debatable.) “And thank you for finding a larger size of my favorite t-shirt! How did you ever find it?”

“Oh, I didn’t get you the t-shirt. It arrived in the mail for you, but I did set up your teddy bear collection. I tried to get them exactly as you had them in your old room.”

“They are perfect. Thank you, Mother.” I gave her a hug and was once again disturbed by the fact that someone was watching me so closely – and had known about my favorite t-shirt purchased years ago. Wasn’t that type of behavior called stalking? Why wasn’t anyone else concerned about it? They actually seemed to like being taken care of in this overbearing way by some Supreme Leader. Mother acted like my new t-shirt arriving in the mail was not out of the ordinary. I found her reaction disturbing and the t-shirt’s arrival very disturbing. I seemed to be the only one who was suspicious about the events that occurred in our lives. It was another thing I was not going to mention to anymore. I was going to keep my observations to myself for the time being.

But Mother sensed my discomfort and asked, “What is the matter, Kitten?”

“I guess I am still getting used to all of the new things happening to me,” I answered side-stepping my real feelings.

I saw Aunt Tessie frown because she was unsure of whether I was telling the truth or not. Interesting that she couldn’t tell.

Mother was satisfied with my answer and said, “Dinner is served in a few minutes. Can you be ready? Dad and Bradford will be thrilled to have you joining us again. We have been a bit worried about you, you know.” She placed her warm palm against my cheek affectionately, sighed again, and smiled.

Sasha leaned her bloated little self against my leg, and I said, “She was sleeping on my bed with me when I woke up.”

Mother looked surprised. “You must have been dreaming, dear. The door was closed, and I do not think she can jump high enough to get up onto your bed. Come, Sasha girl. Let’s get you some dinner.”

Sasha followed Mother out the door, moving heavily, then looked back at me – and I could swear she was trying to communicate something to me through the expression in her dog-eyes.

As soon as I heard Mother begin her descent down a flight of stairs, the heavy clunk-clunk of Sasha behind her, I turned to Aunt Tessie. “Do dogs have a special role in our lives beyond just being pets?” I asked.

“Not that I know of, but what I do know is that Lesson Two is on its way or here already. I must be going now. Ask for me in the mirror if you need me. It is the quickest route to me,” she smiled brightly. “Bye for now!”

Aunt Tessie faded from view, and I walked into my new bathroom. It was bigger than my old one and the mirror over the sink had a frame around it painted in rainbow colors. I liked it!

I was drawn back to look into the mirror, and the surface began to ripple like water, and a piece of paper materialized out of the center and floated down towards my upturned

palms in slow motion. The paper settled lightly in my hands and the mirror immediately returned to its regular surface.

I studied the note carefully finding its mixture of words and symbols confusing. It read:

✓ Mindy of ⊕,  
Welcome to the IIII.  
I have the ✕ expectations  
of your \*.  
The ⊕ is almost here.  
Your participation is ✕.  
Vawn

I read the note a few times but had no idea how to interpret the symbols – and, I did not know who Vawn was.

“Aunt Tessie,” I whispered into the mirror. “I need your assistance with something.”

“Yes, Mindy.” She immediately appeared in the mirror.







“A piece of paper has materialized out of the mirror. It’s a note with many symbols on it. I can read it but can’t make sense of the symbols.”

“Most unusual! I only have a few minutes before the Council meeting. Hold it up, and I will read it for you if I can.”



I held the note up to her face in the mirror and she read it for me emphasizing the symbol translations. She read slowly and carefully, sometimes correcting herself.

This was her final translation:

✓ Mindy of ,  
 Welcome to the .  
 I have the  expectations  
 of your .  
 The  is almost here.  
 Your participation is .  
 Vawn

**Greetings** Mindy of **Tessina**  
 Welcome to the **Supreme**  
**Family.**

I have the **greatest** expectations  
 of your **success.**

The **Great Event** is almost here.  
 Your participation is **applauded.**

Vawn

Aunt Tessie frowned as she read the note then gasped when she read the name of the sender. She spoke in a hushed voice. “A note from Vawn? Mindy, I’ve never heard of this. No one has ever received a direct communication from Vawn – and handwritten no less. Communication with the Keys is always from Amalla who is 2<sup>nd</sup> in Command of Tessina.” She paused then continued reflectively, “Many believe Vawn has been dead for about 100 years. And, I am also not positive about the symbol used for Family. It is similar to the symbol I know, but it is not exactly the same. It could refer to the Supreme or Royal Family.”

Then she added hurriedly looking anxiously around her, “Tell absolutely no one about this. Promise me you will not.”

“I promise,” I said with rising concern.

“I’ll see what I can find out. Remember, tell no one.”

And then Aunt Tessie did not fade but disappeared in a blinding flash of light.



## **Chapter 9 - A First Family Friend**

Very sadly, Aunt Tessie never returned again after the day she translated the note from Vawn.

I called to her in the mirror for about three weeks. I tried to summon her with my mind, and I even attempted to teleport her myself (not that I had any idea what I was doing), but she never responded again.

Those first few days after I became the Key went by in a blur. What I do remember is that after Aunt Tessie left, I felt truly alone. All of my life, I wanted to meet her, and when I finally did, I'd only had a few days with her – and now since no one even knew she'd made contact with me, how was I supposed to mourn her loss?

My heart told me she was never coming back, and that was sad. I had no idea what had happened to her and, consequently, began to find myself concerned about what my own ⊕ essinian destiny had in store for me.

Sasha seemed to know how I felt. It was in the way she looked at me. She had been sleeping with me every night since we moved to our new location, and I think she did purposefully, to offer me comfort. No one ever saw her get up on my bed, including myself, but she was always there in the morning.

The days passed by quickly. I'm not sure what my lessons were or when they came, but I knew I was getting much wiser about everything.

As my mind cleared and I matured (probably at the rate of a week every day), I realized there were many questions Aunt Tessie could have answered for me. For instance:

Was there some sort of master plan unfolding in all of our lives?

How many Families were there in total on Earth? Are we one or are there hundreds, as our number of 703 implies? If there are other Families, why don't we know each other? What did the 'X' mean after our Family's number?

What was life like on ⊕essina?

What were Aunt Tessie's duties as a member of the Council? Or if she wasn't a member, why was she attending a Council meeting?

And who is the person my mother referred to as the "Supreme Leader?" I'd never heard her or Dad use the term before.

But my biggest question was: Why doesn't anyone feel uncomfortable being watched and cared for by someone they don't even know?

(I don't think Aunt Tessie would have known the answer to that last question. Because of the blind loyalty she had expressed to me for ⊕essina, she would have responded as my mother had when I had questioned her about this

person called the Supreme Leader. She wouldn't have understood my concern behind the question.)

Making things more complicated was the fact that there were no existing information sources that I trusted completely to answer any of my questions. No people. No books. No internet connections. My lessons were destined to remain intangible, mysterious, and anonymous.

On a different note.... It has now been about 6 months, and I have not gathered with Family 703X. Quite frankly, I have no desire to meet any one until more of my questions are answered. What my Family might tell me about themselves, I do not want to know just yet. I have to gather information myself and figure out what is going on. I also don't like that I am very important to them when I don't know who I am. Why would anyone be excited about who I am? What myth are they believing? Who told it to them? Who IS this Supreme Leader everyone seems to be blindly devoted to? So many questions, and not many satisfactory answers.

But, (and this is the best part about all of this), recently I was introduced to Emma Hansen who is a member of Family 703X. She is an only child and her parents seem to be decent people. Emma's father is a Guardian like my father. (I am still not clear what Guardians do), and her mother is called a Civilian Seamstress. She is always (almost obsessively) sewing clothing for children and packing it up

in boxes and shipping the boxes off to charities. She said she felt it was her mission to clothe children in need.

When Emma told me she was studying to be a Food Coordinator, I was surprised. It seemed like a fancy word for a Cook, and an odd skill for Emma to be developing because she was very intelligent. Maybe it was my prejudice, but to not utilize her mind seemed rather wasteful of the Supreme Leader.

I had to admit, though, that Emma thoroughly enjoyed serving me her new creations after school. We'd get together for the purpose of doing homework (which we could both complete in minutes), and since both of her parents worked and my mother wanted me to spend as much time with Emma as possible to accept my  $\oplus$ essinian roots, we had a few hours to experiment.

Emma made cupcakes that she stacked up to look like a medieval castle. She made eggs with cream cheese and herbs I'd never heard of. She made a chicken and potato dish with spices that were supposed to be from  $\oplus$ essina – and the dish did have a flavor I'd never tasted before. She claimed the spices just appeared before her when she was cooking and she used them.

(I was again struck by the gullible nature of the  $\oplus$ essinians I knew, but Emma was my friend, and I decided to accept her as she was.)

She shredded vegetables and made pancakes out of them. She chopped squash and actually made it taste

delicious. I have no idea what she did to food to make it taste so good, but she did.

The real fun started, though, on the day that Emma shared her secret recipe with me.

“Mindy,” she began as she wiped the countertop clean to begin a new cooking project. (We had just finished the heavenly marshmallow brownies she had prepared for a  $\oplus$ essinian homework assignment). “I want to share something with you,” she continued, “– but it’s a secret. Swear that you will keep this secret.”

“Of course!” I was already dying with curiosity.

“OK then,” she said. “Remember, this is a secret.”

She opened the large industrial sized refrigerator/freezer they had because Emma’s  $\oplus$ essinian studies involved lots of food and food storage, and she pulled out a large bowl with a lid. She retrieved a serving tray from another cabinet and flipped the container over on the tray. Next she carefully removed the upside down container, and a gelatinous flower shape unfurled itself! It was resting on a bed of red-colored leaves that had been on the top of the mold and were now on the bottom of the flower shape on the tray. Wow!

As my eyes took in the entire flower that was easily 6 inches high and 12 inches in diameter, it began to change color. The red of the base leaves flowed up to the tips of the flower petals. Then the color orange appeared at the base and repeated the journey to the tip of the petals. All of the

colors of the rainbow, each took their turn emerging slowly at the base in the leaves, each new color blending with the previous color then moving in gentle spirals to the tips on the flower petals. After a minute or two, the colors stopped shifting and settled into multiple horizontal bands of solid color.

It was then that Emma exclaimed, “Now it’s done! Isn’t it beautiful?”

“I can’t believe what I just saw! That was amazing!” I responded. “Is it something we can actually eat?”

“Of course,” she said matter-of-factly and dished out an ample serving into a bowl for me.

“That is way too much for me,” I protested.

“No, it won’t be. You’ll see,” she said mysteriously.

I watched the colors in my serving bowl change randomly then I took a modest spoonful that was orange then changed to blue before I put it into my mouth.

“Oh, this is delicious!” I said with great excitement. “I cannot believe how good this is!”

“I knew you would like it.” Emma watched me eat from across the breakfast bar, her chin resting in her hands, her eyes bright with pride.

“Oh, this is way beyond ‘like.’ I would kill for this!”

Emma was watching my response to her dish closely. “So what does it taste like to you?” she asked after I had consumed a number of spoonfuls.



I could barely hear her. It was only by sheer will that I came back from my swoon to say, “It tastes like raspberries, strawberries and whipped cream – the best ever!”

“And those are your favorite foods, right?”

“Yes. How did you know that?”

“Because the dish, that I’m calling Emma’s Wonder, tastes different to everyone who eats it. Usually it tastes like a person’s favorite desert. And, I bet it tasted like exactly what you would have wanted to eat, right? I’ve tested the Wonder on my parents and neighbors each of them tasted a desert dish also, but –”

“Emma, this is astounding!” I managed to fully focus on her words only because my bowl was empty.

“You cannot have more,” Emma responded when she saw me eyeing the rest of the Wonder. “It’s not bad for you. It is, in fact, a fully nutritious meal unto itself even though it tastes like a desert, but if you eat too much, my tests show it will make you very, very sleepy.”

She deftly flipped the Wonder back into the mold where it settled itself in and looked like it still fit neatly. Emma noticed my curiosity and said, “It replenishes itself. That’s the secret about the Wonder – besides the fact that it becomes the desired taste of the person eating it. Since I made it six months ago, it has always replenished itself, and I have not had to make it again.”


“That is simply unbelievable,” I marveled. Now this was why Emma wanted to be a Cook! This made complete sense!

“I know,” she giggled. “I was experimenting with creating food from unusual ingredients and heated up some water, a few balloons, a box of crayons, and a white button – and this is what I got!”

“How is that possible?”

“I have no idea! What I see on my mind screen is what I end up creating – regardless of the ingredients in the recipe. I once made a roast beef out of one of my father’s old sneakers – and my parents didn’t know what I’d started with, and they thought it was delicious! Isn’t that crazy?”

It suddenly occurred to me that Emma had a very valuable gift – one whose implications she did not even seem to be aware of. She was obviously way more than a Cook. She could make food out of essentially anything, and it could replenish itself endlessly. *Wow!* I didn’t know what the exact purpose could be for her gift except to eradicate global hunger, but I knew it would be important in the future for other reasons also.

“Emma,” I began, “This is important, and I can’t tell you exactly why, but please, do not tell anyone how you create your food dishes. Do your essinian lessons, keep experimenting, but do NOT tell anyone, not even your parents and especially not your mentor, about your more creative gifts. OK?”

“Sure, Mindy. I trust you, but what are you thinking? I just thought what I created was crazy, and I felt excited but also embarrassed to talk about it. You think it is important?”

“I’m not sure how yet, my friend, but I do know your gift is very important.”

“Mindy, this makes me feel very good about what I do. Thanks for being so supportive of me.” She paused then asked, “Nobody else we know is a Key like you. Is there any way I can help you with your lessons?”

“No, I’m sorry, but you can’t.”

“Oh, that’s alright.” Emma looked hurt.

I could tell she knew I was the only Key alive, and she’d been told I was very important. Damn.

“It’s not that I don’t trust you. It’s that I don’t know what my lessons are or what I am studying to be.” I wanted to be her friend not someone she was supposed to honor and revere.

“But what about your mentor?” Emma kept following the thread of our discussion. “Do you have one like the rest of us?”

“She came to me three times and then never returned – and that was almost six months ago.”

“That’s terrible, Mindy. Why didn’t she return?”

“I have no idea,” I answered, wishing I could tell her all about Aunt Tessie, but my intuition warned me not to.

“I wish I could help you.” Emma looked sincerely concerned.

She was one of those people who relied on the interaction of others to make her work meaningful. I didn't have that predilection or that opportunity even if I needed it. In retrospect, though, I truly enjoyed interacting with Aunt Tessie the few times I had done so, and missed her even more than I did a few weeks ago.

"You already are helping me by being my friend," I finally said, and Emma grinned back at me, pleased to be complimented.

"Why don't you come to the gathering of our Family this weekend? It would give you a chance to meet everyone, and maybe you'd find someone to give you support with your studies." When I didn't respond, she added, "The Family members are great people, Mindy."

"I'll think about it," I answered but my instincts told me there was a lot more I needed to know before I even considered making a connection. I changed the subject. "Well, I'd better be getting back home for dinner – although I am already full – thanks to your magical Emma's Wonder!"

I gathered my school books, gave Emma a hug, and left feeling truly grateful for her friendship.

I had started a journal in the past week in an attempt to document my observations, and planned to add an entry tonight about Emma's gift. But my evening came together very differently than I had anticipated.

## **Chapter 10 - *The Door***

After dinner, I went upstairs claiming I needed to complete my homework while I really intended to do some writing in my journal.

I had many questions and numerous pieces of information floating around my head that kept lighting up with significance. It seemed important to document them in the hope that what I was experiencing would make sense to me one day in the future. My life had been upside down for months. Things would surely right themselves at some point in time.

I trusted Emma implicitly, but I didn't have anyone to confer with about the questions that weighed most heavily on me. There had not been enough time for me to learn what Aunt Tessie knew. I'd been intrigued by our few conversations – but her response to Vawn was troubling and left me trying to extrapolate deeper meaning myself. I needed more information to fill in the blanks. But where was I going to get it?

I was no closer to knowing the details about the Great Event either. Although it often came up in conversation at our house or at Emma's, no one seemed to know much about it except that it was something that they were excited about and would occur in the next 10 years.

I did not know what a Key was, what I was supposed to be training for – or why someone named Vawn had contacted me personally, who was supposed to be an important person, and who no one had heard from in 100 years. How annoyingly confusing this all was.

Of major concern for me was the mystery around what had happened to Aunt Tessie. I could not help having an increasingly ominous feeling about her disappearance.

As for my recent observations about my brother... Bradford was consumed with thoughts of his girlfriend at our new school, and the images I saw when I tuned into him were the same old, girl-crazy stuff I'd been observing for a while. The difference now was that it was all wrapped around his latest obsession with a tall, body-beautiful, blonde-haired girl named Clara. She was a member of Family 703X so my parents were naturally very supportive of the relationship.

Although Bradford was maturing, he still felt like an idiot to me. His brain was so single focused. It was like he looked nowhere but straight ahead. When I tuned into his lessons I felt support in them – and, also what I would best describe as brainwashing. It wasn't real information. It was more like words that were laced together with promotion for Tessina's message – and the importance of his role. He was becoming more and more impressed with his future role, but there was no real description of that role in his studies. I found myself wondering what the point was to his lessons,

and becoming worried for his well-being. He might be an idiot, but he was my brother and a good person at heart.

At the top of the stairs, I turned left and entered my bedroom. Closing the door behind me, I turned around to find Sasha up on my bed wagging her stubby tail.

“Sasha, how did you get up there again?” I scratched her ear, and she turned and jumped off the bed – only she didn’t jump, she floated down to the ground in slow motion. (OK, now that was weird.) Then she walked to the wall between my dresser and the nook that held my desk and chair, and leaned against the wall expectantly.

I frowned at her behavior. It was unlike her to do much of anything except sleep and eat. She seemed to be trying to communicate something to me, “What is it, Sasha?” I asked. “What do you want?”

She pawed the wall, and I walked over to her, “What do you want?” I repeated, leaning a shoulder against the wall as I studied her. Immediately, a door came into focus near my shoulder, and I jumped back in surprise. Sasha shoved the door open wide enough for her to pass through, and she quickly disappeared into the dark space behind it.

I grabbed the flashlight on my dresser and was about to bolt after Sasha through the door when I had an instinct to grab my journal also. I turned back, and it seemed to be glowing on the bed where I’d left it, calling to me – or

something. Snatching it up, I flipped on the flashlight, and headed off after Sasha only seconds behind her.

I pushed the door open further with my right shoulder and stepped inside of the doorway. The door closed behind me of its own accord. The flashlight lit the space, and what I saw took my breath away.

I was at the top of a spiral staircase that quickly angled out of my line of sight. It was exactly like the stairs in the vision I had when I first held the Key – which seemed like a lifetime ago.

“Sasha,” I called in a whisper. I could hear the clunk-clunk of her feet as she descended on what sounded like stones, but I could not see her. “Wait for me,” I called in a hushed whisper.

I walked cautiously at first, familiarizing myself with my surroundings, but then realized I’d traveled this way in my vision. I knew there were five more spirals down until I reached the metal door that the key had jumped out of my hand to unlock.

Was I supposed to be doing this? I no longer had the key. I was the Key. What did that mean? And I was following my family pet that had just defied gravity and floated to the ground. One thing was for sure – the unpredictable was everywhere in my life. No need to question what was happening when the ‘weird’ appears. It was becoming the new norm.



I kept descending with unexpected ease. Doing this and being here actually felt oddly familiar. Sasha was ahead of me and making much better time than me. How could such a bloated little dog move with such speed? She moved like she had no concerns about gravity. She had floated to the ground from my bed. What was that about?

The distance between us kept lengthening, the clunk-clunk seemingly further away from me with every step. At least I knew where we were going.

There was no hand rail to hold so when I rounded one of the turns, I touched the wall to steady myself, and lights turned on to light the staircase. When I pulled my hand away, the lights stayed on. Interesting.

I traveled the next spiral down keeping the flashlight on (just in case) but felt more at ease with the extra light being offered. There was no visible light source. The seam between the wall and the ceiling glowed with a bluish light that satisfactorily lit my passage. The steps and walls appeared to be stone, but the wall was actually warm to the touch. I actually had a feeling that the entire staircase was alive and breathing. This should have been disturbing to me, but it was not. If I was descending into the bowels of some gigantic beast, it felt safer than my confusion about all the unanswered questions in my life. THIS felt real!

Sasha's footsteps stopped. She must be at the metal door. I rounded the fifth descending spiral, and sure enough there was the door, and there was Sasha sitting in front of

the door, wagging her tail. She looked back at me and gave a short bark.

“I’m coming,” I said. “You are one quick-moving dog!” I moved closer to the door. “What happens next, Sasha? I no longer have a key to open the door – “

Then the door lock clicked of its own accord, and I suspected it was now open. I took a deep breath. What had I been catapulted into? I reached out to touch the latch, leaned down on the door handle and the massive, metal door opened easily.

Before I could respond emotionally with fear or confusion, Sasha darted into the space beyond the door – and was gone. I took another deep breath and opened the door wider. It was pitch black inside. None of the light from the corridor where I stood seeped into this next room.

I heard Sasha bark as if she was only a foot in front of me, but I saw nothing. She barked again as I hesitated, and I decided to extend my hand into the darkness to see what would happen.

Slowly I reached my hand inside the dark room, and it disappeared from the wrist down. I turned my hand palm up. I could still feel it, but I could not see it. Then I felt another hand in mine – and things began to unfold that once again would forevermore change the perception I held of my life.

I stared into the darkness, afraid to step forward, but not knowing what else to do. I wanted to see where I was

going. Was that too much to ask? The hand in mine was warm, and it made me feel connected to something right and meaningful.

Then my hand began to come into focus in the darkness. First I saw what looked like a faint blue outline of my hand – and then my entire upturned palm turned the same faint blue color that Aunt Tessie’s skin had been. That was shocking enough – but then the hand that had been placed in mine came into focus. It was a dark, four-fingered hand, and it began to gently pull me into the room.


I should have been afraid, but I wasn’t. Whatever my questions, I knew I was exactly where I needed to be to find my answers.

Then with complete confidence and a smattering of wonderment, I stepped eagerly into the darkness.





## **Chapter 11 - *The Underground***

As my eyes became accustomed to the darkness behind the metal door, I realized I was in a small room that was about 10 feet x 10 feet in size. Three of the walls were floor-to-ceiling shelves of bottles, vials, books, and artifacts – none of which looked familiar. The fourth wall was a lifeless control panel that boasted a multitude of buttons and dials. Of most interest to me were the labels on everything in the room which were a combination of English words and a number of symbols only one of which I remembered clearly from Vawn’s letter – the symbol for Tessina – . It was everywhere in the room almost as frequently as this symbol –  $\frac{s}{+}$  which I’d never seen before.

I was grateful for the small hand that was still inside my hand anchoring me to the material world with kindness and a sincere understanding of my confusion.

A small, thin figure a few inches shorter than me with a round face and large, dark eyes stood beside me. She was dressed in a knee-length, straight tunic that appeared to be made out of a burlap-like fabric.

The eyes blinked at me sadly, the pupils seeming to glow around the edges in the dark. Then a thin, young-sounding, female voice said, “I am sorry to deceive and manipulate

you, Mindy, but your presence has been anticipated for many years now. I secretly overlaid the information about this place onto the key you found in your dresser drawer so that when you touched it, you would see the door and the stairs. It was an imperative that you be brought here because you are no longer safe and need to be briefed.”

The little creature broke eye contact with me, and her head dropped with her distress. “None of us are safe anymore. I hope we have done enough. We must act very soon.”

I listened carefully and knew the words spoken to be the truth. How I knew this, I did not know; but, I was never surer of anything than I was in this moment. I believed I was not safe, and I believed in the urgency. A sense of dread was here with me, but also an awakening to purpose and destiny. I was meant to be doing this, and this dear creature, whose essence I easily recognized as Sasha’s, was very concerned about something. That she had transformed from my family pet to this lively, intense and compassionate creature vied with everything I knew to be true. But that didn’t matter. Things more important to the future were here now. The pending disaster could be felt in the air itself.

There was very little I understood about what had happened around me in the past 6 months, but this was the one time in my life when all things felt right, and remarkably there was no resistance in me to what was happening.

This was the beginning of my life. It started right here, in this moment. This was the beginning of the life I was meant to live. This was where my abilities as a Key could be utilized, and my life had purpose. Even if I had no idea what my role was or what abilities I possessed, they felt needed here. In this small room behind a metal door, where I looked pale blue, was the beginning of something much bigger than myself. I felt excited and humbled about what was awakening in me.

“You feel it, don’t you? Your awakening, that is,” Sasha said beside me, watching me carefully as if she was trying to read my emotions.

I smiled and looked down to see the blue of my hand in Sasha’s glow brighter, “Yes, I feel myself awakening,” I said softly. I closed my eyes and drank in the delicious feeling of having arrived at exactly the time and place where I began the life I was meant to live.

“Tell me what I need to know,” I said. “I feel how time is against us, and how important it is for us to get started.”

Sasha beamed obviously pleased with my response, and then said in her thin, small voice, “Yes, let’s get started.”

She led me to a corner of the room next to the control panel where two seats dropped down out of the wall for us to sit down on. She clutched her 4-fingered hands together in her lap, and she began her story.

“We are safe here, in this room, only. The leaders are listening through the ⊕essinian descendants. They are

always listening – and they are especially listening to you, Mindy. I had to act fast when you decided to write in your journal about Emma’s gift. They cannot know about her gift – or any of your own. You have been very wise to not share your observations and suspicions about what you know. It would have been disastrous for all of us if you had.”

Sasha paused to observe my reaction to her words. She was concerned that she had been too forthcoming and may have frightened me. That was sweet, but I was listening intently. I felt the truth in her story and the urgency and my responsibility in regards to it, and I trusted Sasha implicitly. I wanted to hear all of her story. I knew it was my story, and wanted to awaken to everything I was supposed to do without reservation.

“You have not frightened me with your words. Sasha, please continue,” I said.

She smiled, satisfied, and continued her story. “When you passed through the door in your bedroom wall, those who watch over you thought you went to sleep because they were shut off from your thoughts and fed a stream of images that we have gathered from your thoughts. These thoughts, broken into dream-like fragments, are now being transmitted to those who monitor and listen.”

I felt the importance of the actions she was explaining, but did not understand why they were needed. Regardless, I knew my answers were here in this room. I nodded my



understanding of what she had shared so far, and satisfied, Sasha continued.

“We are many and there are two other rooms like this one on Earth where we can hide, communicate with each other, and work. The room we are in now is doubly protected from the very effective prying ways of he who is called the Supreme Leader and those called the Supreme Guard. Even if the sleep ruse were to be breached, they cannot penetrate these walls with their skills or equipment. They would be alerted to something being wrong, but would have no way to know what had happened or where you were right now.”

I tuned into the scenario Sasha was describing, and I could hear a voice far away saying, “She is asleep.” Then that information and the time were recorded in a manual.

“If they knew we were here, conversing in this way, we would be eliminated immediately. There are secrets embedded within secrets from the place we all come from, and all of our existence on Earth relies on me communicating the truth to you. We have tremendous faith in what you can do, and are prepared to assist you in any way you require.”

Sasha took a deep breath to steady herself and to gather her thoughts. In those few seconds, I allowed myself to feel surprised by her words about the faith held in me, but I let my personal questions go because Sasha was watching me, concerned once again. I sent a wave of appreciation to her.

(I had no idea how I knew to do it. The intent just seemed to make it happen.) Sasha received my appreciation and continued, renewed.

“I volunteered to follow the Keys until you were born,” she said. “You are #21, the Key that has the potential to change everything that has been in place for thousands of years, and to put things back into their rightful order. We are not even sure what’s wrong, but we know deep within ourselves that something is.”

I listened with all of me. I took it all in, every word. I resisted nothing. This was Sasha’s story and it was my story. I felt the disorder of my life, and I felt a greater responsibility growing in me to right what was wrong. This was my destiny. I could feel it with every fiber of my being.

The “skills” Sasha referred to that the Supreme Leader possessed were beyond my imagination. What I did know was that something had to be done because something else very big, and very dear to me, was seriously compromised – and I was finally getting a glimpse of what that was. Every cell in my body into action felt like it was firing up for action. But, I needed more information in order to be effective in any way.

What I did know was that there was danger very close, that we all were being watched, that I had a destiny to protect everyone, and that the leader who Sasha and my mother referred to as the Supreme Leader, was a powerful male figure.

My reaction to what was happening surprised me. That I felt motivated to make right what was wrong, was out of character for the Mindy of the past. Right now, though, there was something very important awakening in me – and I wanted to know everything about it.

“You will please stop me if at any time I confuse you?”  
Sasha said interrupting my thoughts.

“I am prepared to listen, Sasha, and I am prepared to question.”

“Very good,” she breathed with relief. “There is much to explain. I continue. ...When Vawn contacted you, everything changed. His contact with you alerted us that time was running out. We, the Sax/tons have been here almost from the time the first Earth Ⓟessinians arrived. We set out to find a way to travel here without the knowledge of the Supreme Leader or his associates. It took almost 50 years, but we discovered how to travel here undetected and have been able to hide among you ever since.”

“Are the Sax/tons here as our pets?” I asked.

“We, the Sax/tons, (pronounced s/ɪs) are mostly here in the form of dogs but some of us are cats. Well, only those of us who speak, that is. To answer your question Our mission is to stay close enough to the Earth Ⓟessinians, we elected to serve, in order to recognize any changes that may be detrimental to their well-being.”

I could feel how deep the Sax/ton <sup>s</sup>/<sub>t</sub> loyalty was. It was unshakable. They also believed they needed to be taken care of, and were actually appreciative of servitude. I also knew now with certainty, that Vawn was the Supreme Leader she spoke of, even though, I'd never heard my parents speak his name. Maybe, they didn't even know his name.

Rather than address any of these topics, I continued the thread of our communication with another question. "How can you exist as animals?"

"We are shape shifters of a sort. We can become anything we desire – even inanimate objects if need be – but only for a short time. The Leader does not know we can shape shift, and He and the Supreme Guard do not know that we are intelligent. We have been careful to remain your mute servants for thousands of years, ever since our ancestors had, what could be called, our vocal cords removed to keep us silent. You see, as servants, we saw and knew many, many things – and our loyalty had to be assured. Many of us can speak but dare not do so for fear of immediate death – as was the threat to our ancestors."

I felt the pain of the Sax/tons, but I also felt their dedication to each other, and their bravery.

"For myself, being a dog has been somewhat difficult. I have had to keep myself very heavy to keep from floating. Overeating is important to my dog form."

"Good thing my mother complied with that!" I laughed.

Sasha was, at first, startled by my laughter and then realized it was not meant as judgment but was actually a sincere intent to express camaraderie. It was when she recognized the root of my response that she laughed also. I could feel the overlay of generations of servitude making it difficult for her to trust friendship. But, it was not me she distrusted. It was her own beliefs that kept her subservient and unsure of herself. It was, in that flash of realization, that I knew she was very much a victim of some form of horrific programming – and in that instant, I knew I was going to do everything I could to change that for her and all of the Sax/tons<sup>s/45</sup>.

As I write my story, I find myself feeling increasingly angry with the amount of manipulation that was inflicted on all of us. I can't tell you the details about that yet, but what I can tell you is that I had no idea what was really happening then, but I always did my best to do the right thing. Not that my actions could affect what was unfolding, but I believed they could.

I digress. My story continues...

Suddenly, a red light began to flash on the control panel, and Sasha leaped into action. She literally launched to the control panel and began to flip switches and spoke quickly in a language that sounded like an abbreviated form of English.

“Quickly, Mindy, turn off the lights in your room and project an image of yourself asleep in bed,” Sasha spoke anxiously in a tight, strained voice, her eyes never leaving the expanse of controls in front of her.

I felt the urgency and while fighting to contain my own rising concern, I did as ordered – not sure if I could do it or not. I focused quickly on turning off the light switch, and seeing myself beneath the covers of my bed.

“Very good,” Sasha whispered still not taking her eyes off her work at the control panel.

I heard my mother knock on my bedroom door and say, “Are you asleep, Mindy?”

I was about to answer her, but Sasha was wildly waving her arms for me to be quiet. Accordingly, I did not respond to her question. My mother repeated her question, waited for my answer and when I did not answer, she said quietly, “Good night, Kitten,” and walked away down the hall to her own bedroom.

The red light stopped flashing.

“That was close,” Sasha breathed a sigh of relief then became aware of what she perceived as a lack of professionalism and said, “Forgive me for being so forthright with you, but there was great urgency. If your mother had discovered you were not in your room when our ruse tells those who watch that you are dreaming – an alert would have sounded in Tessina and all of our work may have been discovered – and well, it could have been catastrophic for all of us here.” She spoke quickly by way of explanation. “Again, forgive my forthright behavior.”

I had almost stopped breathing myself when the red light started flashing, and now I inhaled sharply, took a few breaths then answered, “Sasha, I am confused but have complete faith in what you and the Sax/tons are doing. I can feel your integrity in my heart.”

Rather than hearing my compliment, Sasha focused on what she heard as criticism and responded with distress, “Oh, I have not meant to confuse you.”

I registered her distress as information about her need to please me, and I said, “That is why I am here – to be informed about what I can do, and that will happen because I trust you. Look at how well your security system alerted us. I am very pleased.”

“Thank you, Mindy. That makes me happy.” Appeased, she quickly got back on topic saying, “Shall we continue?”

“Yes,” I said.

“We only have a short time left because you must return to your life above. It is of utmost importance that you are perceived to be living the same life you always have been. Normalcy must be maintained. Those who listen and watch are very alert to changes.”

She paused, took a steady breath, and said, “We know much but not everything about the Great Event ⊕, – and you must be informed to understand our urgency.”

*The Great Event ⊕? What could that be?*

“We risk that knowledge being read by those who are assigned to listen. The Sax/tons s/+s are well versed in camouflaging their knowledge – and have had generations to perfect the ability to do so.”

Sasha paused again, and I could see her shudder with what felt like fear.

Then she added, “You must know everything we know about the Great Event ⊕, and I must teach you how to hide your thoughts and emotions. All of our lives depend on it.”





## **Chapter 12 - *The Great Event* ☸**

I could feel the urgency and concern in Sasha's words and responded to it with this request: "Teach me how to hide my thoughts and emotions. Do not tell me anything else before I have mastered the skill."

"Yes!" Sasha responded. "You are very right to insist on this now. We will work with your thoughts, but you can utilize the same technique for your emotions. You can also do this cloaking technique for your thoughts and emotions together around a certain topic. Are you ready?"

"Yes! I suspect this will be a very important technique for me to master."

(I had to know how to do this. Feelings of certainty rushed through me, and I welcomed them. This information was pivotal to my future – and the future of thousands of others. How did I know that? No ego just certainty.)

"Yes, very important to learn," Sasha said, paused then began her lesson. "I will instruct you, now. ...Close your eyes. You are going to learn how to make your mind very still – and then to camouflage your thoughts. First... imagine or see your thoughts slowing and stopping. Here is a metaphorical image you will understand. See a train slowing down and coming to a stop on the tracks. This is the

vehicle for your thought transmission. Can you see the train? Is it stopped?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Good. ...Now envision a great storm rising up and burying the train in snow – or imagine a flood washing the train away – or allow it to be buried in an avalanche – "

"I am envisioning jungle vines tangling around and around the train. They have completely covered all evidence of the train – and now I see beautiful flowers bursting into full bloom completely transforming the original train into an expression of natural beauty."

"Excellent! But don't make your vision too fantastic. It may create suspicion."

"Ah, you're right. Now I've made just a hillside of wild flowers."


"Perfect!"

"Is that it then? Have I done the camouflage technique correct?"

"Yes, you are very gifted at this work. Remember to keep all of the information you learn from me encased in your camouflaging hill of wildflowers – especially if you feel like you are being watched."

"How will I know if I am being watched?"

"You will feel it."

"I hope you are right," I said while Sasha watched me to measure my willingness to continue. "I'm ready." I said in response. "Tell me about essina. What is it like there?"

She smiled at the image she saw across her mind screen and said, “It is a lovely planet. There are rolling green hills everywhere that are lush with vegetation and crops for food. It rains a light misty rain every day. The sun rarely shines for more than a few minutes before there is rain once again.”

(No wonder Aunt Tessie reminded me of the rain.)

“There is a delicious smell in the air. It comes from all of the wild fruit trees and the large tropical flowers. The temperature is a moderate 60-75 degrees all the time. There are 2 large cities and numerous small villages. The population in total is about 500,000 – on the light side of the planet. But there is a shadow side of  $\oplus$ essina also. No one travels there. Consequently, there is no firsthand information available. We do not know the total population, but all of the Council members and the Supreme Leader live there as do all of the Keys – as well as, their servants. It is suspected that the shadow side houses many above ground facilities and also many that are below ground. There must be places to grow food, to perform research and to engage in some form of recreation. But again, nothing is known definitively about what exists on the shadow side of  $\oplus$ essina.”

She paused, feeling the burden of her lack of knowledge. I nodded my appreciation and gestured for her to continue, and she began a new topic.

“About every 100 years a new Key is born. (I don’t know why, but there are only about 30 years between you and the 20<sup>th</sup> Key.) When a Key’s work is completed they return to ⊕essina and become members of the Council. We do not know specifically what the Council does. What we do know is that the 21<sup>st</sup> Key – which is yourself – is the one born at a crossroads with the skills that can make right all that is wrong. We do not know exactly what is wrong only that it is. All we know about the 21<sup>st</sup> Key is through our prophecy and intuition, not through our intelligence gathering.”

I felt the manipulation perpetrated against the ⊕essinians, as well as, the Sax/tons s/tS, and it was disturbing. While the ⊕essinians on Earth were completely unaware of their situation, the Sax/tons s/tS seemed to know more but were also innocent on many levels. My own intuition was telling me this. I was definitely feeling wiser and more responsible for others. This surprised me, but it was probably a result of one of my lessons.

Then Sasha interrupted her story. “I am supplying you with lots of important information, and I am sorry for the quality of the data, but urgency forces me to speak quickly and with as much depth as possible under these conditions. There will hopefully be time in the future for more questions and discussion. For our first meeting, I must

communicate the most basic of information and return you to your normal life.”

“I understand, Sasha, and you are doing a fine job communicating the information.”

She smiled broadly at my compliment and launched into another topic. “You have not been given this information to date, but you must know this: T<sub>1</sub>essina X7-18 is the location of the Sax/ton s<sub>4</sub> underground facility on T<sub>1</sub>essina. Please remember that location.”

I nodded my acknowledgment of the information, and Sasha continued.

“The Sax/tons s<sub>4</sub>s are dedicated to the search for truth. As I said, we are well versed in camouflaging what we know. Our location is secure on T<sub>1</sub>essina as are the three underground rooms on Earth. There may come a time when we will teleport you to T<sub>1</sub>essina, but this has not been decided as of this date. Our plan to keep all of the T<sub>1</sub>essinians safe is evolving as the Great Event ⊗ comes closer.”

“Are there things you know to be absolutely true at this time?” I asked.

“That is a wise question, Mindy! I will share the things we know to be absolutely true.”

She reflected for a few seconds then said, “1) The Great Event is coming sooner rather than later – probably within the year. 2) The Great Event will affect all of the Tessinians

on Earth today. 3) You have the skills to right that which is wrong if you choose. 4) Your role, Mindy, is to organize your people to go home to Tressina.”

I let the 4 truths Sasha shared settle in my mind. None of them seemed exactly right, but I had no idea why that was. Accordingly, I only addressed the last truth about myself. “I am not sure, Sasha, if my role is as you indicated.”

“Neither are we, but we do know that you have been assigned a leadership role – and one of your responsibilities will be to organize the Earth Tessinians to go back home to Tressina. Prophecy tells us this.”

I let this information float in my mind without an anchor so it could morph and change if new information came to me. Sasha waited for me to process the information then I noticed her watching me for permission to begin a new topic, and I came fully back to the room and said, “Please continue.”

“There is something about your development and growth that has alerted what is called the Supreme Leadership Level to act. That Vawn, himself, contacted you is unprecedented. No one has heard from him in over 100 years. Although his death was never announced or confirmed, it has been assumed because all communication has been from his 2<sup>nd</sup> in Command, Amalla. She is a woman who sounds sweet and endlessly kind in her transmissions, but no one has ever seen her, and many of us do not trust

her. There is nothing to substantiate this – only a feeling many of our most gifted have.”

I did not trust Amalla either (and for no substantiated reason) – but kept quiet as Sasha launched into another topic.

“Most ⊕essinians on Earth have no greater goal than to know each other. They are not leaders, and they are not here to lead. They are kind, obedient people. We do not know with any authority why the ⊕essinians and the Keys were put on Earth.”

“We do know what we have witnessed which is that there were originally 703 Families. Your family is 703X. The ‘X’ flags the fact that the Keys are in your lineage. No other family has ever had a letter associated with it. About 1,000 years ago, 703 Families were placed on Earth. Each Family had 20 people in it – 10 males and 10 females. Every 20-30 years their population doubled. In about 150 years the individual Families grew to over 500 in number. It was around this time that their numbers began to thin as they succumbed to a number of natural catastrophic events. Here are a few of those statistics:

- 100,000 died in the 1931 China floods
- 100,000 died in the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami
- 50,000 died of the Black Plague in the mid 1300’s
- 50,000 died in the Indian Famine from 1896-1902
- 30,000 died from the Spanish Flu from 1918-1920

- 1,200 people or 2 entire Families died when the Titanic sank in 1912  
...and those are the deaths we can trace and count.”

I was not exactly sure what Sasha was implying with these statistics, but I did find them frightening. What if they were proof of natural catastrophes that were actually exterminations? I managed to hide my concern from Sasha.

“Today, there are only 20 Families left. Each has about 250 members. This means there are now about 5,000 Earth Tessinians E.⊕. Each Family lives within 100 miles of each other in order to stay connected. About 1,550 Sax/tons s/⊕s still remain here and live with Families, but there are 45 of us who operate completely undercover and change shape often in order to gather information. They are called social scientists. There are also 5 Native Tessinian n.⊕ social scientists. I know this is a lot of information. Do you have any questions?”

I let myself rest back against the metal-like wall of the small, safe room and sighed. Although an infinite number of questions were swirling around my mind, there was one obvious question that was begging to be asked. “What exactly is the Great Event ⊕?” I finally asked.

Sasha began to wring her hands as she spoke. “We are not sure, but this is what we do know. The Great Event ⊕ is a gathering of ⊕essinians. They will all come together in a location not yet known to us. The propagandized message



is that all of you will be able to meet and create a community where you can, at last, live openly.”

“Sasha, I hear an underlying concern in what you are saying. What is it?”

I reached out my hand and held her hand in mine. She squeezed my hand back. There was a slight tremor in her body and voice as she spoke again, “Oh, Mindy,” she began, “there is grave concern. What we do know is that the Great Event cannot be a good thing even though it is being promoted as such ...because we do know that the experiment has failed.”

An experiment? We are all part of a failed experiment? Then if the Sax/ton  $\frac{5}{4}$  statistics are correct, the 20 Earth Tessinian E.Ⓢ Families left on Earth are in grave danger. The Tessinian population has already been controlled very effectively with what appeared to be natural disasters. If the 1,000 year experiment has been deemed a failure then... I could not even complete the thought. I felt my fear begin to grow – and swallowed hard to push it down. *If all of this was true, what could I possibly do to stop it? Was I supposed to stop it?*

Then the red light started flashing on the control panel again, and Sasha launched forward saying to me, “Camouflage your fear. Do it quickly!”

I was startled back to the present moment, and began to force the vines to overtake and encapsulate my fear. It

was difficult because the fear was like a wild animal thrashing to break free of constraints; but, I finally did it. Then I got a few flowers to bloom, and my mind settled.

Meanwhile Sasha was quickly pressing buttons and talking to two other Sax/tons  $\$45$  over a speaker on the control panel in the same abbreviated English I'd heard earlier. All I could decipher was, "Yes... Yes... It shall be done."

Then she flipped off the control panel and turned back to me and said, "We must exit quickly, Mindy, and you will pretend to have had a nightmare. Another communication is coming to you. We think it is from Vawn. He has picked up on your emotion – thankfully not your location – and is about to send another communication through the mirror. Quickly! Up the stairs. Let's go!"



## Chapter 13 - Zack

I raced up the spiral staircase with Sasha, in dog form, at my side. I was sure she could have run much faster but was staying close to me for support and protection. We burst into my room and Sasha immediately floated up onto my bed. At the same time, my eye caught a piece of paper fluttering out of the mirror in the bathroom. I ran to catch it, and as I held it up to read, I remembered to steady myself and keep my thoughts and emotions camouflaged.

The note read:

✓ Mindy

Are you not  $\phi$ ?

Much concern, Vawn

How was I supposed to answer the question? I didn't know what the symbol meant. I could feel Vawn trying to connect to me. It was sort of a watchful/probing sensation. This was probably what Sasha had referred to as the feeling of being watched. (One very important reason why I could not ask Sasha what the symbol was.) Could I telepathically send my answer to Vawn? I had to respond in some way.

Then I had an idea. I looked directly into the mirror and thought the word “nightmare.” I waited a few seconds, and nothing happened. What next?

Then I said softly, “I had a nightmare.” I waited again, and there was no acknowledgment that my response had been received.

Another idea came to me. A good one! Aunt Tessie had been able to read through the mirror. I hastily wrote a note at the bottom of Vawn’s note that said:

*Not sure what  $\phi$  means – but I had a nightmare.*

I waited a few seconds, and again nothing happened. But when I took the note down from the mirror, there was a response at the bottom of the paper in the same handwriting that read:

*$\otimes$  Mindy of  $\oplus$ essina,  
I was worried. Sleep now.*

Now, the situation that was presenting itself was steeped in multi-tiered manipulation. I could only act in response to what I knew then – which led me to conclusions I thought were mine, but they really weren’t. I felt like I was being open-minded and thorough in my decision making, but I was

being led like a Celkin (or a cow on Earth) would be led with a nose ring. Even Vawn calling me ⊗ (wise) Mindy of ⊕essina was alluding to the fact that, incredibly, he knew I was lying to him about where I'd been with Sasha. His use of the word ⊗ was playing to my cleverness but I, of course, did not hear his implication or sarcasm – that he knew exactly where I'd been and with who. I had no other way to travel my situation than as I did at that time, and it was this manipulated journey, although devastating to contemplate, that got me where I would truly heal time.

But I have gotten ahead of myself.  
Back to my story...

I wasn't sure what ⊗ meant on the note, but was reasonably sure I'd dodged a bullet. Still feeling that I was being watched, I took a few deep breaths to steady myself. My heart was racing, but I managed to recreate a normal heartbeat in a few short seconds. I drank a glass of water and brushed my teeth – and felt the close scrutiny back away and release me to my life.

It seemed like Sasha should know about this. The Sax/tons s/t+s were aware of the fact that a communication was about to arrive, but they may not be aware of the

specific contents of the note, and Sasha was obviously not in front of her control panel. How to tell her?

With as much casualness as I could muster, I dropped the note at the foot of the bed near Sasha. She glanced at it and rolled over. I took that as a signal that she had acknowledged the note.

It was very important that the presence of the Sax/tons  $\frac{S}{4S}$  on Earth be kept secret. I knew that with certainty. Oddly enough, I felt very clear about who I could trust, and it was Sasha.

I put the note in the front of my journal – which I was going to update with the most banal entries possible tomorrow. Right now I needed rest. I crawled under the covers and remembered nothing until Mother woke me up for school the next morning.

We were now two months into classes at our new school, and Bradford was obsessed with Clara and surrounded by new friends while I was not. My focus was my school studies, and making sense of what I knew about  $\oplus$ essina and my supposed responsibilities.

As I was walking to my history class, I realized how refreshed I felt. Encapsulating my thoughts and emotions created a sort of compartmentalizing that allowed me to be more present in my life on Earth. I was finding it easier now to separate my  $\oplus$ essinian story from my Earth story. I felt good!

I must have been smiling to myself because when Zack Smith, the new boy from my history class, caught up with me he said, “You look happy today, Mindy.”

At first, I was startled by Zack’s presence then I said simply, “I am – at this moment.”

*Damn.* I could feel him making my response an approval of his presence at my side. After all what else could he conclude? There was no time to set him straight because we had reached the classroom, and I had to focus on finding a seat.

Zack sat down next to me, and I could feel him glancing my way all through class. I wanted to be angry, but found myself oddly curious about his attention and completely bored with the class. When I tuned into what was on Zack’s mind, he was thinking about me in some interesting ways that involved touching and kissing. Somehow the pictures on his mind screen were appealing to me, not appalling, as Mathew’s and his friends’ had been in my old school when I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade such a short time ago.

Not only did I feel older and more mature today, I felt ready to handle a relationship. (Wow, that was different.) Maybe I was older than 14 now. What a very confusing predicament I was in. The life experience of a 12 year old (well, not exactly) – and now feeling like I may be pushing 15 or maybe even 16 years old in a little more than 6 months of Earth time. But today, for some unknown reason,

life didn't feel confusing. It was intriguing – and I was liking it!

I smiled at Zack over my shoulder, and he smiled back. That set off a green light in his head. Good! I felt ready for whatever was going to happen next. I was putting my thoughts about Ⓟessina on hold for at least the rest of the day and going to think about staring into Zack's dark brown eyes and running my fingers through his dark, wavy hair. (Where did that impulse come from?)

For the rest of the week, Zack and I spent time together and got to know each other better. I quickly felt I could trust him and almost succumbed to the idea of sharing my Ⓟessinian roots with him then checked that impulse and soundly suppressed it. It seemed important to keep my Earth life separate from my Ⓟessinian responsibilities. My rapidly developing super ability to encapsulate my thoughts and emotions allowed me to easily keep one door open and the other closed.

“What are you thinking about now?” Zack frowned at me from across the table where we'd gone for a hamburger and fries after school. “You have these moments of being very serious and far away.”

“Zack, I am just one of those people who actually thinks!” I answered, popping a French fry into my mouth.

He popped a fry into his own mouth, and I found myself wondering what it would be like to kiss him. That thought



made my whole body come alive in new, wonderful ways. Zack smiled as if he knew what I was thinking. It was odd to be this in sync with another person, but also delicious. *(Delicious? That was a weird word association, but it was what came to me.)*

We walked close to each other brushing arms together until Zack laced his fingers with mine, and it felt like something was melting inside of me, like my inner world was coming unglued, and I was losing the boundaries between myself and Zack. I was disappearing, and a new “we” was being born. What a feeling!

Two days later we were doing a lot of the touching and kissing Zack had been imagining. Then two days after that we were doing a number of things wearing only a few articles of clothing, and throwing lots of inhibitions out the window in the back seat of Zack’s pick-up truck.

I had not done homework in a week, and Bradford was thrilled to be a part of my secret world of complete defiance and debauchery. (I called it that. He would never have used those words.) Mother and Dad were more and more concerned about my school work – and because Zack was not a member of Family 703X. That was perfect as far as I was concerned – and to hell with all of the Tessinian stuff that kept creeping into my thoughts when I went to sleep at night!

Sasha looked at me every night when I got into bed, her eyes round and questioning, and I whispered, "I'm having fun for a while. Don't worry about me."

Zack and I went "all the way" (as my mother was known to say) on the back seat of his truck one week after we had our first hamburger and fries together. Zack was incredibly kind and compassionate to me, and I responded in unexpectedly wanton ways that made me feel self-conscious afterwards. (Thank goodness Zack had more experience than me, and had been wise enough to put on a condom at the last minute. *What had I been thinking?* Obviously I had not been thinking. I'd been incredibly stupid.) Zack assured me that my sex-crazed response was safe with him. We finally laughed together; and, I had to admit, I did feel safe and respected.

Zack seemed so mature and knowing. I had tucked myself close to his side then sighed on that day in the back of his truck. It had admittedly been uncomfortable, but it was our private place. I wanted to trust Zack. Damn. I even wanted him to love me. Love? What was I thinking? I was acting like a teenage idiot. Like Bradford. Damn!

Obviously (and surprisingly), I wanted this relationship, and I knew honesty had to be the driving part of our interactions. It could take us through anything. I had enough intelligence to never sell myself short or to distrust my own choices, and I had enough self-worth to make sure

the decisions I made were my own – and nobody else’s. So there would be no more regrets in my life, only opportunities for self-growth.

On the evening of the eighth day of my relationship with Zack, I brought him home to dinner at my parents’ insistence. They seemed to like him very much – or, at least, they were pleased that their moody, independent daughter was showing some useful social skills. Even when I excused the two of us to work on some history homework in my room, they did not object. Of course, we did no homework whatsoever and spent our time kissing and touching on my bed.

It was around 9:00 when I told Zack he had to go. We had school the next day – and the action on the bed was almost out of control. It surprised me how powerful the urge was to be with another person. Even when Zack went to the bathroom to pee, I ran after him, and we exchanged many passionate kisses before he shoved me out the door, and closed and locked it behind him playfully.

After Zack finally left for the night, I stood in the bathroom and smiled remembering how many kisses we’d shared in this bathroom saying goodbye. The smell of Zack was still in the air – a sort of cinnamon, smoky smell. I felt blissfully lost in my memories and the sensations of being in a relationship.

Then my eye caught a piece of paper on the top of the garbage next to the sink. It was a paper – a familiar type of paper – the kind of off-white, heavy paper Vawn sent his messages on.

I heard an alarm go off in my head and tried to steady my breathing, but it was a hard fight. I felt my world beginning to spin. My hand was shaking as I crouched and slowly reached for the piece of paper.

I flashed back to Zack shoving me out of the bathroom and locking the door. I remembered him taking a while – and me teasing him from the other side of the door – and then his knocking me a bit off balance by saying, “Hey, give a boy some time here. You have made it difficult for me to pee. You know what I mean?”

I had laughed and thought how wonderful it felt to be lusted after, when you felt the same way. When he’d opened the door, he had tossed what I thought was a tissue into the garbage pail. It had not been a tissue. It had been this piece of paper.

I unfolded the piece of crumbled paper not breathing at all. The words on it were simple. I gasped and found myself sinking down to the floor in complete confusion and distress.

Sasha was at my side in a second and glanced at the note I still held in my hand. It was Vawn’s handwriting, and it read:

*Good work, Zack.*

“Oh, no...no...no...” I said on one exhaled breath.

I didn’t want to ever breathe again.

*Who was Zack, really?*





## Chapter 14 - *Tessina X7-18*

Completely overcome with distress and confusion, I couldn't think straight. I felt like I was being swallowed up by my fear, and the feelings of betrayal were crushing my heart.

I sat on the bathroom floor only partially aware of the fact that Sasha was licking my face. Then I heard Zack saying in a hushed whisper in my ear, "Mindy, it was all a lie. Focus! None of it happened. Damn it! Listen!"

Then he was in front of me on the floor in the bathroom. How did he get here? Sasha was still hovering nearby. What was happening? I started to wildly kick my feet, but Zack was holding me down. Then his hands were around my throat, and I couldn't breathe. I reached frantically for Sasha. Why wasn't she helping me? What was happening? I felt stuck in a nightmare frantically struggling to escape this final indignity. Were these my final thoughts? How had my life taken such a frightening turn? I tried to pull Zack's hands off my throat, but my efforts were futile against his strength.

What was happening? Zack's eyes were unreadable, but I heard him pleading, "Let go, Mindy. Please, let go."

*“Why? Why is this happening? Am I supposed to just let you choke me to death? I can’t breathe...”* I said to him with my thoughts.

Sasha was there doing nothing but licking my face. Then Zack’s face went dim ...and disappeared.

I let go, and I was flying into pieces, millions of them – but I could breathe here. Gulping air frantically, I filled my lungs with what I needed to fully regain consciousness. I was moving with what felt like the speed of light. Where was I going?

Zack was saying softly, “Forgive me, Mindy. This will all make sense. I promise you.”

I didn’t care what he said. He was evil, pure evil. He’d betrayed me, and I was going to kill him... What was I thinking? I was dead. Wasn’t I?

I heard Sasha say, “I cannot pretend to approve of what you have done, but I defer to your wisdom. Is she contained?”

“Yes.” Zack sounded resigned, as well as, concerned. “And Vawn has received the transmission of the information. The emotional and mental cloaking is holding in place.”

“You are very talented, Mr. Zack. I am very glad that we are aligned in our suspicion of Vawn’s intentions, and in you



we now have an ally with direct information about the Supreme Leadership level. You are very helpful to our mission, Mr. Zack. For this we are grateful.”

Grateful?? I’m dead! What are you thinking, Sasha? I could hear her pushing buttons on the control panel. How did I get to the underground, secret room? And Zack was here also. What kind of an allegiance was this?

Sasha continued, “We were alerted to a serious problem when Vawn used the Sax/ton  $s/t$  symbol  $\phi$  for wellness in his note to Mindy. That was a devious trick to root out proof that she was familiar with the Sax/ton  $s/t$  symbols. It was a good thing that she did not know the symbol – although, we think he still suspected something when he addressed her as ‘wise  $\otimes$  Mindy of  $\oplus$ essina’ in his follow-up note. This symbol is also a Sax/ton  $s/t$  symbol. Vawn does not make mistakes. The use of our symbols was intentional. We must assume that we have been warned and that we are now all in terrible danger. Vawn, the Supreme Leader, is a dangerous and cruel man.”

Vawn is a dangerous and cruel man – AND the Supreme Leader? What was I hearing?

“Yes, Vawn has shown us, once again, how much he knows,” Zack said obviously distressed to hear Sasha’s

words. There was a pause then he added, “But most importantly, how am I ever going to fix this with Mindy. I really like her. A lot.”

*“You tried to kill me! And for that matter, you are both traitors!”* I shouted. *“How about explaining the situation to me?”* Neither of them seemed to hear me. Where the hell was I, anyway?

“Can she hear us in there?” Sasha asked.

“I’m not sure. Some people can, some can’t – and this is Mindy T. Barnes.”

“Well, I have a few more minutes of work here to get the system ready for teleportation. My suggestion is to begin your explanation.”

“Right now?”

“Why not?”

“You’re right. It can’t hurt. Maybe she can hear me. If not, it will be good practice for the conversations I will have to have with her in the future to explain myself.”

Then Zack took a deep breath and said, “Mindy, I am really sorry for everything I’ve done – and especially for having to choke the life out of you. That must have been horrible. ...I feel silly doing this, Sasha.”

“Think of this as the beginning of a long explanation,” Sasha chuckled.

When did she become friends with Zack? I just met him a week ago. Where was her loyalty? Damn. Their familiarity with each other was very confusing. Was I missing something?

Zack continued, “I know this must be very confusing for you, Mindy. ...She’s going to kill me, Sasha, and I really like her.”

You better believe I am going to kill you! If I ever get out of whatever I am stuck in, you... are... dead!

Sasha chuckled again, “Mr. Zack, you have got your work cut out for you.”

“Vawn actually believed she was dead, didn’t he? I actually did it. I deceived him.”

“And masterfully!” Sasha said.

*“Why are you both talking like I’m not here? This whole situation is really pissing me off!”* Maybe I’m dead.

“I think she’s mad. I can feel her anger heating up the vial,” Zack commented.

“Whatever you do, do not remove the vial from around your neck – for her own safety. We have a lot more to do before you can do anything for her.”

Okay, let me get this straight. I'm in a vial around Zack's neck?! Great! That's crazy. Actually, I can feel rounded sides surrounding me.

*"Want to feel anger, Zack? How about I tear around this place and create some real problems for you?"*

Wait, what am I saying? How is racing around a little vial going to affect anything? I need a better plan. But what am I planning for – and what can my options possibly be? What am I doing in here???

Zack was talking again. "Mindy, if you can hear me jump around or move in some specific way."

I could feel the warmth of Zack's hand holding the vial. I hated how good it felt to feel his warmth.

"I don't think she can hear me. The vaporize/containment procedure was done correctly, but some people get too scrambled to maintain consciousness until the process is reversed," Zack said.

"Ask again," Sasha said. "If I know Mindy, she is probably very angry and does not want to communicate with you."

"That's true," Zack laughed then sighed. "I know she's angry. It is going to take a lot of apologies and explanation to fix this. ...If you can hear me, Mindy, I'm sorry for everything. You will be brought back to your physical form

as soon as it's safe to do so. Please let me know if you can hear me."

Well, that sounded more promising than living my time out in a little vial. What would happen if I spun around in here. Whee! This is fun!

"I can feel her moving!" I heard Zack exclaim. "Mindy, I am going to make all of this up to you and explain everything as soon as I can."

He sounded like the Zack I first met, the one that was sweet and kind, the Zack who took me on a week of crazy passion, the Zack with a smooth maturity that I was helpless to refuse. I adored that Zack, but now I wasn't sure if I could trust him. What had really happened? And who... was... Zack? Really.

"Everything that happened was real, Mindy, except for what happened after we had burgers and fries together. The rest of it I made up. It was a memory I planted in your head to save your life. All that stuff in the truck. It didn't happen. It was a ruse to deceive Vawn. ...Sasha, this feels idiotic. I'm talking to a vial."

"I'm almost ready to begin the teleportation. Too bad you can't just do this teleportation yourself. It would be easier," Sasha said.

“But far more dangerous. Vawn would know immediately,” Zack interjected.

Then Sasha addressed me. “Mindy, the Sax/tons  $s/t$  are going to help make this right. I promise you this. We will get you to the Sax/ton  $s/t$  underground location on Tessina, and you will be safe. Our loyalty to you and Mr. Zack is absolute and unconditional.”

What was going on? Why pledge loyalty to MR. Zack? Didn't he just choke me to death? (At least, I think he did.) This was damn confusing. Wait. If Zack created our relationship just past the hamburger and fries we shared then all of it was HIS fantasy. Oh, god, how embarrassing. HIS fantasy that I behave like I did. HIS fantasy that I would accept him blindly and do all of those things in the back of his truck. Damn. Pissed off does not even come close to how I feel! Ugh! If I ever get out of here, you are a dead man, Zack! Do you hear me? You...are...a...dead...man!”

“I think she's mad again,” Zack said. “The vial is getting hot. Mindy, I promise you a full explanation, but you and I – and all of the Sax/tons  $s/t$  are in extreme danger. Vawn is very dangerous at all times, but if he realizes he's been duped to the degree that he has been, I don't know what he'll do. Think about your family. Unless we get this right, they are in danger. By getting this angry, you could break the vial – and then I won't be able to recreate your physical

form – and your skills are desperately needed in the near future. Please calm down. ...Okay, that's good. Please trust me. I will explain everything.”

I took what could be the equivalent of a deep breath and settled down. What choice did I have? I had to have physical form to kill him.

Then Zack said, “I think she bought all of that...”

What?? That is maddening. I ‘bought all of that?’ What did THAT mean? ...Stay calm. I am not going to respond. I am going to use this to my advantage. I will not let the two of them know I can hear them. Oh, I was getting clearer and back to my real self now.

“...Well, the truth is even more bizarre than what I have told her.” Zack sounded sincerely distressed. “I hate this, Sasha, but I was raised to align with the Supreme Leadership position, and I can play their game well, and what I have done had to be done. Now there is no turning back.” Then he seemed to be talking to himself. “Vawn believes Mindy has been eliminated. Time has been altered so Mindy never existed on Earth – “

WHAT? I never existed on Earth?

“ – and I have disappeared from Vawn’s scrutiny. The explanation around my disappearance may be the only problem, but everything will be resolved. I can do this, but I truly hope that Mindy will assist me.” Zack sighed again. “Regardless, the Earth Tessinians and the Sax/tons  $\frac{s}{t}$  of the Light Side will survive. I promise you this, Sasha.”

“I hear you, Mr. Zack. Now we are almost ready – and time is of the essence. Come, sit here. Now wrap your hand around the vial to protect it. I am not sure how our teleportation system works as compared to yours – but it is very effective.”

She pushed a few more buttons. “We are ready. In a few seconds, you will be underground at the Sax/ton  $\frac{s}{t}$  safe location of X7-18 on  $\oplus$  Tessina. My apologies if you feel a bit disoriented afterwards, but there will be assistance with re-entry when you arrive. Our service is to  $\oplus$  Tessina, and your allegiance is greatly appreciated as the Great Event  $\otimes$  is very close now.”

Sasha’s voice was facing completely away from me as she spoke a few words to another Sax/ton  $\frac{s}{t}$  in her abbreviated English. (She was probably facing her control panel, and Zack and I were standing behind her.)

Then she said, “In the name of gratitude and our love for you both, I release you to our greatest minds.”

Then I heard a low hum and lost consciousness.







## Chapter 15 - *Waking Up in ⊕essina*

I opened my eyes slowly, and I heard cheering. It had the high-pitched sound of Sasha's voice.

"Shh, don't startle her," I heard Zack say. "Mindy, you are safe on ⊕essina in the Sax/ton s/+ underground location."

I lifted my arm to see if I could move it, and found it was very heavy. I put my hands in front of my face, and they were both blue tinged.

Then I heard Zack say, "Give yourself a few more minutes for a full reintegration, and you will feel completely like yourself again."

I managed to answer groggily, "I guess the vaporize/containment procedure was successfully reversed."

Zack was to my right looking bluish himself but less than me. I saw him run his hand through his hair. It looked like he'd done it a number of times. His clothes looked disheveled and the top button of his shirt was gone.

"I guess you did hear Sasha and I talking," he said. I could feel his mind racing through his memories for what had been said.

“Oh, I did hear you,” I assured him with as piercing a stare as I could muster. Damn, why did I feel so heavy? “As soon as I can move, you are a dead man.”

Zack laughed over his shoulder. “She’s coming back!” The others in the room laughed. I glanced beyond Zack and counted 10 Sax/tons  $\frac{s}{t}$  who didn’t seem to know why they were laughing but did so because Zack did. “She can be rather, let’s say, direct,” he offered by way of explanation to the room about my comments. Then he added, “As you know, teleportation can scramble the mind.”

“Ah,” one of the Sax/tons  $\frac{s}{t}$  said in polite acknowledgement, and the others nodded in sympathetic agreement.

Then he addressed me saying, “Full reintegration takes a few minutes, Mindy. Be patient.”

One of the Sax/tons in a long robe, stepped forward and asked Zack, “May I speak to her?”

“You do not need his permission to speak with me,” I said struggling to get to a sitting position, but the dizziness threatened to overtake me so I stayed prone.

Zack grabbed my arm to stabilize me. He said, “Stay put until you are fully reintegrated again, then I will help you up.”

I felt immediately stronger and clearer when Zack touched me. It would have been easy to succumb to the support, but I pulled away from his grasp, and almost fell

off the other side of the small mattress. “Don’t touch me,” I whispered through clenched teeth.

I addressed the Sax/ton  $\frac{s}{+}$  wishing to speak with me as I swung my legs off what I could now see was a small, short cot. “I am Mindy T. Barnes. Who do I have the pleasure of speaking to?” I couldn’t stand up, but I managed to stay in a sitting position.

The Sax/ton  $\frac{s}{+}$  who looked like Sasha was a few inches shorter than me. He was wearing a floor length, cranberry colored robe with bell-shaped, long sleeves. He bowed his head slightly and spoke in a thin male voice. “I am very pleased to meet you, Miss Mindy T. Barnes. I am Professor Lam, head of the underground facility at  $\oplus$ essina X7-18 – here, at your service. You are to ask me for anything, and I will make sure it is yours.”

“Thank you for your kindness and generosity.” I turned my focus to the others in the room, all of them wearing the same long robes, and said, “So you are the best minds that Sasha spoke of?”

Professor Lam failed to recognize my humor and attempt at camaraderie and said in a flustered tone, “Well, yes, if that is what you have been told.”

I’d forgotten how formal and subservient Sasha was. Accordingly, I continued my questioning with a more professional tone that would be more comfortable for him. Actually, forcing myself to communicate made my mind clearer. “How do you know English so well?” I asked.

“We have been on Earth for over 1,000 years protecting the Tessinians there. It has been our duty to be completely fluent in English, and whatever other languages were required of us to serve and protect with proficiency. Direct communication has been your salvation and ours during difficult times and natural disasters.”

“You are referring to the kind of disasters that were created by the Supreme Leader?”

“Well, yes, Miss Mindy – sadly, yes. You are correct when you say that.”

I was feeling my sense of responsibility and leadership skills coming into full focus. I was not sure where they were taking me or what had to be done, but I knew there was someone I knew who had a few of my answers. Accordingly I said, “Zack and I have some private talking to do. Can you please excuse us?”

They all seemed flustered and looked to Zack for clarification. He nodded and Professor Lam said, “Yes, of course. We will come back later. Shall we bring food for you both for fortification?”

“We will let you know when we are hungry,” I said and the group of Sax/ton <sup>s/4</sup> intellectuals hastily left the room, each one of them bowing to me as they left.

As soon as the door closed, I stood up to test my legs. Zack reached out to steady me. When he didn’t let go of my arm, I pulled away from him and walked a few uneven steps

into the room and sat down again. My anger was growing, and I could actually feel it fueling my ‘full reintegration’ – as Zack called it.

“What was confusing about my request for privacy? Why did they all look at you for clarity?” I asked.

“I am not known as Zack here.”

“Of course, another lie on the list of many. What is your name then?”

“I don’t have a name here. It is more of a designation.”

There was a pause, and he annoyingly offered no further explanation. Impatiently I rubbed my forehead attempting to clear the lingering fog in my brain and asked, “And what is your designation?”

“VNA1.”

“Sasha called you Zack, in fact, MR. Zack.”

“Sasha had known me as VNA1 and because I used Zack on Earth with you alone, she was less familiar with using the name and tacked on MR. to be proper.”

That sounded like the truth.

With Zack watching me closely, I walked stiffly back across the room. It was an irregular shaped room about 20 feet X 20 feet. The irregularity seemed to be related to the natural rock formation. We were obviously underground. Three of the walls were massive screens with control panels at their bases. The surface of the fourth wall looked like obsidian. There were three closed doors along this wall. A large table stood in the center of the room with papers

scattered across its surface as if the participants had been hard at work before our arrival. Small chairs surrounded the table – none of which would be comfortable for Zack or me for very long. As I walked towards the table a wave of extreme fatigue came over me, and I sat on the edge of the table then sat on the corner to rest. Zack noticed my disorientation and immediately moved towards me.

“Stay away from me. I’m fine now,” I said.

“That is because I got closer to you,” he beamed his most charming smile.

“What are you talking about?” I asked, annoyed that his charisma had the effect that it did on me.

“My energy stabilizes yours. Let me walk away again.” He backed away, and I felt a wave of fatigue and my stomach turned. Zack noticed and walked two steps back towards me. “See what I mean? As long as I stay within about 10 feet of you, all is well.”

“Great,” I fumed. “You put me under a spell of sorts in the recent past. Why not again, VNA1?” I added sarcastically, emphasizing his admitted designation.

“I am not creating this. I created other things, but not this.” Zack gestured around the room.

“Yes, let’s talk about what you did create.” I resettled myself on the edge of the table and felt better. “...First of all, how dare you manipulate my thoughts and emotions – and make me believe the things that you did! I feel like I could kill you! You invaded my privacy. You planted a sexual



fantasy into my memories. The back of a pick-up truck – how dare you?!”

Zack shrugged. “It was a simple teenage fantasy – and Wawn was watching. It had to look real.”

“WHAT?” How could he be so casual about this deception? This actually hurt to hear.

Zack continued his explanation in the same casual tone. “I had to make him think it was real. I had to get close to you to make it convincing. That was the agreement. He wanted to observe you, but what he observed didn’t really happen. You should be happy about that.”

“I never felt so manipulated – no – let’s call it like it is. I have never felt so DEFILED in my entire life.”

“It was a lie. It meant nothing. It was for show – for Wawn to see and be convinced that I had gotten close to you. Just forget about it.”

Forget about it? Was he insane? NEVER!

“Was your assignment to kill me?” I asked pointedly, folding my arms in front of me.

“Well, yes, but I didn’t.”

“Why not?” Damn, I was grasping at straws – and I knew it. I actually wanted him to like me. How petty!

“I didn’t kill you because I am not a killer.”

I stared at him. That was his answer? He wasn’t a killer. It wasn’t that he was attracted to me and couldn’t do it? Damn. Bad answer on his part, and troubling emotional response from me.

“I feel sick about all of this,” I said and turned away from him.

If I was honest with myself, I had to admit I had feelings for Zack, and it was sickening to think that they were a part of a manipulation. *Who was Zack really?* It was hard to wrap my mind around the reality that the relationship never happened. My emotions did not seem to be able to understand this. Obviously, he did not have feelings for me. I’d been an assignment. Best to stay mad at him.

Zack was talking again. “I’m sorry, Mindy. I really am. Right away I liked you – way too much – and I knew I could not eliminate you – “

“You never liked me. That was part of the manipulation so don’t play that game with me. What I do want to know is WHY you had to eliminate me?”

“I don’t know.” Zack glanced beyond me to a closed door as if he wanted someone to disturb us so he wouldn’t have to have this conversation with me. “Would you like some food?” he asked.

“Do not try to change the subject. I do not believe that you do not know why I was supposed to be killed.” I stood up and faced him defiantly.

“Mindy, Vawn wanted you eliminated. My only choice was to manipulate the situation.”

“I don’t believe you. Vawn is not an evil man.”

“Oh, but he is. Trust me on that...” Zack shook his head and sighed heavily.

“You chose to manipulate me. I am not exactly sure why – and I do not trust you. You are DESPICABLE! How dare you plant those images in my head and make me believe them. I want to know why. Why did Vawn want me dead?”

“Are you finished yelling at me?”

“Am I FINISHED? How dare you patronize with me. I will never be finished with you!”

“Regardless, we have to stay together for now. You need me to be stable in this atmosphere. If you get outside of the 10 foot range, you’ll feel dizzy,” he answered lightly.

“If that’s true, it’s one more troubling development in a horrible situation. The more I know you, the worse things get. Answer the question! Why did Vawn want me dead?”

“Vawn wanted you eliminated, and there was nothing I could do but manipulate the situation.”

“So you have said. Tell me WHY he wanted me dead. Tell me the truth.”

“You really want to know?”

“That’s what I keep asking.”

Zack nervously ran his hand through his hair. “The reason why Vawn wanted you eliminated is because you are the 21<sup>st</sup> Key, the one prophesized ‘to make everything right.’ Vawn thought this meant you might secure his position as Supreme Leader. The Wise Ones have inferred that if you righted all that is wrong, it may actually take him out of his position of power. He couldn’t take the chance. He let you come of age only because he couldn’t resist

seeing how you would grow and how powerful you would be. I think your potential terrified him – and he knew you had to be eliminated, and he sent me. I am the best at what I do.”

Could that be true? Have I been watched? When Vawn contacted me was it just a final cruel gesture to measure my loyalty? I felt no loyalty to him, but surely no animosity. The real tragedy, though, was that everything Zack was saying sounded true. I had many questions:

- Who were the Wise Ones?
- What specifically is Vawn concerned about that involves me?
- What skills do I have that are so threatening to him?

But I kept these questions to myself. All I addressed was Zack’s role in the situation.

“You are a killer,” I finally stated staring at the floor finding it hard to reconcile my confusing feelings for Zack with the fact.

“I’m a skilled manipulator – and problem solver.”

“Don’t play semantics with me. You kill people.”

“I left the note from Vawn behind for you to find. I left it on purpose in order to come clean. Doesn’t that win me a few points?”

“I don’t think so. That’s a ridiculous claim about the note.”

Zack swept up a piece of paper from a notebook on the table. “Look here is a piece of paper, Tessinian paper, the same paper Vawn used to communicate with you. Look how easily I can get rid of it.” He closed his fist around the paper, and there was a small flash of light through the fingers of his fist. When he opened his palm, nothing was there.

I stared at his hand. “I must admit that was impressive.”

“I’m sorry, Mindy – for all of this, but you need to forget about your problems with me. We are in the middle of a crisis, and you and I are the only ones who can fix this mess.”

“I am doing nothing with you. Count on that.”

“You don’t have to like me, but I must make you believe me. Listen to what I have to say with your heart. ...We are all in extreme danger. ...I was raised to be neutral and to have no feelings about what I am assigned to do. But I found myself caring very much about the Earth Tessinians and the Sax/tons  $s/4s$ . ...I was teleported to Earth to observe and take you out, and I found myself conflicted. The Earth Tessinians  $E.\oplus s$  and the Sax/tons  $s/4s$  are not only innocent, their lives are of value. They are good souls living under a cruel delusion. I decided to do my best to correct what I learned was wrong, but I cannot do it alone. Am I telling you the truth? What does your heart tell you?”

“I feel extreme danger,” I sulked, not willing to admit that Zack was right on any level. “But why didn’t you kill me? Why save me? I hear that you think the Earth

Tessinians E.Ⓟ and the Sax/tons s/+s are ‘good souls living under a cruel delusion,’ but why leave me alive? Kill me and you can be everyone’s great savior!”

“I don’t want to be everyone’s savior – just yours.”

“WHY?”

“I don’t know exactly why. For one, you are part of the prophecy and I have great respect for the Wise Ones. Secondly, your emotions scramble my logical mind. I think I like you.”

I stared at him skeptically. “I find that very hard to believe,” I responded.

“That’s all I know. I found myself intrigued by your role in our history, and I like you. End of story.”

“Say it all you want, but that is not exactly true. Remember, I can tell if you are lying.”

“I do not know the answer to your question, but what I do know is that we must work together. You can kill me – or torture me until the end of time AFTER our work is done. My skills and yours combined can save everyone. When I met you, everything fell into place, and I developed a plan. You complete it.”

“How can I possibly trust you?”

“I don’t know. Wait! I know how this can work.” Zack paused then began again slowly. I could feel him carefully putting his idea into words, “You will be able to trust me because I am going to teach you how to defend yourself against my skills. You will know my weakness, and you can

choose to take me out anytime you choose – or if you feel I have betrayed you. I am going to give you the power over my life.”

“Why would you do that?”

“It is the only way I can think to convince you of my truthfulness.”

I stood up feeling stronger now. I had resolved myself to the mission at hand. There was a part of me now awakened to my mission. I was meant to save the Earth Tessinians and the Sax/tons  $\frac{s}{4s}$ . The urge to do so overpowered my other concerns. My feelings would have to wait to be resolved. I was probably never going home again, and the fact that my parents did not even know I existed, was very disturbing. But I didn’t trust Zack, and I didn’t share those feelings with him. Maybe in the future, there was going to be a way to reverse what Zack had done. Maybe I could go home – one day, but right now I could feel the impending danger, and said with steely resolve, “If there is a chance, I can right, even some of what is wrong on Earth and save lives, I must do it. Tell me what I need to know.”

“Great!” Zack breathed a sigh of relief that sounded sincere, but I dared not trust him. He followed me around the room as I idly touched random items and paper to get a better feel for where I was.

Zack continued talking, “Let’s begin. Here’s what you need to know... Vawn has ordered the Great Event. It is a mass extermination. He is afraid of the powerbase he

senses building on Earth. He senses the presence of the Sax/tons s/+s and probably even my betrayal. But my cloaking skills are quite good, and I am beaming a stream of lies to him 24/7 in order to keep everyone safe.”

“And how does this relate to me?”

“If the stream of lies falters even for a second, it will only take seconds (maybe minutes here underground) for Vawn to find me – and eliminate me. He’s being fed data that assures him I am still on Earth, only he doesn’t know where. My idea is to convince him I was involved in some sort of investigation that required I break our connection for a while.”

“Let me get this straight. Are you telling me that if Vawn finds you, he eliminates you – and that I should be concerned because then he’ll find and eliminate me? Or is it that if you are eliminated I’ll destabilize in this atmosphere?”

“Not exactly. ...It’s true that you need me to keep your energy stabilized, but what you don’t know is that I need YOU to maintain the ruse. When I was manipulating you to think you were being choked and sending that feed directly back to Vawn, I was unsure if I could do it. But when I was touching you, it was easy. When I am in close proximity to you, my skills are greatly enhanced. If I am not within about 10 feet of you, I do not think I can keep the images flowing.”

“So you are using me.”



“Well, yes – but for a very good cause.” He was matter-of-fact.

“And, so how do I check to see if you are telling me the truth about my having control over your life?”

Zack frowned. “I guess, you can’t. To find out the truth would be to have me eliminated – and possibly yourself.”

“So I can’t really test your truthfulness. I just have to believe you again – and you have proven to be SO trustworthy, haven’t you?”

Zack looked at me reflectively – as if he was trying to calculate the value of a new idea not my words, then said, “I guess you have to believe me. ...You did see how fast your Aunt Tessie was eliminated when she found out about Vawn’s existence, didn’t you?”

“Yes. Well, actually I wasn’t sure if she had been eliminated until you confirmed it right now,” I said sadly. “She died because of my lack of knowledge. I didn’t know enough to protect her. I showed her a note signed by Vawn. He was responsible for her death then. It is confirmed: Vawn is a cruel man. She’s dead,” I reiterated more to myself than to Zack.

I fought showing any emotion in my voice, but Zack picked up on it and said, “You could not have known that Vawn would have her eliminated. Very unfortunately, your Aunt Tessie was expendable. Her only mission was to assist you in your earliest awakening, but she didn’t need to be eliminated. It was Vawn’s choice. He is concerned about

what is happening and leaves no witnesses behind. As I told you, he can be very cruel.”

It hurt to think my actions had gotten Aunt Tessie killed, but I chose not to share those feelings with Zack – even though he was picking up on them to some extent. My feelings defined me and they were private – and I wanted them to stay private.

Then there was the manipulation he’d put me through. The images kept haunting me. Damn, all of it had been so personal – and very convincing. I shook my head in an attempt to dislodge the images and feelings.

Zack was watching me closely. “Are you okay?” he asked.

I chose not to answer and changed the subject. “Since it looks like I have no choice, but to go ahead with your plan, do you have any OTHER skills you have not told me about?” I asked.

Zack paused, attempting to read what I was not saying, then just answered my question. “I can self-teleport short distances. That’s how I got back into your room after I left Vawn’s note for you. I also seem to be able to feel your emotions at times, like when you are angry at me – like now. Please, Mindy, torture me when this is over, when everyone is safe. People are going to die if we don’t act very soon. Am I lying now?”

“No. So you have to stay close to me to keep the false images projected at Vawn?”

“Touching you makes it even easier – “

“Oh, don’t even THINK about it!”

“Got it. As long as I am within about 10 feet of you, I think everything will be okay.”

“So all I have to do is take a few steps away from you, and you will be eliminated?”

“Yes. Treason is punishable by immediate death. There are no hearings or trials like on Earth.”

“And, I need to stay close to you to feel stable in the ⊕essinian atmosphere?”

“Correct.”

“I am still not happy with any of this because if you die that means I will probably also be discovered and eliminated. You do realize that what you propose does not really address my concerns about you or give me any power?” I paused then sighed when Zack did not respond and continued, “But what has to be done must be done to save the innocent lives at stake. After they are saved then I will get back to your punishment. You may wish that Vawn had taken you out when I’m through with you.”

“I don’t doubt it,” Zack smiled.

“Don’t you dare use that charm on me,” I said as menacingly as I could.

“Got it.” Zack saluted me, grinning and obviously delighted with our exchange.

I sighed exasperated with him – and my own confused emotions that pulled me towards him. I wanted to kiss him, to feel his body against mine. *Damn! Stop thinking!*

I shook my head, annoyed with the direction of my thoughts, and his lack of seriousness and ability to manipulate his way out of anything. He was a manipulator – probably a champion manipulator – if I were to guess right. Maybe that was why he is designated A1. And what was VN short for? Vawn? If so, what did the designation of VNA1 mean about who Zack really was? I had more information about him but most of it might be a misdirection or just smoke and mirrors.

Zack was watching me closely and asked, “Any other questions, Mindy? I will answer anything you ask.” He sounded reassuring as he moved and parked himself on the same side of the table near me.

Right, with some more double talk, I thought, but held my tongue and asked, “Why has Vawn really taken such an interest in me?”

Zack sighed, “You are very powerful and threaten his position of power.”

“As you said, but what else do you know?” I asked, barely containing my impatience with him.

Zack took a deep breath and said, “Vawn has a connection to you he does not want to break which has kept him from eliminating you. From what I can best figure out, this is because you are his daughter.”

## **Chapter 16 – Part 1 of the Plan**

“Vawn’s daughter?” I responded disbelievingly. The words were caustic on my tongue. No, I was not his daughter, but I was someone very special to him. That I knew for sure. Damn, but it sounded like there some level of the truth to the claim.

Zack continued, “Not only are you his daughter, but he considers you his greatest achievement and, as I said, the greatest threat to everything he has created.”

“I am not even going to think about it now,” I said and changed the subject. “What I need is something to eat.”

Zack launched himself off the edge of the table to request food. It seemed he was happy to do something else besides answer questions. I could swear there was a little bit of wanting to please me mixed into his actions, but I pushed the thought and the subsequent simmering emotions aside. Better to suppress anything that would move me towards VNA1, Vawn’s A1 manipulator and eliminator. Well, his prize student was seriously betraying his Supreme Leader – or so it seemed. Best to maintain a level of vigilance just in case Zack’s actions were all a trap for the Earth Tessinians E.Ⓞs, the Sax/tons s/4s and myself. I shuddered at the thought, and felt weak.

I heard Zack say from near the door, “Come over here, Mindy. I can’t let the Sax/tons  $\frac{5}{45}$  know about the food request unless you move closer to the door. Come over here. Stay with me, Mindy dear,” he teased.

I came down off the table and angled towards the closest control panel, hit an intercom-like button and said, “We’d like to request you deliver us some food.”

“As per your request, food will be delivered in a few minutes,” was the quick reply. “If there is anything else we can do for you, please let us know.”

“Thank you. If you have two slightly larger chairs, please bring them in with you.”

“Of course! Anything else?”

“That’s it. Thank you very much.”

Zack grinned at me and came back to stand beside me at the control panel. “That, is another way to order food, and that is why you are the leader, and I am the problem solver.” He was still grinning, but I did not return the gesture rather I turned away to hide my confusing need to reach out and touch him.

“Move over there.” I pointed to the end of the table about 6 feet away from me.

“Okay,” he said amicably.

“What are you so happy about?” I asked frowning.

“You are not mad at me anymore.”

“I’m too tired and hungry to address your assumption, but I am not past being mad at you.”

“I’ll settle for what is here now.” He smiled and tilted his head slightly in my direction.

Damn, he was easy to like. His manipulation of my memories included a fairly accurate depiction of his authentic, charismatic self. Damn.

Food and chairs were delivered in minutes. The three Sax/tons <sup>s/+s</sup> who served us withdrew, and Zack and I ate in silence. The chairs were still small for us especially for Zack who had to be at least 6-7 inches taller than me, but the food was a decent replica of roast beef, mashed potatoes and green beans. The desert was chocolate pudding with a dollop of whipped cream – or something very close to it. Our hosts had out done themselves!

We ate in silence for about 20 minutes. I was savoring my last few spoonfuls of chocolate pudding when Zack pushed his food tray aside, leaned back in his chair, and put his feet up on the table.

With his ankles crossed and hands behind his head, he said, “That was quite good, and must have been very difficult for the Sax/tons <sup>s/+s</sup> to create. Earth food was the best part of my assignment on Earth!” He patted his stomach, satiated.

“Where are we going to sleep?” I asked changing the subject.

He raised his eyebrows in recognition of my quick change of subject, then answered simply, “Somewhere underground.”

“That’s not an answer.”

“It’s the answer to your question. If you need another answer, ask another question.”

I sighed then asked, “Are we going to have to sleep in the same room or can we be in different rooms with a wall between us still maintaining the maximum 10 foot distance requirement?”

“That’s a different question,” he dropped his feet off the table and looked at me. “We have to sleep in the same room. This rock formation will make it difficult for me to maintain the connection to you. I only need an hour to reboot my system, but you will need 7-8 hours. I’ll write up the first part of my plan while you are sleeping. The Sax/tons <sup>5/45</sup> are wonderful hosts, and I am sure they have provided for us with consideration and generosity.”

“Hm... It is amazing how things come together here. Any chance I can shower alone?” I asked meeting his gaze.

He laughed at my question, “In other Sax/ton constructions, the doors in the suites are a wood-like composition, so yes. You can use the bathroom in privacy.”

Damn, he was charming. It took serious effort, but I managed to not smile back at him.

“How old are you, anyway?” I asked attempting to redirect my thoughts.



“105.”

“Is that true?”

“What do you think?”

“But you look about 18 at most.”

“On Earth that’s true, not here.”

“How old is Vawn?”

“That’s a question I cannot answer. Maybe you will tell me when you meet him.”

“I’m meeting Vawn?” I asked, surprised that I felt anxious, as well as, excited to meet him. “Meeting Vawn sounds counter to your plan to date. I am supposed to be dead.”

“It is one feature of the second part of my plan.”

“Great,” I responded sarcastically. More enigmatic comments from Zack – what a surprise.

One of the doors opened and Professor Lam and three of the others from the earlier reception party entered. Professor Lam bowed his head and said, “We have your quarters ready for you. You will need your rest. Follow us, please.”

The Sax/tons <sup>s/+s</sup> exited the door, and Zack and I followed without commenting. I was very tired. This had been a very long day. Maybe, I’d even been up for a week. Who knew?

The walls were rough, hewn black rock. Light seeped in from above where the wall met the ceiling. Curious. I

glanced behind us and noticed the lights turned off seconds after we passed. It occurred to me that I should be more upset by recent events, but I didn't have the energy nor did I seem to be the rebellious child any longer. She was gone, replaced by a wise, more calculating, young woman. This was the new me, carefully assessing my situation and feeling the pull of responsibility and leadership.

Then we arrived at our quarters. The door was swung open, and Professor Lam gestured for me to enter. Two full-sized cots were set up on opposite sides of the small 7 feet x 7 feet room. A small desk with a lamp and some other technological equipment on it was between the beds. The only door in the room was near one of the cots and led to a bathroom with a shower. Every one of our needs seemed to be addressed. There were extra clothes, toiletries, one small dresser and a small closet.

"This is perfect," I told Professor Lam. "Thank you."

A broad smile on his face, he bowed his head and said, "We only had a short time to prepare for you both according to the specifics VN – excuse me, Zack provided us with, but we managed. With much gratitude, we leave you. This button, here, summons us to meet your needs." He pointed to a button near the doorway he was standing in while his three companions stood dutifully in the hallway.

"Thank you again for your attention to the details," I said, the Sax/tons<sup>s/4s</sup> withdrew, and Zack and I were alone.

I turned to Zack and asked, “You told them what to prepare for us?”

“Yes.”

“How did you know?”

“I knew a few days ago – and shared my requests with them,” he stated easily and then changed the subject. “Why don’t you take a shower and get your sleep.”

I was beyond tired. Maybe, I really had been up for a week. The water temperature in the shower was instantly perfect. My favorite soap was in the soap dish, and my favorite toothpaste had been provided. I donned the t-shirt on the table in the bathroom and was not surprised to see that it was a duplicate of my favorite tie-dyed t-shirt. All of this was creepy and comforting at the same time.

I wanted to explore more, tour X7-18, get all of my questions answered, and discuss our future prospects, but I desperately need sleep first. Exiting the bathroom, I let my weary body fall into the bed closest to the door. *Ah....* Zack was already sleeping in the other bed, his back to me. In seconds, I was also asleep.

I woke to see Zack leaning over multiple sheets of paper, making notations in the margins. He looked alert and well-rested.

He didn’t look up when he said, “Here is some orange juice for you – or something close to it.” Then he picked up the glass, beamed his charismatic smile at me, and held the

mug out for me. By way of explanation he said, “The Sax/tons  $\frac{s}{+s}$  are always looking to please. Good morning! You slept about 12 of your hours.”

“Why didn’t you wake me up?” I sat up, accepted the mug, and drank the surprisingly good orange juice-like drink.

“There was no need to wake you up.” He was back checking his paperwork. “When the plan is completely flushed out, you will orchestrate it.”

“I will? Are you sure of that?” I set my empty mug down more loudly than expected. I didn’t like to be told what to do.

“Absolutely! The plan is excellent!”

I sighed. Zack did not lack for confidence, and he didn’t notice my discomfort. How well did I really know him or he know me, anyway?

“How long have we known each other? In my time, that is?” I asked.

Zack stopped writing and thought. “About 3 days your time,” he answered quickly and went back to his paperwork.

No wonder our relationship was what it was. Damn, maybe even my attraction to him was manipulation. It was disturbing to think that my emotions may not even be my own. But I couldn’t think about Zack, anymore. There was work to be done.

I rose and went to freshen up in the bathroom. I dressed in clean clothes that were hanging over the shower bar. As I did, it came to me that I should request some bacon and eggs when I was finished, only to find them waiting for me on the desk next to Zack.

“They were just delivered,” he said by way of explanation without looking up.

“Aren’t you eating anything?” I asked.

“I ate already – I think three meals since you have been asleep,” he answered totally engrossed in his work.

“How did they know what I like?” I said more to myself than anyone else.

“I told them,” Zack answered without looking up.

Of course, he did. He was a 105 year old man who had spied on every aspect of my life for who knew how long. Privacy was an illusion. Damn!

I sat on the end of my bed. Zack shifted his paperwork over about a foot, making space for me on the desk, and I ate my meal. It was quite good – not exactly the taste of bacon and eggs, but good nonetheless.

Just as I rose to stretch, Zack suddenly looked up beyond me and gasped. “Oh, no!” he said between clenched teeth, and sounded genuinely concerned about something.

I spun around in the direction of his gaze and saw nothing but the wall. “What is it?” I asked.

“It’s Vawn. He’s close – and searching for me. Quick, you must do exactly what I tell you without questions and without faltering – NOW!”

“Tell me what to do,” I responded immediately. Zack was telling the truth about something of dire consequence to him.

He quickly stood and faced the door then spoke in a low, fast whisper. “First... Stand behind me and get as close you can. Press against me, but stay BEHIND me. Do not let yourself be seen. Second.... Think about the Earth. No emotion! You are the Earth anchor. I have to project myself to appear BEFORE Vawn finds me himself. He will see you unless you stay tucked in close behind me. I cannot do this without you. If this does not work, the response will be immediate elimination. NOW!”

I jumped behind him and pressed myself against him turning my head so my right cheek rested against his back. I heard his heart beating wildly. That was a real response. I placed my palms flat on his back, and he took a deep breath and his heart settled immediately. I followed his lead and did the same to my own heart which was also racing.

“Think of the Earth. It is an imperative,” he whispered. “All could be lost if this does not work. Here we go!”

I focused on the Earth forcing myself to project images of mountains, streams, lakes, sunsets, wheat fields, peach trees, and orange groves. Then Zack got very cold which

made me cold in every place our bodies touched. I stayed connected to my Earthly images.

“Looking for me, Vawn?” Zack asked in a casual, easy tone. His voice now sounded very far away.

I kept my mind focused on the roar of the ocean and the feeling of the spray of salt water on my face, but listened to Vawn’s voice with a very small part of my consciousness.

“There you are, VNA1,” Vawn said. “You disappeared. Where are you? I have become concerned.” The voice I heard sounded scratchy and metallic. It wasn’t weak, but it sounded ancient.

Without a single hesitation, Zack answered, his voice convincingly calm, “I’ve been studying the animals here on Earth. They are very sensitive to outside influences, and I broke connection for the study. There are many uses for their innocence and loyalty. This is especially true for dogs.”

I allowed a dog to be a part of my focus, one that began to growl menacingly. Vawn picked up on the sound and threat. Zack picked up on the usefulness of my projected image and sound.

“Our communication has disturbed the animals. I promise to be back soon with some very useful data and suggestions for us to explore for our next project on Earth.”

“Excellent —” was all I heard Vawn say because Zack disconnected from him in a flash of light that filled the room for a split second.

He fell back exhausted onto his bed, half crushing me beneath him then quickly rolled away panting from the exertion of the combined ruse and the projection. I went to move away and he grabbed my hand as he fought to level out his breathing. I watched him reign in every ounce of strength he had as he blocked his reaction to the interaction with Vawn.

It occurred to me that maintaining the Earth image projection would help and went back to my focus on first a dark, starry night, then a vision of a full moon, and then a light rain.

Zack chuckled shakily, “You have done well, Miss Mindy.” He squeezed my hand then let it go and sat up. “That was unexpected,” he laughed unevenly.

“That was not only unexpected, it was scary as hell!” I said sitting up and moving a few inches away from him. What I didn’t say was that I thought it was one of the best real interactions we’d shared together that was not a manipulation.

Ah, the bliss of ignorance. Everything was a manipulation, but I had no way of knowing that the games being played out were being masterfully played.

Sorry, I digress. Back to my story...



A few minutes later, when Zack's breathing had evened out, I asked, "Can you tell me what just happened?"

Zack sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "Vawn is always checking in with me and monitoring what I am doing," he said. "And the use of the growling dog was pure genius!"

"It was pretty good, wasn't it?" I admitted.

We smiled at each other, and it felt good to relate to each other in this simple, genuine way. We were naturally aligned in powerful ways when it came to doing what best served our mission, but there was still, quite understandably, a part of me that could not trust him 100%.

"Alright, enough of that!" Zack sprung to his feet fully recovered. "We have some serious work to do. Are you ready for Part 1 of my plan?" He was thumbing through papers on the desk.

"Sure. What is it?" I sat up, alert and ready for him to review the extensive data in front of him.

Zack shuffled through a few more pages then said, "We are going to teleport all remaining 5,000 Earth Tessinians E.⊕s, 1,545 Sax/tons s/4s, and 5 Native Tessinians N.⊕s to this underground facility."

"Sounds simple to me," I quipped sarcastically.

Zack ignored my sarcasm and continued. "We are going to do this DURING the Great Event just before they are eliminated in some tragic disaster. We'll make it look like they all died at the same time."

A disturbing thought. There seemed to be no end to dire information. “You are sure the Great Event is an extermination?”

Zack turned to me, a serious look on his face, “The conclusion that the Great Event is an extermination is the outcome formulated by our best minds. We must assume the worst outcome to provide for the best protection and highest survival rate.”

“This is all unbearably sad to consider,” I mumbled as I watched Zack talk. How could he look so attractive when the topic was so disturbing? Stop it! Focus! “But what if the extermination is like the plague when those who were eliminated took many days to die?”

“Then we are screwed. But I don’t think that will happen. I think it will be a quick elimination. Vawn has become impatient.”

“But he is also shrewd and cruel.”

“True, but you know what, Mindy?” Zack stood and said in mock triumph, “We cannot lose because there are two of us and only one of Vawn.”

I knew that Zack was struggling to believe we could save the Earth Tessinians E.Ⓟs and the Sax/tons s/+s so I agreed with him. “We can do this,” I said and allowed myself to stand also and initiate giving him a victory hug. He felt so much better to touch than the feelings he had planted in my false memories. Damn, what was I doing – and thinking?

“Okay,” Zack said, quickly pushing me away. (Good thing he did. Who knows what else I was going to do? Damn.) He turned away from me so I could not read his expression and continued. “Let’s go find these incredibly smart Sax/tons  $\$45$  and fill them in on the plan.”

He gathered up his papers, and we left the room together.

As I followed closely behind him, I wondered...

What were we getting into?

How was Zack’s plan ever going to work?





## **Chapter 17 - *Some Answers, More Questions***

I did not understand the details of Zack's plan. As I stood off to the side, everyone else leaned in together pouring over Zack's notes excitedly, and I heard words like entanglement system possibilities, hydro generation potential and pulse parameters. (What were they?)

And why was everyone acting as if they were long time acquaintances, maybe even old friends? (Was this Zack's charisma at work on the Sax/tons s/+s – or was it something else?)

One of the Sax/tons s/+s noticed my confusion and discomfort, and came over to me to offer support. "I am Professor Kel, Miss Mindy. I am in charge of data entry and management. Can I be of assistance?" she asked in a sweet, small female voice.

"I am at a loss when it comes to this information, Professor Kel. My education did not include the topics being discussed, and I cannot offer much in the way of suggestions," I answered.

"Call me Kel, please, and would you like to learn more about what the others are discussing?"

"Yes, I would," I answered, surprised and pleased with her consideration. "Thank you, Kel, for your offer,."

She smiled at my appreciation and bowed her head. "Then come with me," she said and gestured towards the door.

"I cannot move more than 10 feet away from Zack," I informed her.

"I am aware of this. We will only be in the next room, in view of the others, and less than 10 feet away. With your permission, I would like to explain a few things and give you a tour of this facility via the monitoring screen."

"That is a very thoughtful intention," I said, and Kel smiled broadly again.

We went out of the door in the middle of the control room and immediately entered into a small room with a screen that was about 6 feet x 6 feet in size and covered the far wall. There was another door opposite the one we'd used to enter the room that I presumed led to the hallway. Kel sat in a chair near the screen and indicated I sit beside her. I sat in a small but comfortable chair to her left while Kel proceeded to push buttons on a control panel in front of us, and the screen came to life. Her hands seemed to race across a glowing keyboard of unfamiliar letter and symbols. Her four fingers on each hand operated very differently than our five fingers did, and did so very adeptly.

"This is the hallway you traveled to your quarters," she began. "The walls are obsitico which is a natural composite that is very hard. In fact, it can withstand a very large underground or above ground explosion. We had to work

with the natural formations and add walls and supports made from a synthetic compound. The walls serve to break up the space into living quarters.”

Kel paused and looked at me questioningly. I nodded that I was following her and had no questions, and she continued. “The entire underground area was hollowed out by water centuries ago, but it was felt that the area (which extends for about 3 miles underground) needed more support and redesigning for us to live down here.”

She flipped to a number of different views showing an extensive network of halls, work rooms and many, many bedrooms. Some were dormitory style, but most were like suites with 3 or 4 bedrooms. There were a number of large eating areas, game rooms, and even areas that looked like playgrounds for children. Not a single Sax/ton  $\frac{s}{4}$  was in any of the areas I was shown.

“Where are the others who live down here?” I asked.

“Miss Mindy, this is an area constructed for the Earth Tessinians and the returning Sax/tons  $\frac{s}{4s}$  almost exclusively. Only those of us who have been in hiding for many years have assisted in the development and construction of X7-18. It would be far too dangerous to have people disappearing from the surface. That would draw attention to what we were doing, and that could be disastrous. After the mass teleportation, there will still be much danger until the second part of the plan is completed.”

A wave of discomfort flooded over me that I found hard to reconcile. I fought hard to make my question a mere inquiry rather than the beginning of grave concern. I was not completely successful when I asked, “You have known about the teleportation of the Earth Tessinians  $E.\oplus_5$  and the Sax/tons  $s/_+5$  for a long time, haven’t you?”

“Yes, for about 5 years now Earth time.”

Five years? Then what was Zack explaining to the Sax/tons  $s/_+5$  if the plan was already known? (But then 5 years on  $\oplus$ essina could be 5 minutes of Earth.) And she’d even mentioned the SECOND part of the plan. It seemed that I was the only one lacking important information. Was that intentional on Zack’s part? I could only assume that it was.

“I’m confused, Kel.” I said in response. “I thought Zack had come up with the plan for the mass teleportation in the past day.”

She looked flustered then said, “Ah, yes, that is how he must have presented it to you. I may have spoken about things not for me to explain. Forgive me.”

I liked Kel. There was no hidden agenda in her words. She was honest and might prove to be a valuable ally. Accordingly, rather than press the issue and create further discomfort between Kel and myself, I decided to change the subject. “You mentioned that you would be able to teach me about Sax/ton  $s/_+$  and  $\oplus$ essinian science. Can we begin?”



“Yes, we can do that,” Kel breathed an audible sigh of relief that I was not pursuing the subject. “Let us move on to the debriefing I promised you. Time is of the essence – and we have work to do. With this information, you will know everything the Sax/tons s/+s know, but our knowledge does not include what Zack knows personally. We do not have access to his extensive knowledge only what he has shared with us. Are you ready?”

“I am ready,” I assured her – and, of course, nobody seemed to know exactly what Zack was up to, but they all trusted him. The difference was that I was not sure if I did.

Kel opened a door on the control panel and withdrew a small box. She opened the lid, and I could see that there were a number of small blue stones inside.

“Knowledge Download Stones,” she said in answer to my unspoken question.

Then she took my right hand and placed one of the stones in my palm and curled my fingers back over it.

“Just close your eyes, relax, and allow the stone to transmit all of what we know to you. It is not expected that you will understand all of the knowledge, but it will be with you to be summoned when it is right for you to retrieve it.”

I did as instructed. Images flew into my mind much faster than I could process them. Most were only a blur of colors and sensations. Within seconds, Kel removed the stone from my palm.

“Mindy, you are finished,” Kel said gently uncurling my fingers, and removing the stone. I heard it drop into the small box. My eyes were still closed, and she asked with concern, “Are you feeling well?”

I opened my eyes and said. “Yes, I am.” My mind was spinning like a top, but I felt like I was moving very fast towards something important.

“What you need to know will awaken when you need it. Pieces will fall into place for you to the questions you ask yourself,” Kel offered watching me closely. “I’ve never received from the stones, but I have transmitted to them – and even that can be disorienting. Would you like some water?”

I didn’t answer at first and then I felt something light up inside of me. It wasn’t anything specific only a feeling of greater clarity. In that moment, I knew there was something I had to do.

Accordingly I said to Kel, “Water is exactly what I need. Thank you.”

“I will get it for you,” she said and scurried away to fulfill my request.

I didn’t know how I knew – or why I knew – or why I felt compelled to test the validity of Zack’s words, but I did. As soon as Kel left the room, I bolted out the door to my left and ran down the hallway that I had previously traveled to and from my room.

I passed the door to my room. The hallways began to get dark, but as I had done on the spiral staircase down to the hidden room on Earth that Sasha had taken me to, I touched the wall and a bluish light appeared between the space where the wall and ceiling met.

I ran and ran attempting to lose myself in the network of hallways. I turned left then right then ran some more. I stopped in front of a door and entered the room closing the door behind me. I was in an eating area exactly as I knew it would be. Obviously, I could not lose myself.

I did not expect an alarm to go off.

I did not expect to feel dizzy and unstable.

I did not expect Zack to be eliminated.

I did not expect Vawn to suddenly find me and kill me.

I expected nothing to happen.

And nothing happened – except that within a few seconds Kel burst into the room.

She stood in the doorway, shocked and dismayed with what I had done. I looked at her, allowing my agenda to be seen, and she immediately recognized why I had run. I had to check the validity of Zack's orders to me. I had to know the truth.

Now, I knew it was all a lie – but why? Was it all about Zack keeping me close to him because he didn't trust ME? There was nothing in what I had learned from the Download Stones or Kel herself that was giving me my answers. The

answers I sought were probably sealed tight in Zack's mind. Hmm. I'd have to figure out how to get those answers.

Kel watched me, her loyalty absolutely unquestionable. She did not have to ask me why I'd bolted. She was there for me. I knew it, and she knew I did. She bowed her head in silent agreement that the secret of my test of Zack's claim was safe with her.

"What now?" Kel asked in a whisper.

I was looking around the eating area. Something was here I needed to see or recognize. What was it? I walked around and touched one of the tables and a few of the chairs. A question was being asked – what was it? I knew something that was very important. I knew the answer to a question. What was it?

Then it came to me in a flash!

I whirled around to face Kel and said excitedly, "You don't know how you are going to feed everyone who will be transported. Correct?"

She hung her head in shame. "Yes, that is our last concern. We have failed. We cannot seem to find a way – "

"I have the answer! Quick let's get back to the others. I have the answer!" I exited flying back to the main room where the others were conferring. It was very important to share what I knew. The teleportation could happen now! I could hear Kel moving along with me keeping my pace. Every once in a while she took the lead to make sure I was moving in the right direction, but I would not have taken a

wrong turn. I knew this underground facility very well – and so much more from the Knowledge Download Stones. We would have to enter the main control room through the monitoring room to avoid suspicion. Kel knew this also.

I would deal with Zack at another time. He was going to have to answer some serious questions. Right now we had thousands of innocent beings to rescue out from under Vawn’s cruel hand. The Great Event ☒ was about to begin.

But as I entered the monitoring room, a terrifying image flashed across my mind screen that drew all of my attention. I could see/feel that all of the dogs on Earth were being targeted for extermination. Vawn had studied the hidden implication in Zack’s hasty use of the study of dogs, and had read it as a threat on some level. He had probably read my affection for dogs – which was directly tied to Sasha. Did the Sax/tons on s/+s Earth know already? They had to be warned.

I turned to address Kel who was watching my changed expression with grave concern, and said, “Quickly transmit this information to the Sax/tons on Earth. All dogs are about to be eliminated. They must change into another form immediately. Quick! Vawn is going to kill all of the dogs!” I whispered, feeling my panic rising.

Kel starred at me for a split second, shocked, then entered the control room, flew to the control panel and immediately sent this message:

DANGER! ...ALERT! ...All ...dogs ...must ...change  
...configuration ...IMMEDIATELY!

She turned to me and said breathlessly, “It is done, Miss Mindy.”

I knew the alarm was going off in the three underground locations on Earth. I froze hardly breathing. Was there enough time for the information to be received and disseminated? How long did it take for the Sax/tons  $\frac{s}{t}$  to transmit a warning? Seconds were going to make the difference.

A high pitched sound echoed painfully inside my head and then slammed into the Earth – and I knew, right then, that all dog-like creatures on Earth were gone. ...Gone...

The sadness of it all overwhelmed my senses. I buckled over from the pain of it, and I think I started to scream.

Zack burst into the room, and rushed to me. I felt unsteady on my feet and grabbed the wall to keep my balance. I felt Zack holding me up while he frantically searched my mind for information about what had happened. But I was a pro at camouflaging my thoughts – even now. Sasha had taught me well.

Where was Sasha now?

Then I sat heavily in the small chair as a wave of sadness overtook every part of me – and I felt like I was drowning in it.







## **Chapter 18 - *The Mass Teleportation***

“What happened, Mindy?” Zack asked, trying to read my thoughts. He sounded genuinely concerned. Whether his concern was for me or the mission escaped me. I didn’t care, anyway. His intentions were dubious. That I knew now for sure. “Tell me what happened,” he pleaded.

I was feeling grounded again, my shock at what Vawn had done had left me shaken, but not broken. There was work to be done. “Vawn killed all of the dogs on Earth. His action may have included the Sax/tons s/+s,” I said as stoically as I could.

Zack looked from my face to Kel’s. She nodded and shuddered with her sorrow for what may have happened to her fellow Sax/tons s/+s on Earth. “I sent an alert as Mindy advised,” she said. “Whether it was received and acted upon is yet to be determined.”

Zack ran both of his hands through his hair and said angrily, “Damn! How did you know, Mindy? Why did this happen?”

“None of that matters, right now,” I said rallying completely. “There is serious work to be done. The mass teleportation must take place as soon as possible.”

“What?” Zack seemed distracted, his mind elsewhere on other cascading problems.

“I said: Arrange for the teleportation to happen as soon as possible!”

“We wanted all of the Earth Tessinians E.⊕s to be gathered together for the Great Event ⊗ – and then initiate the teleportation,” Zack protested still distracted.

“You no longer have that option. Trust me. Vawn is suspicious, and that puts everyone in danger.”

“There is a problem – “

“I know what your problem is,” I interrupted him, “and I have your solution. Teleport everyone, and I will make sure they all have food.”

Zack’s eyes widened in surprise then narrowed with what may have been distrust. It didn’t matter.

“It doesn’t matter what you think, Zack. What matters is that you get everyone off the Earth NOW! Bring them into their quarters. They’ll be confused, but they will be alive.”

“You don’t understand. There will be complete confusion– “

“We will deal with it, Zack! Get everyone with Tessinian roots off the Earth – NOW – or they will all die! I’m telling you Vawn is VERY suspicious – and that is dangerous!”

I was waving my hands while expressing the urgency I felt, and noticed how blue my skin looked with my emotion. The change in color startled me, but it seemed to be a trigger to Zack, because it was then, that he began to react to my urgency. He issued a quick command of action, and a frenzy of activity began in the main control room. Lights

were flashing across the massive screens on all three walls. Orders were being shouted. Focus was intense.

I took a few deep breaths to steady my emotions and turned to Kel and asked, "Can you tell if the alert you sent was received?"

She sighed. "What are seconds on Earth are experienced as hours here. There may have been time for a reconfiguration to happen for the Sax/tons  $\frac{s}{4s}$ . Sadly, though, those animals that were genetically dogs are sure to be gone." Kel paused digesting the enormity of what had happened then continued nervously, "If at all possible, there will be a message sent from the Sax/tons on Earth. As soon as the situation is assessed, I can assure you, we will be notified. Only about one minute has passed on Earth."

I reached out and took Kel's shaking hand in compassionate support, and she and I fell silent in our shared concern for what may have happened to the Sax/tons  $\frac{s}{4s}$ .

The screen suddenly lit up, and a message flashed across the screen then disappeared almost instantly. It had read:

*We are  $\phi$  but security is breached ●•*

"What did that message mean, Kel?" I felt afraid to hear the answer.

“The communication said they are well  $\phi$  but I do not know who the ‘we’ refers to. I know that security has been ● breached, and that the transmission connection has been cut permanently, probably destroyed. That is what ● means.”

“By Vawn?”

“Maybe. The destruction of the communication system could also have been carried out by the Sax/tons  $s/t_s$  themselves for security reasons BEFORE Vawn recognized their presence. I do not know the final outcome.” Her shoulders slumped with the strain of what was happening. She felt part of something that may have failed terribly.

“Kel,” I said and placed a soothing hand on her shoulder. “You have done your absolute best. I have been witness to this, and the warning was received because of your quick action.”

“Yes, it is true. I have done my best. Thank you, Miss Mindy.”

Kel was still upset but felt vindicated by my compliments. Her servitude once again struck me as incongruous. Here was an obviously brilliant scientist who acted meek and unaccomplished in my presence. The source of her response to me was of interest to me, and I would pursue the question. But, now with the situation as resolved as was possible, I turned my attention to the enormity of what remained to be done, and entered the main control room.

Zack was punching numbers into a large console and saying intermittently, “Okay, now for Family 197! ...Family 42...” Then a few seconds later, he shouted, “...Family 513!”

He seemed to be randomly isolating families and teleporting them. This would surely alert Vawn unless –

“ – Mindy!” Zack shouted. “Keep Vawn occupied in some way. Keep him distracted from what we are doing!”

Zack was correct. Vawn had to be distracted, but what could I do? What would best catch his attention? Then it hit me – a communication from ME – his supposed daughter who he presumed was dead. That would do it!

I went back into the small room where Kel was focused on her screen now linked to what was happening in the main control room. I closed the door between the two rooms, and sat down. Kel said nothing, just focused on giving me the space to do whatever it was that I needed to do. She turned off the sound on her console, and set her intent to support me. Once again I found myself appreciating her quiet strength and loyalty.

I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and allowed myself to make an open, full connection with Vawn, still making it seem like the transmission was emanating from Earth.

“You had me eliminated,” I communicated in the smallest, weakest voice I could create. “Why?”

The response was immediate, “Where are you, Mindy, ...dear?” Vawn tacked on the ‘dear’ as a way to play on my emotions. I allowed him to think it had.

“What did I do to deserve this?” I asked, my voice quavering.

“No harm was ever meant to come to you,” he answered in his scratchy, metallic voice.

I didn’t respond but projected that I was in emotional distress, and he continued, “Where are you, Mindy, dear? I will rescue you.”

“I am lost,” I said and projected an image of myself crying to demonstrate vulnerability that I hoped would keep him totally engaged with me.

“Tell me where you are. I cannot locate you. I will make sure you are safe,” he responded with what sounded like sincere concern – which I didn’t believe for a second.

“I don’t know where I am.” I made myself sound weak and desperately sad. “I have never been to a place like this before.”

“Focus, my dear,” he answered.

I sent Vawn an image of me taking a deep breath and trying to focus. I kept my concerns about the mass teleportation encapsulated in a network of vines and wildflowers as Sasha had taught me.

Vawn received my ruse, and said, “Good... Now describe where you are to me. I see vines.”

That startled me. He'd seen the vines! He was not meant to see them. Now I had no choice but to use them. He was obviously very good at infiltrating my thought structure, but I was not going to let him get any further.

"I'm lost," I said. "I think I am tangled in vines." Then I changed the scene to me drifting in fog. "No, wait. I think I am in fog." I shifted the scene again. "No, I am spinning high in the sky," I said making myself appear dreamy and disconnected from reality.

"Mindy, listen to me," Vawn said patiently in a soothing voice. "Settle your mind. Count backwards with me. We'll count from 10 to 1 together. Are you listening?"

I could feel him attempting to control my mind. The counting backwards was the beginning of the implementation of a major manipulation that could unravel everything. I could feel the potential of his powerful control aided by the use of the vibration or modulation of his voice. This control coupled with his cruelty had horrific implications. They went way beyond the possible effects of hypnosis. Damn.

Vawn could easily read thoughts and manipulate others, the environment, and time. I don't know how I knew this. I just did. Damn. It was dangerous to have him focused on me. The connection would have to be broken very soon. I only hoped there had been enough time for the mass teleportation to be completed.

“Mindy?” Vawn asked, snapping me back to the present moment.

“I’m floating. Why am I here?” I answered allowing myself to appear to be sobbing.

“I want you to listen to my voice only. Focus. I am going to start counting,” Vawn said. I could feel his impatience building.

It took all of my strength, but I willed myself to stay on top of the interactions and to escape his invasive intentions.

“Lost... I am lost,” I said and let myself drift across a cloudy sky. Next I projected an image of myself becoming transparent then I disappeared from his view.

I heard Vawn shout in a loud, angry voice that surprised me. I did not know he could speak with such rage. “Mindy! Listen to me!” he shouted, his anger aimed directly at me.

Then I definitively cut the connection to him, very glad to be free of his influence, and collapsed emotionally and energetically.

I slumped in my chair, and when I opened my eyes, a few seconds later, Kel was watching me closely. “I’m fine,” I told her then shook my head to clear it, and took a deep steadying breath. “What is the status of the teleportation?”

Kel paused, wanting to offer me support then decided to just answer the question. “The Earth Tessinians E.⊕s had been instructed by the Supreme Leader to attend the Great Event ⊗ and were preparing to leave when we teleported



them. They are all here,” Kel answered but instead of being joyful she sound mournful.

“What is the problem then?” I stood up to scan the numbers on the screen. It looked like 5000 people had been transported to ⊕essina. I could feel the confusion of the travelers and sent a transmission of calming energy throughout the underground facility. I turned back to Kel and asked, afraid of the answer, “Where are the Sax/tons s/4s?”

“Zack says he cannot account for the fact that they are not here because he teleported a count of 1550 Sax/tons s/4s. ...Mindy, where are they?” Kel was wringing her hands.

I scanned the underground area quickly maneuvering my mind through the quarters and community areas. The Earth Tessinians E.⊕s were all there with nothing but one small piece of luggage per individual. Since they had been packing for the Great Event ⊕ when teleported, they had some of their personal treasures with them. They would give them some comfort in the next few days.

I found my family and a bittersweet feeling brought tears to my eyes. I couldn’t go and welcome them because they wouldn’t know me. I kept moving and found Emma and her parents.

But, very disappointingly, no matter where I looked, there were no Sax/tons s/4s ...anywhere.

They had to be here. I refused to believe that they weren’t. Maybe if I focused on finding Sasha I would have

better luck. I went back to scan my family's living unit. Sasha would never leave them. If she could, she would be with them.

Where could she be?

Then I found her, and knew exactly where all of the Sax/tons  $s/+s$  were!

Kel noticed my broad smile. "What is it, Miss Mindy? What do you see?"

"They ARE here, Kel!" I cried.

She looked shocked as I left the room in a rush to find Sasha.

"I have work to do!" I yelled back to her.



## **Chapter 19 - *The Sax/tons s/+s***

I raced down the network of hallways in the underground facility absolutely certain of where I was going and where my family was located. I wasn't positive where Sasha was, but I had a strong intuition about where she and the other Sax/tons s/+s were hiding.

The information in my mind that I had acquired from the Knowledge Download Stones flooded me with all of the data I needed to travel the facility easily. Accordingly, I moved down the hallways with complete knowledge of where I was going. As I ran, I touched the walls occasionally making sure all of the lights were on, and sent calming energy to everyone. Confusion seemed to be running wild down every hallway, and behind every closed door. At least, it was not escalating to panic. The calming energy was keeping everyone patiently waiting for news or orders.

"Trust me," I whispered to all of our guests as I moved swiftly among them. "Everything is going to be alright."

I was almost to my family's quarters when I ran into a man in the hallway. Slowing my walk, I greeted him with a nod as I passed by; but he stopped me with a question, which was a mark of his bravery, because chances were

he'd never before seen a person whose skin had a bluish cast to it.

"Where are we?" he asked, his tone direct with a hint of concern.

I could not deny that things were very confusing to our new guests, and although my work was tantamount to their survival, addressing this man's concerns would no doubt serve to ease the stress of the transition for many of them as it got quickly passed around from family to Family. It would be wise to utilize this opportunity for that purpose.

"You are on ⊕essina," I answered. There was no reason to add that all of them were now safe. That would imply that they had not been safe – a fact all of them were ignorant of. "Your teleportation just began a bit earlier than all of you expected. We are sorry for any inconvenience."

"Thank you for your concern. Can you tell me why we are underground – and have not been greeted with a parade and gifts as were promised to us? Where are our beautiful homes? Our Family members are concerned enough to not want to leave their quarters."

The Supreme Leader had really laid it on thick since he/Vawn never intended to follow through on his promises. If I read the situation correctly, the Earth Tessinians E.⊕s were most concerned about the things they were promised that they did not have in the moment – not their safety or where their next meal was coming from. Why would they be concerned? For those, they had always been taken care

for, they had never wanted for anything in all of their time on Earth. I could see that as we moved forward caring for the Earth Tessinians E.Ⓟs, we were going to have to work carefully with how we presented the reality of the situation to them. Creating calm and normalcy would assist in creating a template for that goal.

Accordingly, I said in as normal a tone as I could muster, “A meal will be served to you in an hour or so in your dining area, and a full explanation about what has happened will follow afterwards in the Gathering Room. There is no cause for concern. Can I trust you to pass that word on to the other members of your Family?”

“Yes, of course. I am honored to be of assistance.” He bowed his head in a quick subservient nod of respect, assuming I was someone in control – and I guess I was that person.

A thought occurred to me. Zack probably knew exactly where I was and may even be monitoring my conversation so I said out loud, “You will shortly be given something to drink and a snack.” (There was nothing like food to keep people distracted.) “In about an hour, you can all move to the dining room. There is a map in your quarters and signs in the hallway to assist you.”

That order would send Zack and the Sax/tons s/+s into action. I was sure they could get whatever supplies they had to our guests somehow. They were very smart scientists and Zack could probably even do it telepathically. I tuned

into the main control room, and everyone was scrambling to fulfill my demand. *Good!*

“Is there anything else I can do for you, Miss – “

“Mindy,” I answered.

“Miss Mindy, I am Paul White, and I am willing to assist in any way I can,” he said.

“Ah, the heart of a Guardian,” I said and the man beamed with pride at being recognized. “I am pleased to meet you. I have urgent business to attend to but honor your loyalty and generosity expressed here today.”

Then I turned and rounded the next corner before he had a chance to reply. I did seem to be growing my ability to handle people, and they were assuming I had authority. Interesting.

Two hallways later, I was at my family’s door. Rather than burst in (which I felt like doing), I steadied myself and my breathing then knocked. It was an imperative that I find out if I was right about where the Sax/tons  $s/t$ s were. I had to play out what my intuition was telling me. How I was going to do that, I was not sure. I’d have to wing it.

Bradford opened the door. “Yes?” he asked then quickly added, “Whoa!” in acknowledgment of my blue-tinged skin.

A part of me had hoped that Zack had lied about altering the timeline. Obviously he had not. Bradford did not recognize me as his sister.

“Who is it, Brad?” I heard my father ask as he appeared in the doorway with my mother behind him. “Oh!” he exclaimed, surprised by my presence. I thought he may have recognized me, but he was thinking about Aunt Tessie. As I scanned his thoughts, I could tell that he had never actually seen her appear bluish. This only happened when a Key was in the ⊕essinian atmosphere, but she had shared the information about the blue skin with him, as well as, some descriptions of ⊕essina when I was a baby before she died – or rather, before she LEFT for Tessina.

“I guess we really are on ⊕essina,” my dad marveled then recovered and said, “I’m sorry I’ve been rude. I am Phillip Barnes. How can we help you, miss?”

I looked at each one of one of them, making eye contact. None of them recognized me, and I was surprised how much that hurt. It made me feel truly alone. I wanted them to remember me. I wanted to shout, “DAD, it’s ME! MINDY! Don’t you remember me?” But I didn’t. I pushed my feelings aside and said, “Pleased to meet all of you. I am Mindy, and I’m here to ease your transition.”

I paused to see if my name triggered any recognition. Sadly, it did not so I continued speaking. I had a mission to complete. “We think there may be some contamination on your luggage – and we need to scan it on our monitor. May I collect it?”


“Of course,” my mother said, “but we have already unpacked. Do you need our belongings also? Should we be concerned?”

My mother’s eyes held none of the warmth they always had when she looked at me – just concern for her family. I was truly a stranger to her, and that reality hit me hard. I stared at her willing her to remember me – and she asked, “Are you alright, Kitten?” – and that nearly shattered my composure completely.

“Oh, I’m sorry, miss,” my mother quickly apologized. “I don’t know what came over me.”

Her words made me smile and I said, “That’s just fine. No need to apologize. I probably remind you of someone.” (Maybe the possibility was there that I could awaken her memory of me someday. The thought gave me hope!)

Mother frowned like she was trying to remember something then quickly abandoned the effort and smiled back at me, pleased I had forgiven her. It was enough for me today that I was still Kitten to her. It was difficult, but I pulled myself back to the task at hand and said, “You do not need to be concerned about your belongings. I just need to take your bags for screening. May I take them now?”

“Yes, of course,” my father answered. “Anything that serves essina.”

I gathered up the three small suitcases they had traveled with when my father said, “Do you know when we will be taken to our new home?”



It struck me how sad the families were going to be when they learned the truth. Whatever they were told, the reality of their situation was going to be hard for them all to process. They had expectations of grandeur that I was not sure we were going to be able to meet. They'd been programmed to be obedient and trusting – and now they were not going to get the Christmas presents they were promised. Who knew how that was going to turn out? You can't expect someone to be grateful for their lives when they did not believe they were in danger. They would only be disappointed, perhaps even angry, not to receive the presents they were promised.

I pulled myself away from my meandering inner thoughts, came back to the present, and answered, "I do not know exactly when you will move to your new home. What I can tell you is that dinner will be served in an hour or so in your dining area – and there will be a full explanation afterwards. You will, also, be receiving drinks and a snack."

"We already have!" Brad answered. "These cookies are awesome!" He was sitting at their kitchen table eating – something he was always very fond of doing. "They just appeared on the table. That was cool!"

I smiled. Zack had performed his magic and displayed another mad skill. Now I had some serious miracles of my own to accomplish. "Have a wonderful dinner," I said and exited with the suitcases, glad to be distancing myself from

the reality of the situation because I felt emotionally exhausted.

As I moved down the hall to the closest storage room, I felt myself getting a renewed grip on my objectivity and turned my focus back to the task at hand which was to contact the Sax/tons s/+s and assure them they were now safe. Why didn't they already know they were?

Then it suddenly occurred to me that Sasha may not know me. I was counting on her trusting me in order for this to work. Since Zack's claim that memories of me had been taken away from my family was actually true, then what if they had also affected Sasha's memory of me? If she did not know me, I would have to go to Plan B. The trouble was I didn't have one.

I opened the door to the storage area (again I knew exactly where it was), and found it almost empty. The Sax/tons s/+s of X7-18 were evidently ill-prepared to care for their guests. That would have to be remedied as soon as possible.

I set down the medium-sized three suitcases. There were two modest brown suitcases that were my parents' and a navy blue one with spaceship stickers plastered all over it. I remembered Brad putting them on when he was about 8 years old. I selected his suitcase and focused my words towards it.

"Sasha," I began, "I know the Sax/tons s/+s can change into inanimate objects for short periods of time, and my

intuition tells me you have all configured into luggage. If this is the true, it is safe for you to reveal yourself now. This is Mindy, and no one is here but me, and I am your friend. Please, please may you remember me, and may I be right about this.”

I closed my eyes in silent prayer and almost immediately felt a small hand on top of my own. My eyes flew open. Sasha was standing in front of me!

“I remember you, Mindy,” she said softly in her high pitched, little voice.

We hugged, very relieved to have found each other again.

“I knew you could do it, Mindy. You have saved the Earth Tessinians  $E.\textcircled{S}$  and the Sax/tons  $s/t\textcircled{S}$  from certain death, and gotten everyone here! Even the 50 Sax/tons  $s/t\textcircled{S}$  who lived in hiding, were able to reconfigure into luggage, and were transported by  $\textcircled{T}$ essinians who are now here! I believed in your gifts from the beginning!” Sasha exclaimed.

I answered, “Well, it was the Sax/tons  $s/t\textcircled{S}$  and Zack who got everyone here. I am glad that Zack’s work did not touch the memory of me for you.” I hugged her again, and we shared a few more tears and lots of joy. Then I asked, “Are you alright?”

“A bit cramped from holding that shape this long, but fine,” Sasha answered flexing her small fingers.

“I am so happy to see you!” and tears welled up in my eyes again. “Sasha, I’ve only known you a few days, and you are my most trusted friend.”

“Oh, Mindy, you have known me for your entire life!” she laughed a tinkling sound.

“You are right,” I said, and we laughed together in relief and joy.

Sasha turned serious, beamed with confidence in me, and said, “Now it is YOUR gifts that will create the life all of us have dreamt about.”

“I do hope that you are correct about that,” I answered humbly.

I had to admit, though, that with Sasha, who understood the needs of the Earth Tessinians  $E.\oplus_s$  and felt a deep loyalty to them, we actually may be able to save everyone! How we were going to manage such an undertaking was beyond me in this moment – but I now had faith that it just might be possible.

Sasha spoke again, “I am somewhat concerned about one thing. “ I waited for her to continue. “How do we release the other Sax/tons  $s/_+s$ ? They cannot reconfigure in the presence of the Earth Tessinians  $E.\oplus_s$  who are unaware of the Sax/tons  $s/_+s$  existence. There would be considerable fear on their part, and that is unacceptable to us. What are we to do?”

“I have an answer to that question,” I responded confidently. (My mind seemed very clear about some

things.) “Here is what I am proposing, and you tell me what you think. You need to change your appearance to an Earth Tessinian E.⊕<sub>s</sub>. Then simply gather the luggage using the same ruse I used with my family – “

“ – and as we do this, we will grow in numbers exponentially,” Sasha jumped in excitedly, “and be able to complete the task in minutes. We can do this!” Then Sasha looked concerned and said, “But then what will happen?”

“What to do?” I asked more of myself than Sasha. Then a brilliant idea struck me, but I didn’t have time to explain it in totality. “This is what we will do. After the Sax/tons  $s/t_s$  have all reconfigured into Earth Tessinian E.⊕ forms, they are to be instructed to go to their perspective dining areas, the ones associated with their Families. Then they are to send one representative to the kitchen to retrieve the Family’s food. They will, of course, need to keep their Earth Tessinian E.⊕ forms for the meal. After the meal, instruct everyone including the Sax/tons  $s/t_s$  to go the Gathering Room still maintaining their Earth Tessinian E.⊕ form where I will address everyone. There are maps in all of the hallways to assist all of you in finding your way around. Is that clear?”

“Yes, Miss Mindy. It is clear. One of us will report to the kitchen from each Family for food, then we will all report to the Gathering Room after the meal. I will make sure all of

the Sax/tons s/+s in Earth Tessinian E.⊕ form do this for their Families.” Sasha answered beaming to be of service.

I hugged her then moved towards the door. “There is much to be done before that time so I leave you to your mission. Everything will work out just fine.” (I hoped I was right about that.)

“I am at your service and have complete faith in you, Mindy.” Sasha said in parting.

“Thank you, Sasha,” I said truly grateful to have found her.

Then I left the storage room. My next project was going to take my full concentration: Feeding 5,000 Earth Tessinians E.⊕s.



## Chapter 20 - A New Home

As I reflect back on how these early times unfolded, I am amazed at how easily I embraced my responsibilities.

Of course, the lessons of the Key were flooding my system, but it was more about my own natural abilities being kick-started into utilization. I was becoming the best possible version of me. (I know this sounds confusing, but I promise to explain it all to you.)

So many things were configuring around me, then. Some of them good, some of them bad, but they were all indistinguishable from each other.

Back to my story and work at X7-18...

It wasn't necessary for me to concern myself with feeding the 1,550 Sax/tons who Sasha had described as social scientists and the 10 Sax/tons  $s/4s$  that ran X7-18. In their natural form on  $\oplus$ essina, they only drank a small amount of fluid once a day, and this fluid they made themselves from some sort of plant root that was abundant

on  $\oplus$ essina and directly related to clover on Earth. This had meant that it had been easy for the Sax/tons  $\text{S}/\text{T}$ s to stay fortified on Earth.

Accordingly, their nutritional needs did not need to be added to my list of responsibilities. I could see that their needs were minimal and that their fellow Sax/tons  $\text{S}/\text{T}$ s could easily provide for them. I also noted that they preferred to sleep close together in a small space, and the Sax/ton  $\text{S}/\text{T}$  scientists already had the dormitory-style living quarters constructed which would perfectly meet their needs. It occurred to me how lonely it would have been for each of them living alone as house pets. It was another example of the depth of their self-sacrifice in their name of monitoring and protecting the Earth Tessinians  $\text{E.}\oplus\text{s}$  – who seemed comparatively incapable of monitoring their own well-being.

While the Sax/tons  $\text{S}/\text{T}$ s and the 5 Native Tessinians  $\text{N.}\oplus\text{s}$  appeared to be self-sufficient on many levels, the 5,000 Earth Tessinians  $\text{E.}\oplus\text{s}$  were not; and, it was an imperative that their needs be addressed.

On the move now, I followed the hallways making a number of short turns. I was searching for a member of Family 703X, and they were all in the same section. I needed to find my friend Emma. Emma's Wonder was easily going to feed everyone!



The details were falling into place for me. There were 20 dining rooms, each equipped to feed 250 T<sup>⊕</sup>essinians (which was about the number of members in each Family). If Emma made 20 Wonders, all of the Tessinians could be fed indefinitely – or until I figured out how we were going to get them to the surface, and teach them to be self-sufficient. (Of course, one of Emma’s Wonder could feed everyone, but the logistics of having 5,000 people line up to be served, one at a time, was not a workable option.)

The Earth Tessinians E.T<sup>⊕</sup>s were generations deep in learned dependency on others. The expectation of being provided for was ingrained in their behaviors. In most recent times, food appeared in their refrigerators, cars in their garages, and occasional surprise gifts like bicycles or candy for the children. The Earth Tessinians E.T<sup>⊕</sup>s were long past expressing simple gratitude – if they ever had. They were literally bathing in expectation.

As a child, I’d been the recipient of many gifts that I now realize were not from my parents, my tie-dyed t-shirt being the most recent anonymous gift I received. My mother had thought nothing about a gift just appearing on our doorstep. I even wondered if my father ever had a job. What exactly had he done all day on Earth? I couldn’t remember if I ever knew, but then the details of my life on Earth seemed to be blurring and slipping away.

But underneath all of this, they were kind decent people who had been made dependent and had lost their

way. They had no living memory of self-sufficiency or individualism. My intention was to patiently begin to teach them to be independent – and learn to be proud of a job well done. (How I understood this, I did not know.)

Since the Earth Tessinians E.⊕s were painfully innocent about their plight, the first step would be to use their need to be obedient to ASSIST them in the transition to their new life. Even though they did not know they were in danger, I would have to find a way to inspire them to be a bit more discerning than they were. When the time was right, they would all have to grow beyond their Vawn-imposed naivety; but, that would not be happening in the near future. Not that I could foresee.

The best way I could begin to grow their awareness was to inspire them to serve and protect each OTHER'S well-being as they did in their own families. This would have to be the approach I took with Emma.

I stopped in front of Emma's family's door. Since she was probably not going to recognize me, I'd have to approach her carefully, using her need to be obedient and loyal.

I knocked on the door to the Hansen's living quarters, and Emma opened the door. She was about to address me formally then stared at me in confusion her eyes wide with her response to me. I was unsure if she was responding to my bluish appearance or to me, Mindy, her friend. Then her father and mother came into the doorway. Mrs.

Hansen gasped at my appearance then rallied and smiled so as not to be judged as being rude while Mr. Hansen immediately recognized me as safe to his family regardless of my appearance, and asked anxiously, “What is it? Is something wrong?”

“There is nothing wrong,” I assured the three of them. “But I need to talk with Emma privately – if that is alright with you?”

“Of course, anything for Tessina. Go Emma, you are needed.” Her father pushed her out the door towards me in complete trust.

In the hallway, she looked at me and blinked a few times, and I thought it was in recognition; but, she said nothing. I took her arm and led her away from the door. As soon as we’d distanced ourselves a few feet from the closed door, Emma stopped and said, “I know you, don’t I?”

My heart almost skipped a beat. Maybe Zack’s influence did not go very far beyond my own family. It was hard not to say anything, but I managed to continue walking down the hall towards the Family’s kitchen. One glance told me that a group of Sax/tons s/+s posing as Earth Tessinians E.⊕s were hard at work pulling out dishes and silverware in preparation for a meal. I smiled. They excelled at anticipating the needs of those they served.

Emma and I turned into the game room next door, and sat down. “We do know each other, Emma,” I said closing the door behind us.

She stared at me, studying my features. “I can almost place your face. I have memories of you, I think.” She shook her head as if it would clear her mind and her blonde curls shifted across her shoulders.

“I’m Mindy,” I told her thinking back to the days we’d shared together. Although there were only a few days to remember, they felt significant to me, and I couldn’t help but smile with the memory.

Emma’s hand flew to her mouth as if to smother her emotional response. I noticed her purple nail polish. It reminded me of the day we’d polished our nails together. My nail polish was gone. She’d redone hers. I had nothing to prove our friendship.

“Mindy!” she exclaimed. “I remember you! But how can that be? We shared so much and were so close. Oh, I’m not sure what I know. What happened?”

“Zack happened,” I said quietly on a sigh.

“Zack Smith from our history class?” Emma asked suddenly concerned.

“Yes, but forget about him,” I answered, not realizing I had mentioned his name out loud and quickly changed the subject. “I am delighted you remember me – or, at least, you are starting to remember me. I promise we will have

time to reconnect, but right now I need you to perform a very special service for the Earth Tessinians E.Ⓢ.”

I knew that I didn’t have to do much more than play on her need to be of service. I wanted to align in friendship, but that would have to come after we’d resolved our immediate problems underground.

“Me?” she asked, her eyes wide with surprise. “What could I possibly do to serve the Earth Tessinians?”

“Make 20 different batches of Emma’s Wonder.”

“You know about it? Yes, I remember now that you do. You were the one who told me to tell no one about it.” Then more reflectively she said, “We were good friends, weren’t we?” She seemed to be gradually waking up to our friendship.

“Yes, we were – and I hope we still will be.” (Thank goodness Zack’s reach did not extend with great strength beyond my family.)

I continued, “Emma, I need you to make 20 batches of your Wonder to feed the 5,000 Earth Tessinians E.Ⓢ. There will be one in each of the dining areas. Can you do it?”

“Of course, I can.” She was completely focused on her assignment.

“What ingredients do you need to make them?” I asked.


“Well, it’s not really the ingredients. It’s what I do to them after I stir them together. Should I keep that a secret?”

“Of course! Don’t even tell ME,” I laughed.

“I don’t know why, but I’d tell you in a second,” she confessed seriously.

“Don’t you dare!” I said, and we both laughed. It was nice to share this easy camaraderie. Maybe the future did hold a chance for us to reconnect; but there wasn’t time now. The food had to be prepared as soon as possible. “What do you need to get started on your 20 Wonders?” I asked.

“If I could be provided with, let’s see, flour and water then I can make the Wonders,” Emma answered.

I scanned the supplies available and realized there was no wheat flour, but there was flour made from a type of grain native to  Tessina called Marell – and there was not much of that either.

“I can easily provide you with 10 pounds of a flour called Marell and water. But if you need wheat flour that can be arranged.” (Zack would have to manifest it.)

“Mindy,” Emma whispered, “I think I can make the Wonders from anything. After all, I have made them from crayons and balloons. Remember?”

“Yes, I do!” It was a good feeling to know she was waking up to our friendship. “Your gift is amazing, and your willingness to serve is going to save a lot of people, Emma,”

I told her expressing the sincerity and gratitude I felt in my words.

Instead of responding with humility, Emma asked, her blue eyes wide with concern, “How can there not be food for us, Mindy? We were promised – “

“I know. Everyone was promised things, but you all had to be transported before everything was ready.” I redirected her inquiry asking, “Are your temporary living quarters satisfactory?”

“Yes, of course!”

I felt her latch onto the word ‘temporary’ as was my intention. There was no point in dashing the dreams of anyone on Tessina regardless of how improbable they seemed in the moment. “Let me show you to the kitchen.” I said. “All of your staff is there to help you. Tell them what you need them to do, and they will do it. You can trust them with your life.” (That was truer than she could even imagine.) “They will deliver 19 Wonders to the other dining rooms, and you will keep one for Family 703X. Is that okay with you?”

“Of course, I am pleased to be of service,” Emma answered.

“Thank you again for your willingness to assist everyone with your talent. Come, I will introduce you to your kitchen staff, and you can begin.”

After that, we walked a short distance and entered the kitchen area. One of the Earth Tessinians E.⊕s was Sasha,

and I put her in charge of distribution with a smile of appreciation. I reminded her that when the 20 Wonders were completed and delivered, all of the Sax/tons  $\mathbb{S}/\mathbb{T}$  should overview the meals in the dining rooms with their own Families.

After the meals were eaten, each family should be instructed about the clean-up procedure. Sasha protested, claiming that the Sax/tons  $\mathbb{S}/\mathbb{T}$  were fully capable of taking care of the clean-up, but I told her that lessons in self-responsibility were going to be a big part of all of their lives on  $\mathbb{T}$ essina. When she looked concerned, I reassured her that her services would always be needed, and she brightened again.

After dinner and the clean-up were completed, which I assumed would take an hour or so, she was to instruct everyone to move to the Gathering Room. She should not be concerned if some of them were already informed about the meeting since I had shared the information with Paul White earlier.

I informed her again that all of the Sax/tons  $\mathbb{S}/\mathbb{T}$  were expected to come to the Gathering Room disguised as Earth Tessinians  $\mathbb{E}.\mathbb{T}$ ; and, even though I felt her discomfort with attending as an equal to the others in the room, she nodded her acknowledgment, and assured me that my message would be communicated to the Sax/tons  $\mathbb{S}/\mathbb{T}$ . I turned to leave knowing everything on Sasha's end was in order.



As I headed back to the central control room, I allowed my mind to scan the situation for any important details not yet considered.

I saw that all of the Earth Tessinian E.⊕ couples had, at least, one child; and there were 53 pregnant women. That brought up another concern: medical care. Surprisingly, none of the Earth Tessinians E.⊕s were sick nor did they have any chronic health issues. *Interesting*. There were no doctors among them so I suspected a number of possibilities could be true. Some of which were: the Earth Tessinians E.⊕s never got sick, the occupation of doctor exceeded their intellect, or the position was one of authority which would imply self-sufficiency. All were reasons that Vawn would have used to restrict or manipulate their choices.

My mind flashed to a theory one Sax/ton s/+ scientist, Dr. Olz, had presented that I learned about from the Knowledge Download Stones. It stated that not a single one of the Earth Tessinians E.⊕s died from the Plague in the Earth's mid 1300's. Even though ⊕essinian history texts indicated that 50,000 people died, this research stated that they could not have died of the Plague because they were not susceptible to it and were, in fact, eliminated during the time of the Plague so as not to create suspicion or draw attention to them as a single population. The scientific paper further hypothesized that Vawn

wanted those 50,000 people eliminated for his own unknown reasons, and the Plague was a convenient ruse.

The more I awakened to the implications behind Vawn's actions, the sicker I felt at heart; but, I had more immediate concerns. He would be dealt with, though. That I knew for sure.

Back to medical needs: Even if the Earth Tessinians E.⊕s did not get sick, there were accidents (like my broken leg) and childbirths that had the potential to get complicated. A quick scan told me that any medical needs would have to be addressed by the Sax/ton s/t doctor called Dr. Jex. From what I could tell, he was well-versed in Earth Tessinian E.⊕ physiology and disposition. He also appeared willing to take on students. (I'd have to make sure my mother became a part of his team. I thought about how quickly and easily she'd healed my broken leg as a child. She may even be able to teach him a few things!) Dr. Jex had been one of the initial 10 scientists I'd met, but had not yet conversed with personally. That would change in the near future as we put our new community together.

Then I felt Zack invading my thoughts and following me on his mind screen. *"Leave me alone,"* I told him telepathically.

*"Just waiting for my next orders,"* he answered easily.

*“We have to review what we know so I can figure out what to tell our guests. I’ll be there very soon. Be ready to answer questions.”*

I saw Zack salute me on my mind screen. Then he added, *“Yes, Miss Mindy. We will be ready for you, oh, fearless leader.”*

I was thinking about how delightful it would be to strangle him, and he had the gall to laugh.

Seconds later I entered the central control room, and all heads turned towards me – Zack and the 10 Sax/ton s/t scientists. (Well, maybe, not Zack. The jury was still out on that one.)

It struck me that these were my companions in my new life, and that gave me some comfort. These were intelligent and caring individuals. We were, though, the only ones who knew the truth about what had occurred in the past two days, and it was our combined knowledge that was going to rectify this situation; but, we needed each other to make it happen.

(If I could resolve my distrust of Zack, the arrangement would be perfect. The Sax/tons s/t had complete faith in him, but he had not pretended to kill any of them. That experience might taint their opinion.)

Although, we’d accomplished great things so far today as a team, we could not stray from the task at hand. We could not rest, yet. There was one more phase of this plan

that had to be completed. Even if we didn't know exactly how we were going to do it, we were going to care for the Earth Tessinians E.⊕s, and we needed all of our skills combined and operating at optimal levels to do it.

Zack handed me a drink and a sandwich, and I was distracted from my inner reverie. The food was a thoughtful gesture on Zack's part, but it was going to take three lifetimes to cancel out the lies he'd told. Accordingly, I ate hungrily and did not thank him.

Feeling more fortified, I allowed my focus to shift to our next, most immediate task – informing the Earth Tessinians E.⊕s about what was happening in the most supportive way possible. As to what the future was going to bring or specifically what kind of future awaited all of us – that was very much undecided.

The Earth Tessinians E.⊕s would have to be moved to the surface at some point. I knew it was a warm, temperate climate very suitable for all of us. There were more days of rain than sun, but that kept the ground moist and the rolling hills covered in large leafy plants and flowers. It was a beautiful place haunted by the orchestrations of Vawn's 1,000 year rule.

1,000 years. Wow. I knew from the Sax/ton's s/4's library of knowledge that he'd ruled for 1,000 years on ⊕essina. It was almost impossible for me to believe that he had lived that long – and nobody actually knew how

many years he'd worked to grow his communities before he officially became their self-designated Supreme Leader.

Even more daunting to realize was that he'd been perfecting whatever horrific plan he had concocted for all of that time. The implications were inconceivable. He had to be very powerful and twisted by now.

Vawn's goal seemed to be to keep everyone subservient – but there had to be more to it. If every life he touched had been made dependent on him by design then why had he created the Keys in the first place? Weren't we a threat to his dominance? What roles did the Keys play on the shadow side of  $\oplus$ essina where Vawn lived according to the Knowledge Download Stones? Were the Keys even there? Maybe all of them had met the same fate as Aunt Tessie.

No one could live independently under Vawn's rule, and everyone rescued deserved to live freely. I knew, with every fiber of my being, that he had to be stopped or eliminated completely for the rest of the population to thrive. He'd already had 1,000 years to do as he pleased. His reign was coming to an end. I was going to see to it.

Although I'd been able to absorb what the Sax/tons  $\frac{s}{t-s}$  knew about Vawn and what they called the shadow side of  $\oplus$ essina, they did not seem to know much. Their information fell short of explaining anything substantial about the shadow side of the planet, and of indicating the full range of Vawn's skills and intentions. These would have

to be known to take him down. He had to have, at least, one weakness.

Zack had to answer some serious questions in the near future about Vawn because he seemed to be able to keep that information safely hidden from my attempts to read it. Quite understandably, I found it hard to trust Zack, but the Sax/tons  $s/+s$  had worked with him for many years and seemed to trust him implicitly. That was confusing. They were innocent themselves in many ways, but they were intelligent and had maintained their ability to think independently. They had been programmed to serve, but because they needed their intelligence to serve well and to stay safe, they'd retained those traits while the Earth Tessianians  $E.\textcircled{S}$  were programmed to be obedient and were quite incapable of managing their own lives.

There were many difficult problems I'd have to resolve at another time, Zack's knowledge being very important to a meaningful resolution; but, today I didn't need to know all of the answers. I just needed to know how to reassure the Earth Tessianians  $E.\textcircled{S}$  about their future.

I'd been lost in my thoughts, and became conscious of the fact that Zack and the 10 Sax/ton  $s/+s$  scientists had been watching me closely. I took a deep breath and came fully back to the room. Zack would have been able to know exactly what I was thinking.

“Any suggestions, Zack, about our impending challenges?” I asked pointedly.

“No, not at this time,” he answered, avoiding eye contact with me while idly straightening papers on the large table in front of us.

“Great. Thanks,” I answered openly annoyed at his monitoring my thoughts and his evasion of my question.

Zack responded verbally with what sounded like honesty saying, “What I know, Mindy, will help us later with Vawn. Not here. You are the one who has the leadership skills and the knowledge to resolve our immediate concerns.”

He sounded serious. There was no sarcasm in his voice. No intent to avoid or deceive. *Interesting*. But I still felt I had to watch him closely.

“Can we assume that Vawn is distracted or otherwise engaged and not aware of what has happened to his Earth Tessinians E.⊕s?” I asked him.

“No, we cannot assume that,” Zack answered shaking his head. “Chances are he is very angry and in search of me at this very moment.”

“Great. Just great,” I answered.

“I will let you know if there is any change and exactly what it is,” he responded finally looking me in the eye.

*“You had better be telling me the truth because I’m watching you, and there will be hell to pay if you lie to me*

*again,”* I answered telepathically, and he looked away to hide his smile. Damn. This was not amusing on any level.

*“Mindy, the situation is dire, but I take pleasure in observing the person you are.”*

*“Stop talking to me.”*

*“Got it.”*

If the Sax/tons  $s/4s$  were aware of our telepathic communication, they stayed respectfully out of our interaction.

I turned my focus back to the state of affairs in the underground facility. No point in dealing with Zack now. There was serious work to be done. Nearly all of the Earth Tessianians E.Ⓢ were now in the Gathering Room save a few stragglers. Emma’s Wonders had gone over very well. Everyone was raving about how delicious their meal had been. It was almost time to address them, but a few questions had to be answered first.

“Professor Lam, what do you think is the greatest concern we should address in regards to our new guests?” I asked.

He thought for a few seconds then said, “They are unaware of their predicament and are focused on the promises made to them.”

“Rather like spoiled children,” I commented with sadness more to myself than to the others, then added,



“They are going to be unhappy if those promises are not fulfilled.”

“We would not label them ‘spoiled children.’ They are our concern, and we love them dearly. That being said, I think there is a great probability that they will be quite petulant if they realize the truth of the situation,” Professor Lam responded tactfully – and his fellow scientists nodded in agreement.

I took a few seconds to consider his comments. 5,000 petulant children was a daunting probability. Then I asked the others, “Are there any additional thoughts, any one of you has, in regards to the needs of our guests?”

“They do want to be served – and the Sax/tons  $s/4s$  are willing to serve them,” Kel said.

“Yes, that is also true – and must be considered. Thank you, Kel.” I paused as I contemplated the situation then asked, “Is there any way, at any time in the future, that we can provide them with housing on the surface?” I asked the group.

“Anything is possible,” Zack answered. “Housing on the surface for another 5,000 people could be accomplished.”

“How long would it take?” I asked.

“It can’t be done ...unless Vawn is eliminated,” Zack added and the Sax/tons  $s/4s$  murmured their agreement.

“Of course,” I sighed. “Alright, I’m ready. I’d like you all to go with me to the Gathering Room. You will be introduced as the Earth Tessianian E.⊕ leaders.”

“Mindy, how can that be done?” Professor Lam asked. “The Earth Tessinians E.Ⓟs have never seen a Sax/ton s/+ in its true form.”

“That’s about to change,” I answered definitively. “Let’s go. Our guests are waiting for us.”

We traveled the hallways, walking and thinking aligned like a small army. This was the beginning of the world we were going to build together. This was our first appearance as the new leaders of the Earth Tessinians E.Ⓟs. The future loomed before us as a blank slate. I knew what had to be done. I knew what they had to know. There was one problem: Vawn – and he would be dealt with very soon. That, I was also sure of.

We turned a corner and were at the door to the Gathering Room. I observed the room and the situation from the doorway while the others stood quietly behind me. It was quite an impressive room. The floor gradually sloped downward to a stage area on the far wall. The sides were lined with thousands of bleacher-type seats. The aisles were wide, as was the walkway that rimmed the entire top level of the room – which was the level of X7-18’s extensive complex of rooms.

Blue light filtered down from the ceiling that was slightly brighter than the blue tone of a full moon on Earth. There was a blur of sounds that included conversation and nervous laughter.


Most impressive wasn't the arena though, but the massive sea of Earth Tessinians E.⊕s that filled the thousands of seats. Even though they were programmed to trust orders given to them without question, they were uncertain about what was happening to themselves and their families. Anticipation was new to them – as was the anxiety some of them were feeling.

As I scanned the room, I noticed that all of the Sax/tons s/⊕s were in their disguised forms towards the back of the arena. Huddled together in the back rows, they were struggling with uncertainty for different reasons. How would they be able to serve the families they loved so dearly? What was going to become of them? Were they destined to be pets even on their home planet? All of them had grown up on ⊕essina then volunteered to be transported to Earth for service. It was all they knew in their almost 900 years of life. What was going to happen now?

There was so much life to manage. I didn't dare think about what could go wrong only what had to be done for all of them. Failure was not an option I would entertain – not even for a second.

It was time to lead, and I stepped onto the ramp that led to the stage. Zack and the Sax/ton s/⊕ scientists knew I had to do this part alone, and they remained in the doorway as I descended. Heads turned in my direction as

the Sax/tons <sup>s/+s</sup> at the back of the arena first became aware of my presence. Each of them nodded their respect to me as I passed them. Then a hush fell over the room as I descended down towards the stage.

I knew I was walking into my role as a leader. I was no longer a young girl without much experience, and no longer angrily and impatiently thrashing through life demanding answers. I had become a young leader who was making meaningful decisions way beyond what I would have been able to a few short months ago. With the information from the Knowledge Download Stones, I had the information I needed to be the wise, compassionate leader I was destined to be in this underground facility on  Tessina.

There was work to be done, more information to be collected and analyzed, and Vawn to be dealt with before we moved to the surface – but everything would be accomplished because I would have it no other way.

I knew I was light years from Earth and that same distance away from the Mindy Tessina Barnes born there. No turning back, ever. I was walking towards my destiny with strength I had no idea I possessed actually that seemed natural to me now. Somebody had to resolve this horrific situation, and I was about to begin doing it.

When I finally traversed the arena and stepped onto the stage, the room was completely silent in anticipation. I

began my first speech, and all heads turned towards me in rapt attention.

“Welcome to Tessina!” I began throwing my hands up over my head in celebration.

A loud cheer rose up from the group and filled the space with an audible expression of the joy and anticipation they all felt. I allowed it to have its full voice then raised my hand, and the sound dropped away and trickled back down to silence in a few seconds.

I continued, “I am Mindy, and I am dedicated to making your life here the perfect experience you have been promised.”

The cheers rose to a crescendo once again. I started to think ‘you don’t even know me, then I just allowed their appreciation to wash through me. They needed to believe in a strong leader – and I was going to be that for them.





## Chapter 21 - Vawn

I continued my speech to the arena filled with 6,550 beings – 5,000 Earth Tessinians E.⊕s, 1,545 Sax/tons s/+s disguised as Earth Tessinians E.⊕s, and 5 Native Tessinians N.⊕s (who we very similar to the Earth Tessinians E.⊕s only taller and their skin pinker.) I read a mixture of joy, anticipation, and also some serious concerns about the future.

“My apologizes for the suddenness of your departure from Earth, but the storms between the Earth and ⊕essina, which can last for years, necessitated the timing of your trip. To wait would have meant you may never have been able to return.”

“*What an excellent, believable explanation!*” Zack said to me telepathically.

I ignored him and continued.

“Your safety, comfort and happiness have consumed my thoughts and those of the 11 others who make up the leaders of this underground facility. You will be introduced to all of us, and many of your questions will be answered. In addition. And I think this will please all of you: Each family has been assigned 1 or 2 servants depending on your

specific family's needs. Servants will report to you daily and attend to your everyday needs then return to their quarters."

A murmur of approval rippled around the arena. They had been promised a very good life, and servants were a part of that promise. Accordingly, this pleased them and assuaged some of their anxiety.

"But before all of you meet the special Tessinian natives who will serve you, I'd like to give you more information about your new home and what you can expect in the future."

There was not a single other sound in the arena except my voice. Everyone was listening to my words as if I was sharing the secrets of the universe.

*"They already trust you implicitly. Amazing,"* Zack commented.

I ignored him again. His commentary or support to do what had to be done was not needed. It was lonely out here, and it would be nice to accept support, but I could not afford to trust him – even if I did feel drawn to him. No, I was not even going to think about him.

I pulled my focus back to the room and continued, "⊕essina is a beautiful place. It is a land of rolling hills, green leafy vegetation and flowers of an infinite variety and color. Although ⊕essina is smaller than Earth, I am sure it



will meet your needs. There are a number of large cities, hundreds of small villages, and many small communities.”

I could feel their excitement growing for a place I’d never seen but was selling them on from information garnered from the Knowledge Download Stones.

“Since you have arrived earlier than anticipated, your housing on the surface is not complete, but it will be. In a few days, I will be sharing more specifics about your move. Please spend the time until then getting to know each other. Take walks in your Family area and throughout the entire underground facility. This is your temporary home, and it has a number of features designed to meet your needs. There are game and craft rooms, areas for you to appreciate art and music, and exercise gyms in each Family section; but, the layouts and designs are slightly different – so visit each other. Ask your servants how to get to these places or have them take you there. It would be their pleasure to assist you. Even the dining rooms are all different from each other which will make sharing meals very enjoyable for you. By the way, how was your dinner? Shout out your answers.”

A chorus of excited voices shouted words like, “Excellent! Delicious! Superior!”

I smiled at their enthusiasm then continued. “It was one of your own who used her skills to masterfully create your food. Emma Hansen, please stand up and be recognized for

your fine work and service to your fellow Earth Tessinians E.⊕s.”

Emma stood up slowly, and everyone burst into applause. She was embarrassed but waved to me in gratitude for the recognition.

I caught the eye of my father watching me with rapt attention. It would have been nice to think he was proud of me, but I knew he was thinking about how wonderful ⊕essina was going to be for his family – which did not include me at all.

Then Paul White boldly stood and asked, “May I address you, Miss Mindy?”

“Of course, Mr. White, What is your question?”

He smiled, pleased that I remembered him, then asked with concern, “Some of us are wondering what has become of our pets. Do you know where they are?”

“That’s a very good question,” I answered, reading that the gross majority of the Earth Tessinians E.⊕s were more concerned about their own needs than the whereabouts of their pets. “Trust me when I tell you they are being well taken care of.”

*Great answer! You are superior at this leadership thing!* Zack said telepathically, but I ignored him.

I addressed the room. “Are there any other questions before I continue?”

My father stood and said, “We trust you completely, Miss Mindy!”

As the crowd murmured “yes” and began to applaud, all I registered was my father’s complete disconnect from me as his daughter, and felt empty. But as the applause subsided, I rallied, cloaking my emotions, and continued because I had to.

“Thank you for your question and sharing your concerns, Mr. White; and, thank you to all of you for your understanding and support.”

The applause started again, but I put up a hand, and it immediately stopped.

“I have one more important announcement. ...You have come to a rich and magical land where the  $\oplus$ essinians are served by very special, loyal and compassionate beings called the Sax/tons  $\frac{s}{t}s$ . You have all adapted to my appearance, and there are more like me here on the surface. Underground, myself and Zack are the only  $\oplus$ essinians. While we are slightly different from all of you, the Sax/tons  $\frac{s}{t}s$  are very different in appearance. There are 10 members of your leadership team who are Sax/ton  $\frac{s}{t}$  scientists. Please, welcome Zack and the 10 Sax/tons  $\frac{s}{t}s$  – your brilliant dedicated leaders who have worked tirelessly to bring you here, who created this underground complex for you, and who are working hard to create your new life!”

I gestured towards the doorway where Zack and the Sax/ton  $s/t$  scientists (who understood their cue) were now entering the arena. Heads turned and stared at the small, dark, thin Sax/tons  $s/t$  in their long cranberry-colored robes. Then the Earth Tessinians  $E.\text{\textcircled{S}}$  closet to their entry point (who were disguised Sax/tons  $s/t$ ) began to applaud, and the gesture was picked up and quickly rippled around the arena.

They all came onto the stage and lined up facing the audience, and as I announced their names the applause continued. I allowed their enthusiasm to express itself then motioned for quiet.

“As I mentioned earlier, you have all been assigned servants. They are Sax/tons  $s/t$  who have watched over you for years, and when you meet them I am sure you will feel a connection to them. Your Sax/tons  $s/t$  will come to greet you at your quarters after we conclude here. As I said, they do know who you are.”

The Earth Tessinians  $E.\text{\textcircled{S}}$  would not question details about my comments. They were all focused on the idea of getting their own servants as promised by their Supreme Leader. And, I felt the approval of the Sax/tons  $s/t$  for my resolution of the problem. This was a way for them to continue to serve their families and live their true identities. I could telepathically hear the Sax/tons'  $s/t$ ' small voices

ringing in my head saying *“Thank you, Miss Mindy! Thank you, Miss Mindy! Thank you, Miss Mindy!”*

I smiled and nodded in recognition of their gratitude. Obviously, they were quite capable of telepathic communication and could probably hear Zack and I conversing very well when we conversed telepathically. For their part, the Earth Tessinians E.⊕s did as they were told, and were thrilled to have the servant or servants they were promised regardless of their appearance.

I continued, “We now conclude our first meeting together. You will have opportunity to ask questions in our next gathering. Your servants are your source of all information for the next few days. Anything you need or any questions you have, please direct to them. Your leaders will be very busy with the plans for your future and unavailable to you until we meet again. It has been a long day for all of us. Tomorrow you begin your routines in your new life. Please enjoy being our guests here in your temporary home. There is much to be done, but you have arrived – and all is well now. Welcome to ⊕essina!” I concluded with my hands waving in celebration over my head.

The room burst into cheers, whistles and applause.

*“Brilliant!”* Zack said from behind me on the stage, and I ignored him.

It had been a very long day, and without the benefit of the sun or the moon to trigger my biorhythms, I was feeling exhausted and out of sync with what would have been my normal routines. All I wanted was some decent sleep, but I continued to smile and greet the Earth Tessinians E.⊕s.

Much later, it was Kel who showed me to my room. She did not speak as we walked, allowing me to be with my own thoughts. Then she opened my bedroom door and disappeared before I could say goodnight.

The room looked like it was constructed to honor a dignitary of some sort. The main room was about 20 feet x 20 feet. There was a large 'L' shaped sofa with a low table in front of it, a chair with its own end table, a table with four chairs, and a number of bookcases fully stocked with a library of titles that I looked forward to browsing through.

I passed through the first room and entered a second which was a bedroom that looked like it had been thoughtfully decorated with me in mind. The quilt on the bed looked like it had been handmade. It had a sky blue background with a number of Earth birds, clouds and a rainbow embroidered into it. The double bed mattress was thick and comfortable when I sat on it. There were two hand-woven rugs on the floor that matched the quilt, and there were even mock windows with closed curtains on them. The large bathroom had pink towels hanging on the

wall hooks and my tie-dyed t-shirt was folded over the chair in the corner. In a word, the room itself was a sweet gesture obviously created to make me comfortable.

I crawled into bed and had hardly closed my eyes when I became conscious of light filtering in through the curtained windows. My first thought was that it was the morning sun. My second thought bolted me out of bed to pull back the curtains. Was there really light coming in the windows? To my dismay, the answer was, no. The Sax/tons  $\frac{5}{45}$  had put timed lights behind the curtains to mimic the rising sun on Earth. Again, how thoughtful of them. I was sure the light indicated it was morning, since I felt rested, so I showered and dressed in the clothes in my dresser – jeans, another tie-dyed t-shirt, and a gray hoodie. All of the clothing fit perfectly, and I felt ready for whatever this next day was going to bring me.

What day of the week was it, anyway? Did it matter? Time was measured in 6 day cycles on Tessina. That would take a bit of getting used to – as would my accelerated growth.

I truly felt another year older since I'd arrived. Emotionally and intellectually, I felt completely different. Amazing, but what was. No time for that direction of thinking. There was work to be done.

I went to brush my hair and realized there were no mirrors – as was the case in the small bedroom and bathroom Zack and I had shared eons ago. (Or was that

yesterday?) Was it true that Vawn could find people through mirrors and the lack of one was a necessary precaution? Or was the fear of mirrors yet another manipulation by Vawn?

I scanned my mind for what the Sax/tons s/+s knew about Vawn and mirrors, and I found the answer. Yes, they did believe he could connect to people through mirrors. It wasn't the actual mirror itself that was the concern, but the duplication of any energy that alerted Vawn to where a person was and made it easier for him to communicate with or find that person.

There was a soft rap on the door of the suite, and I opened the door to find Zack standing there looking refreshed and smiling in his typical charming way I'd come to distrust along with everything else he did.

"Oh, it's you," I said trying my best to sound annoyed. "What do you want?"

Zack ignored my mock displeasure with his appearance and said, "You were unbelievably fantastic last night, Mindy! They loved you, and are feeling hopeful about their future on Tessina this morning. Excellent work! The servant thing went over very well also. Everyone is singing praises for Miss Mindy!" He gave me an exuberant hug which I did not respond to, and added, "You can't be angry with me forever."



“Yes, I can,” I said still holding the door, and purposefully, not inviting him inside.

He easily moved past me into my living area then turned to face me saying, “In my defense, I only did what had to be done to save you. You’d be dead right now if I had not volunteered to take care of you myself. Vawn was concerned that you might become too powerful. If that had been observed, he would have eliminated you in an instant. I convinced him that he needed to know exactly what you were capable of, and that is why you are still alive.”

“That doesn’t make any sense. Why does Vawn care about me? Aside from being his daughter – which doesn’t sound exactly right to me – “

“You are a Key, and all Keys are Vawn’s pet projects.”

“A pet project? I don’t like that either. What does it mean?”

“He created the Keys with very special care and attention to details.”

“Why?”

“I’m not sure. He hides that information very well. He plays with the Earth Tessinians E.⊕<sub>5</sub>, but the Keys are all he has truly lived for. As I told you, from what I can deduce, the Keys are his daughters – and you are the one he is especially fond of and, at the same time, afraid of.”

“All of this information – hell, this whole situation just creeps me out!” I responded moodily.

“Hey, your suite is very nice!” Zack changed the subject. “Lots of space and, oh, look at the library of books. These are some amazing, antique artifacts.” He picked up one of the books and thumbed through one. “Wow... a real book.”

“Put that back,” I reprimanded him. “You have to answer some questions.”

He replaced the book and said, “You are the messiah here, you know. The Sax/tons  $\mathbb{S}/\mathbb{T}\mathbb{S}$  have been waiting for you. You look like a messiah.” He turned and looked at me with his head tilted to one side as if getting a good angle on my appearance and added, “You do look like a messiah, you know.”

“That’s ridiculous. There is no specific look to a messiah, and I am no one’s savior.”

“I beg to differ with you.”

“What a surprise. Where do we get something to eat? I’m starved, and you are trying my patience.”

“That is why I am here – to bring you to breakfast. After that, I am going to share my plan with you – at least, what I have come up with so far.”

“What plan?” I asked.

Zack took my elbow and pulled me out the door and closed it. “We have rescued the Earth Tessinians  $\mathbb{E}.\mathbb{T}\mathbb{S}$  and the Sax/tons  $\mathbb{S}/\mathbb{T}\mathbb{S}$ , and now we move on to Part 2 of my plan – to deal with Vawn,” he said. “He is waiting for me. Now that the dogs are dead, and my bogus experiment has

effectively been terminated by Vawn, I should be home reporting to him.”

We walked in silence. My head was already spinning with unanswered questions, but I needed some food to regroup my thought processes. I tried to fight my fogginess but couldn’t.

I didn’t remember entering a kitchen area or even sitting down; but, then suddenly a plate of fried eggs, hash browns, and blueberry pancakes were in front of me. I ate heartily, barely conscious of my surroundings until a few minutes later when I looked up and Zack pushed a glass of orange juice towards me. I took it and drank it all down at once then sat back to look around.

“Where is everyone?” I asked.

“The Sax/tons s/+s are off doing their computing and monitoring. They left us here to eat and talk. The food was good, right? It’s replicated from Earth food – especially for you.”

“Why do the Sax/tons s/+s like me so much? They don’t even know me.”

“Well, first of all, Emma made the food. She is definitely perfecting her skills, right? And as for the Sax/tons s/+s not knowing you... They’ve been monitoring your life, as have I, for years. They know more about you than you probably know about yourself.”

“Again, this is all very creepy.”

Zack laughed, "So you have said! Maybe you're right – but you are the 21<sup>st</sup> Key – the one prophesized by the Wise Ones to have the power to 'right what is wrong.'"

"Who are the Wise Ones, and what the hell am I supposed to be 'making right'?" I asked miserably.

"My opinion? I think you have the power to take Vawn out."

I looked at him incredulously, and said, "That claim sound ridiculous. Who are you to Vawn, anyway?" I asked, feeling my underlying frustration coming to the surface. "And don't give me the VNA1 answer again. But what are you doing here with the Sax/tons <sup>s/+s</sup> and me? What are YOU getting for all of this? Are you Vawn's dangerous infiltrator who everyone falls for?"

"You are falling for me? That's good to hear."

He looked boyishly elated which was dangerously cute and convincing. Argh! I made an attempt to be serious, "What is your angle, Zack? What are you getting from all of this?"

"What am I getting?" Zack looked sincerely shocked by my question.

"You must be getting something. There has to be a reason why you are doing what you are doing – whatever that is."

"I did everything I could to stop a very cruel leader from eliminating everyone dear to me," he said sincerely, all pretenses dropped.

I studied his face for signs of deceit. There weren't any, and that seemed to defuse my frustration. I didn't trust him, but I needed his allegiance and the information he had to serve those I was attempting to protect. Accordingly, I decided to continue pursuing that information despite my distrust. "So why are you not loyal to Vawn? What happened? And the Sax/tons <sup>s/4s</sup> seem to know you very well. What's that about?"

"We have known each other for a very long time." He was thoughtful then added, "Mindy, I promise to answer all of your questions, but I am having a very hard time keeping Vawn from focusing on us. Can't you feel him?"

"Yes, I must admit I can."

"His impatience is growing, and that is not a good thing – for any of us. I need to go over my plan with you, and we need to take action as soon as possible."

I sighed, "You're right. What is your plan?"

Zack smiled, pleased with my resolve and began his explanation. "I've been over our situation hundreds of times, and the only scenario that will work is for me to somehow get you to see Vawn. I have not been able to discover any weaknesses. In fact, I think I am programmed to keep from seeing them, and to think of him as all powerful. What he didn't assert over my consciousness was loyalty. I suspect he did it as a test, purposefully leaving a door open to torture me. But then I doubt he'd destroy me because I am another one of his special projects. He would,

though, probably delight in torturing me in every way possible. But you,” and he grabbed my hands in his, “you would be able to see or read what I cannot. You’d be able to find the way in to destroy him. He cannot continue. He is about to destroy everything, possibly even the entire planet. He has threatened to do so in the past, and now I think he is serious. Something is very wrong with him.”

“I can feel that,” I had to admit. I slowly pulled my hands free from his grasp. His touch was scattering my emotions. He didn’t seem to notice and kept talking.

“If we destroy Vawn, we will have to consider the fact that he has many loyal followers and a well-equipped army on the shadow side of ⊕essina led by his 2<sup>nd</sup> in Command named Amalla. They will be weakened without his leadership, and we may be able to convince them that the two sides of ⊕essina can live in harmony with each other. That would be the ideal outcome, and –“

“Alright, I understand the dynamics of the situation.” I interrupted him. “But how do you get me in to see Vawn without him seeing me or realizing I’m there?”

“I’m not sure. You’d have to be there with me in order to observe him. He is most relaxed and least guarded with me. He has always trusted me, even though, I think he suspects I am up to something.”

“The trust part sounds out of character. Why does he trust you?”

“I think he WANTS to trust me. He calls me his son, and when he does there is a level of caring in his words.”

“Is it possible that you are his son?”

“None whatsoever. I am what you Earthlings might call a test tube baby. Although, I am not even sure I was a baby. I have no memories of being young.”

“If you are his son, how am I his daughter? I was not a test tube baby. I know that.”

“I’m not sure.” He ran a hand through his hair, his way of expressing frustration. “Vawn manipulated the gene pool somehow. I don’t think either of us are part of his DNA – only that he created us for reasons I am not aware of and refers to us as his son and daughter.”

“Let’s stay focused on your role in this. There must be something significant about you. After all, Vawn wanted me dead. Hmm. How about this? Are you expected to be his successor?”

“No. Vawn has no intention of dying. He’s been alive for well over 1,000 years now.”

“What about this? Are you created in his image?”

“No – at least, not that I can tell. He once suffered serious injuries that maimed and scarred him. I do not know how the injuries occurred.”

I reflected a few seconds over what I knew – and what the Sax/tons <sup>s/45</sup> knew. There was only one way for me to observe Vawn, and it was the worst possible solution for me. “Zack, I’ll have to be vaporized and contained again in

a vial," I said reluctantly, already feeling sick to my stomach over the prospect.

"I was thinking the same thing," Zack replied, sensitive to my reluctance.

"Damn. I hated being stuck in there."

"I know," he responded with sympathy.

"I wouldn't be able to see him, but I could hear him and read the situation."

"Maybe, you actually could see him through my eyes," Zack said thoughtfully.

"How could I do that?"

"I don't know for sure, but I have a theory. I've never been vaporized and contained. That you are conscious is probably a gift Vawn gave to the Keys. Maybe, with intention you could see through my eyes."

"How do you figure that would work?"

"Well, the brain is tangible material and has a place in the physical body, but the mind does not. We know that PHYSICAL attributes are in the vial when a person is vaporized, but we are not sure what happens to the non-tangible parts like thoughts, emotions and intentions."

"I did feel free in those ways when I was contained. That is what makes the physical containment even worse. Maybe with intention, which is still available to me, I can do what you are suggesting." I rubbed my face with my hands in frustration then said, "We have to do it. It's the only way. *Damn*. Nobody has a future if Vawn isn't stopped."



It was only minutes later that the Sax/tons s/+s had been briefed on the plan and Zack asked, “Are you ready?”

“No.” That was the truth. There were still problems with the Earth Tessinians E.⊕s lives, but they could not be resolved unless Vawn was stopped. I suspected he would find them all one day soon and eliminate them, making any plans for the future pointless.

*“Mindy?”* Zack invaded my thoughts. (What a surprise.)  
*“I’m ready.”*

This time I vowed to stay fully alert to everything that happened as part of the vaporize/containment process – and then for Zack’s teleportation of himself with the vial of me around his neck. I wanted to be aware of everything.

*“Here we go.”*

Zack was sitting across from me. There was a table between us in the kitchen, and my hands were palms down in front of me. “Close your eyes,” he said and then I felt his hands over mine.

His energy field extended towards me and a process began that very quickly rearranged my cell structure. In the blink of an eye, I was disassembled. It was rather a disturbing sensation, but it had to be done, and gratefully

my mind felt clear. Next there was a whooshing sound, and I sensed the walls of the glass vial around me.

Zack must have put the vial around his neck because I felt myself fall against his chest and then heard his heart beating. It felt oddly intimate, but I did not have much time to think about it because I felt Zack wrap his hand around the vial, and we were traveling very fast for about 5 seconds.

We stopped moving, and I recognized the scratchy, metallic voice of Vawn say, "There you are, my son. Welcome home."

Vawn sounded genuinely pleased to see Zack, but his next question had an edge to it that I could not place.

"The dead buried?" he asked. Was that suspicion beneath his question?

"The dogs are buried. What a terrible shame they were lost. Their loyalty and intelligence may have served us, but I guess it was not to be," Zack answered, making his voice sound neutral.

"I've been worried. You have been gone for longer than I expected," Vawn complained, any concern ambiguous. I sensed another agenda, but one I couldn't define yet.

"I am sorry to have worried you," Zack sounded casual yet showed the correct measure of concern. "I should have informed you of my plan rather than self-initiating it."

“You are entitled to take on your own projects, but you know I worry when we are out of communication for very long.” Vawn’s words literally dripped with duplicity, but Zack did not seem to be aware of it.

“It will not happen again. I am home now. What do you have for me to do next?” Zack redirected the conversation.

Vawn paused as if contemplating Zack’s answer then said, “Things have changed. The Earth Tessinians E.⊕s are all gone.”

“That was your intention,” Zack said in a matter-of-fact tone, but I could feel the slight discomfort in the center of his being that he was working to hide from Vawn. “Did you gather the information you needed about Mindy T. Barnes before I eliminated her?”

I felt Vawn studying Zack again. He’d heard the way he said my name. He felt the emotion Zack had for me. So did I. It felt like a sincere feeling, an emotional connection to me he could not hide with his usual adeptness. This could be trouble for Zack. I needed to observe Vawn more closely.

Accordingly, I created an intention rooted in all the knowledge I’d recently gathered, and tried to see Vawn through Zack’s eyes. My vision was blurry at first then Vawn came into focus. He was staring directly at Zack who was not registering any response to him except neutrality.

Vawn’s appearance was shocking and disturbing. He was about the same height as Zack. One side of his face was severely scarred. One eye was pulled sideways, the other

was normal. His entire face looked like the skin had melted away in some tragedy at one point in his life. In fact, one side of his body was grotesquely damaged while the other side was untouched by whatever horrific event created his injuries. I could tell that even his vocal cords had been partially damaged. It looked like he had inhaled fire or a corrosive gas of some kind.

Then Vawn leaned close to Zack and looked inquisitively into his eyes. Zack did not respond, but I flinched. I quickly camouflaged my emotions so they would not be revealed in Zack's eyes, but Vawn had already seen me and said telepathically, *"Very good, Mindy, but you have got to do much better than you have if you want to evade me."* Then he laughed with menacing delight.

"The 21<sup>st</sup> Key is here," Vawn said to Zack.

"How can that be?" Zack asked with feigned innocence.

"You tell me," Vawn responded mildly and turned away as if thinking. "I feel her presence through you, VNA1. Remember, I know both of you very well.

"I don't know what to tell you," Zack answered, his tone purposefully unconcerned.

Vawn paused and looked back to Zack over his shoulder and spoke with a deliberateness that was very disturbing. "Son, if you lie to me, I will not spare you my wrath."

"I know nothing about where Mindy T. Barnes is right now," Zack lied ineffectively.

Vawn spun around in a sudden rage, “She is mine! And I want her! I’ve waited 1,000 years to get this right. 1,000 years waiting patiently for her! The Wise Ones are wrong,” he said through clenched teeth while saliva dripped down his chin. “She will rule WITH me – and we will be more powerful than anyone can imagine. If we choose to, we can rule the entire universe!”

Vawn stepped closer to Zack, who was holding his ground, and spoke in a harsh whisper. “I knew you wouldn’t kill her, and I knew that you would bring her to me. You had to! I planted that thought in your mind a very long time ago. Did you think I would give my son more power than myself? NEVER!”

He extended his hand towards Zack’s chest and his shirt ripped open of its own accord. The vial suddenly tore from his neck, and I was in Vawn’s gnarled hand.

“NO!” Zack screamed.

Vawn’s cruel laughter ricocheted everywhere in the room magnifying its viciousness.

“Watch what happens when you disobey me!” he threatened, and without warning squeezed the vial.

Then suddenly without warning, Vawn violently threw the vial into an open fire pit beside him filled with iridescent, blue fire.

The last thing I heard was Zack’s desperate cry, “NO! ....”

Then his voice trailed off.



## **Chapter 22 - *The Final Confrontation***

The iridescent, blue fire began to melt the vial, and my anxiety grew. I frantically tried to escape, but quickly realized that the fire wasn't hot. I could tell that it was a source of power and energy; but, surprisingly it was not hot – at least, it wasn't to me.


My concern about burning to death dispelled, I now heard Vawn raging at Zack for being insubordinate and lying to him. But then he suddenly switched emotions, unable to contain his sick joy, and he laughed loudly at Zack's reaction to his dashing my vial into the fire pit.

"I can manipulate you like a champion! It gives me more joy than you can imagine to do so!" he laughed again while Zack wisely kept quiet.

I felt his deep sorrow. He was not trying to communicate with me because he believed I was dead; and, I dared not attempt to communicate with him. It was safer for him to believe I was gone.

Zack asked without attempting to hide his sorrow. "If Mindy T. Barnes was so important to you, why did you kill her?"

Vawn laughed with twisted delight again, and I saw him on my mind screen clutching his stomach from the exertion.

“She is not dead! She’s impervious to  essinian fire. I made her that way. I just wanted to hurt you for defying me – and it was abundantly enjoyable to do so!”

Then his voice went ice cold, and he said, “She is no longer yours, you know. She’s mine now. Are we clear?”

“Yes, sir, we are clear. May I be excused?” Zack sounded resolved to the situation, his sorrow checked. He was moving back to neutrality, but it was taking concerted effort to achieve. He was relieved to hear that I was not dead, but could not think clearly about what to do next. He wanted to remove himself from Vawn’s immediate sphere of influence. I felt Zack leave the room and focused on my own situation, and how I was most effectively going to deal with Vawn.

“Well, Mindy dear,” Vawn said as I heard him turn towards the fire pit, “it’s me and you now – and an eternity of conquering whatever we please! When the time is right, you will realize your true identity. I knew it would take almost 1,000 years to produce you. It has taken 21 trials, but you are finally here – and I am ecstatic!”

While Vawn celebrated his successes, my mind circled around the words ‘true identity.’ He must have created me in someone’s image. Perhaps, I could tune into his baseline of knowledge and get my questions answered.

“Go ahead, Mindy dear,” Vawn said. “Look into anything you want to know. It will help you awaken.” Vawn said. His



voice sounded like he was leaning close to the fire listening to my thoughts. *How disturbing.*

But rather than fight it (because I needed more information than I had to plan my next move), I tuned into the festering, twisted mind of Vawn – and was immediately entangled in an expression of extreme cruelty and secrets. It was as if his brain was undulating with ways to harm others; but rather than retreat, I moved forward with the intention to know him better – which was what I knew he would allow. He was proud of his dominance and power, and he wanted me (or whoever I represented to him) to be impressed.

My first steps into Vawn’s mind were tentative because they had to be, but they were also tentative by design. My advantage was that he WANTED me inside his head. When I could, I’d tiptoe into the parts that I could use to take him down. It was a mission that would take careful, deliberate observations to accomplish.

I walked past the presumed deaths of the Earth Tessinians E.⊕s. It surprised me that Vawn assumed they were all dead. No wonder he wasn’t enraged with their disappearance. But then I saw a deeper explanation and had to check the emotion that suddenly surfaced in me.

Vawn knew exactly where the Earth Tessinians E.⊕s were – and planned to deal with them when they moved to

the surface. I shuddered with the realization of the danger they were in.

“Mindy, are you alright?” It was Vawn still leaning over the fire pit. He had registered my shudder. At least, I had been able to make it non-specific.

*“Yes... just adjusting,”* I answered him telepathically.

“Take your time. I’m here if you need me or have any questions.” Vawn responded kindly; but, I could feel him fighting his anticipation. After all, he’d waited a very long time to have me here with him – whoever I was to him.

I turned my focus back to Vawn’s mind, and I felt his joy in eliminating all of the dogs on Earth and how much it pleased him to outwit Zack. I almost recoiled in disgust but held my emotions. After all, I was at the very beginning of the memories of a 1,000 year old man.

I continued my journey through the sick, twisted bog of Vawn’s mind and made observation after observation while camouflaging my emotional responses. I allowed myself to express my amazement at his accomplishments, and he seemed to accept that response as authentic. I could tell that whoever I was to him, it was important that I admire him.

I traveled a timeline backwards, encountering the multiple victimization tactics used on the Earth Tessinians E.Ⓢ to keep them innocent and dependent. Next I

witnessed the torture of selected beings. The techniques implemented were developed to increase obedience and productivity but not disable the individual. Although I didn't have time to look at the specifics, I could see that Vawn's teachings had been copied by other ruthless leaders on Earth – a fact that he was very proud of.

There were scientific experiments performed on races on other planets to determine their pain threshold. I saw what Vawn called the Light Side Ⓟessinians threatened and brutalized with massive explosions, fires that raged across the land, and floods that destroyed crops – all implemented to explore the most useful ways to utilize victimization to secure his control over the peoples he created and their dependency on him. He saved them over and over again from the disasters he designed; and they were, of course, grateful for what they thought was his compassion for their plight. I felt sick but was careful to keep my emotional response hidden.

The Ⓟessinians on the home planet were a mixture of DNA from a multitude of races. About 10% of that mixture was human DNA. They were programmed to be docile and subservient.

The Earth Tessinians E.Ⓟs, although identical to their root race, had also been programmed to be subservient – but then, they were treated in ways that were intended to radically grow their dependency and loyalty. They were a psychological and social experiment that Vawn had become

bored with. He also felt they multiplied too quickly for him to control effectively hence the many catastrophic deaths over the years.

I came across the idea to create Zack then the actual DNA combination that was used in his design. He was a mixture of Vawn, human, and ⊕essinian DNA, - and then about 2% of some sort of robotic components and synthetics. He was programmed for independence and loyalty – which were vying attributes that Vawn enjoyed observing. He would encourage Zack to be independent then test his loyalty over and over again without Zack being aware of his tactics.

Surprisingly, he'd created Zack in his own image to look at himself in his prime before his accident. (It was sickening to me that I was so attracted to the face and body of the young Vawn – and had to use some extra effort to cover how disturbed I felt at the thought. I let my feelings dissipate quickly go before I was discovered.)

Next I made two observations that might be considered vulnerabilities: 1) Vawn was unable to repair his own body, and 2) he feared giving Zack that knowledge and making him intelligent enough to have influence over him.

When I looked to see why Zack had no childhood memories as he claimed, I saw him growing in a sort of suspended state. Since no one knew about Zack's existence in the beginning, and Vawn did not want to care for an

infant or toddler himself, he did not bring Zack to consciousness until he was about 6 years old.

Zack was relatively well-balanced because he was given ample intelligence, lots of simulation, and allowed to be independent unlike Vawn's other experiments.

There were others like Zack who did not thrive or were considered mistakes. Vawn had eliminated all of them except for one he named Theo who was intelligent. But instead of being easily manipulated by fear, he was debilitated by it. Consequently, fear was almost entirely programmed out of Zack. Theo actually looked like Zack's twin (except for his platinum blond hair) and was someone I needed to find in the near future. He had been kept hidden from everyone. This was done so that Theo would have no outside influences that might taint the experiments. He would die when Vawn was destroyed because no one knew he existed – that is, except for Vawn and now myself.

"I want you to know everything, Mindy, but Theo is a waste of time. Keep traveling. Go back to when we first met," Vawn said with the barest hint of impatience in his voice.

I wasn't sure exactly what he meant with his comment about going back to when we first met, but I didn't question him. Something very important was very close. To Vawn's credit he was good at reading exactly where I was traveling. To my credit, even though he was picking up some of my

emotion, I felt that I was effectively keeping my agenda from him.

All of what I had viewed was evidence of the game played by the twisted mind of one man who seemed to have an infinite reach and capacity to inflict pain and suffering. Most disturbing was that all of his activities not only garnered him the knowledge he used to control and manipulate others, but also brought him great pleasure. He felt accomplished – no, maybe vindicated was more accurate. What had happened to him in the past?

As I traveled, I noted that there was also an emotion at the core of his psyche that created a gaping, ragged hole. This hole never seemed to be healed no matter what he did to appease his own pain. Surprisingly, this emotion was loneliness.

“Go back into my thoughts and find you and me,” Vawn repeated quietly. He did not want me to dwell in his loneliness.

Since Vawn wanted me to go to a time when he was young and looked like Zack, and I was a part of his life, I let myself drift further back in Vawn’s memories. I moved quickly past more experiments, pages and pages of notes, books read, loneliness, anger and more loneliness before coming to the young Vawn and a young woman who looked strikingly like myself –

“That IS you, Mindy,” Vawn said quietly. “Your name was ⊕essina then. Do you see yourself?”

“Yes,” I answered compliantly as I communicated telepathically – which was the opposite of how I actually felt. “*I see me.*”

I felt impending tragedy as I stepped into the memories, but I didn’t falter and continued to walk forward at the same pace.

Vawn and Tessina had gone to school together on their home planet of Zal/dine. Both were members of an elite social class that was comprised of those who were considered the most intelligent and beautiful people. They were groomed to be leaders and great thinkers. While Vawn was an exceptionally gifted scientist, Tessina was gifted in space travel technology. The two of them were deeply in love when Vawn’s competition for Tessina’s heart came forward.

This young man was considered by Tessina’s family to be a far better life partner for her; and, most importantly, her marriage to him would elevate the entire family’s position in society. All of them would actually be raised to a level of royalty – which was extremely desirable and carried with it many advantages. This was because the groom’s family controlled the economy of Zal/dine.

A wedding was arranged by the families, and Vawn and Tessina were both devastated. They felt that their love was one that could never die. They had to do something. They went to Tessina’s parents and declared their love for

each other, and were told there was no way their love could be indulged. Vawn was not a match that served the well-being of their daughter or the family. They were told they were young and could not understand these things. No matter what they presented, they were told their love could never be and that they were being selfish and inconsiderate to pursue it.

Even Vawn's own parents sided with Tessina's parents. Since their relationship was not going to continue, he was told to choose a woman who elevated their own family. While Vawn's family was wealthy and had status in the community, the relationship with Tessina was considered a lateral relationship and did not serve his family in any way.

Needless to say, Vawn and Tessina were devastated, but they rallied with a plan of their own to save their relationship. It was a few months before the arranged marriage, and that gave them the time they needed to implement their plan to escape their home planet together and start a new civilization on another.

In a matter of weeks, Tessina secretly built a small space craft, and Vawn purchased and gathered everything he needed to create a balanced ecosystem on a new planet – one that was to be an example of the best life he could imagine for himself and Tessina.

He created plans for cover vegetation, food sources, small animals, insects, and birds – all of them his original genetic designs. He took some of the power and fuel source



on his home planet called lumin, and reconfigured it on the chemical level so it could be easily transported. Later he planned to restructure it back to the blue ⊕ Tessinian flame that I was intimately familiar with.

He brilliantly restructured the composition of building materials, fabric for clothing, and food for 10 years into small, light packages that fit easily onto the space craft. Tessina was proud of his work, as he was of hers. They felt they could accomplish anything because they loved each other so much.

There was one thing, though, that Vawn did not share with Tessina. He planned to destroy the entire extended royal family of the groom in one horrific explosion beneath the area where they all lived. This would be done with an underground explosion that would look like it sourced from instability in the planet's core, a known problem that scientists were working to control.

The day before the planned wedding, Vawn had everything in place. The timer for the explosion was set for that afternoon, and Tessina was to meet him that morning when they would escape in the space craft she had constructed, and he had packed.

When she did not arrive by noon, he was distressed and knew something was wrong. He had to search for her, but he could not contact her family because their relationship was forbidden. He had no idea where she was. He knew it would never be her choice not to join him. Something had

to have happened that was out of her control. Frantically he tried to find her by connecting to her emotionally – and then he saw her on his mind screen with her parents at the royal family’s home. She was wringing her hands and trying to bravely participate in the meal they were all sharing.

He had to get to her! She’d be killed along with the rest of the family. There was no way now to stop the explosion. Small explosive devices that he had injected in a ring miles beneath the surface of the planet had already begun to fire. The chain reaction that would collapse the surface crust under the area where the royal families lived had already started.

In a desperate act, he traveled to rescue her realizing he may lose his own life by doing so – but that didn’t matter. He knew with the obsessive devotion of a teenager that he could not live without her. He had to find her.

He got within a mile of her location when an explosion rocked the countryside. When he got as close as he could, he saw that the devastation was extensive. He could feel Tessina’s heart still beating and followed the sound to her in a large pile of debris. He dug to her with his hands and reached her just in time to hold her as another explosion created a fireball killing Tessina and severely injuring him. Blinded in one eye, he swept up some of Tessina’s ashes and bone fragments and clutched them to his own heart, screaming at the universe for creating the horrific chain of

events that brought her to this location and took her from him.

When the explosions continued, he realized there was more destabilization than he had expected. He put Tessina's remains, which he still clenched in his hand, into his shirt pocket and vowed that he would always keep her close to his heart.

He traveled as fast as he could in his vehicle back to the space craft barely escaping the now cascading explosions. He passed destroyed neighborhoods and dead bodies, but he didn't even see them as he traveled at a reckless speed, deftly avoiding debris in the road and hurling through the air.

When he finally arrived at the space craft, he took off in a storm of flying debris. As he was jettisoned out into space at a tremendous speed, the explosions continued behind him.

Vawn survived but was emotionally devastated. His facial injuries and the damage to the right side of his body were horrifying. After lift-off, he managed to use some of the precious healing ointment (Silvetamide) he'd invented from a mineral he called Vetta. It had helped with healing him physically but not emotionally.

He traveled mindlessly for two days before a small planet appeared before him, and he landed on it. For days, he alternately mourned his loss and cried out in rage over what had happened. Finally he rallied and decided to

rebuild everything and to resurrect his beloved  $\oplus$ essina from the DNA he had. No matter how long it took, he would dedicate himself to bringing her back to life.

He called his new planet  $\oplus$ essina, and decided that the native creatures, who were simple-minded and mute, would make excellent servants. He was relieved to discover that they were not only trainable but eager to serve him. When he discovered they actually had vocal cords, he removed them from over 100 of those he perceived to be their leaders. He did this as a clear warning to the others of his power over them.

Since they were unable to share anything about themselves with him, he named them Sax/tons  $\text{\textcircled{S}}/\text{\textcircled{t}}$  after the wealthy family who had attempted to steal  $\oplus$ essina away from him. Until the end of time, it would be his private joke that the Sax/tons  $\text{\textcircled{S}}/\text{\textcircled{t}}$  would wait on HIM, and HE would control THEIR destinies!

Once again, the depravity of Vawn's actions made me shudder with revulsion, but I quickly moved on to assure my reaction not be recognized as such.

Vawn kept a picture of his beloved Tessina front and center on his mind screen. It was as if he had a photograph of her that he viewed many times a day. I looked at her and felt eerily like I was looking into a mirror.

“You are beautiful, ⊕essina.” Vawn said expressing her name with the love I felt in his memories. He wanted me to BE her, and so I would pretend to be – and somehow use his emotional connection to ⊕essina to my advantage. I had a plan!

“Please reconfigure yourself, my lovely ⊕essina,” he continued. “You know how to do it. I want to look at you again. I have only seen you in my memories for a countless number of years. I want to SEE you here, in the flesh, now, in physical form!”

I could tell he was literally drooling with anticipation. With a sick feeling, as well as, one of victory for having discovered one weakness I could use to my advantage, (his devotion to the one he lovingly called ⊕essina), I turned my focus to the task of reconfiguring.

I had observed Zack’s work closely when he’d vaporized and contained me, and knew how to reverse the process – at least, I thought I did. The glass vial had cracked and then completely melted into the blue fire so I was free of my containment, but not in physical form. I had to do this. Vawn had to be stopped. How I was to accomplish this, I was not sure, but I did know I had to confront him in physical form.

It took only minimal effort to gather my cells into logical patterns of cooperation. I realized that it was actually harder to keep them apart. They longed to be back together in their harmonious family groups. Accordingly, it was only

seconds before I could see my hand materializing, and I flexed it to see if it still worked. All of my parts seemed to fly into perfect alignment with each other, and I was suddenly standing in the middle of the fire looking very blue.

“Tessina, is that really you?” Vawn asked hopefully, a tone in his voice that I had not heard before.

“Yes,” then I used the words his heart longed for and he had not heard in about 1,000 years, “...my darling... I have missed you.”

I actually saw tears of happiness come to his eyes. It was unbelievable that what started out as a sincere and deep love for another being had become as distorted as things were today. *Could love be this distorting to someone’s life? Could it be this deep and sincere?*

“Look at me, Vawn ...my darling,” I continued. “Help me out of this fire like you tried to do when I died. Save me this time from the final explosion that killed me and so scarred you. How lucky you are to have survived – and how blessed I am that you have resurrected me.”

Vawn, entranced by my appearance and words, seemed unable to move.

I continued, “I will repair your damaged skin and resurrect your youthful appearance. I know you cannot do it yourself – but with your guidance I can. Our love can conquer anything we choose. Together, both of our lives are complete.”

“I have missed you more than you can imagine,” Vawn said with longing in his voice. He smiled and his face rather than showing love, looked more deranged.

“Please help me. You can do it.” I extended my hand to him reaching up outside of the flames that seemed to terrify him. He was not impervious to the flames. He hesitated so I continued my appeal.

“Your son was created in a perfect image of you when we were together. His image will be copied and reproduced.” Vawn reached his hand out to me. “Such fine, masterful work you have done with Zack –”

Vawn was jolted back to the present when I made the mistake of using the name Zack instead of VNA1. *DAMN!* In that split second he realized that it was me, Mindy, pretending to be his first and only love, Tessina. He was quick to respond, but I was quicker – and grabbed his hand and pulled him towards me. He was strong physically, but because of his injuries his balance was off. I jerked him towards the fire – and me.

It was almost sad to see the expression on his face as he descended in slow motion into the blue fire. In the same infinitesimal measure of time, I moved back one step which meant he fell the three feet down into the fire pit, face down into the blue flames. They leapt greedily onto his clothes. And then as I watched, the fire hungrily grabbed for his skin and began to devour him. Vawn rolled face up and emitted a wail of distress then a groan of pain.

His last words to me were barely audible. I heard him whisper, “Thank you, Mindy. My pain is almost gone.”

Then the flames completely consumed him, traveling across his scarred face, the skin twisting and darkening. When his face fell inward revealing cracked bone and the last gelatinous spasms of a dying brain, I watched with a mixture of regret and relief. Taking a life was not easy, but Vawn had to be stopped – and this was the only way to do it.

Then his brain shriveled in response to the blue flames and turned to ash like the rest of him. There was no hint of life in Vawn now. Only the gentle, soft crackle of the flames was heard. There was no movement or communication from Vawn, or life at all that I could read in the ashes. In seconds, the horrific 1,000 year reign of Vawn had ended.

I felt heavy with sadness for all that had been – for the love that was doomed and the unprecedented cruelty that had poisoned so many lives.

“Good bye,” I said quietly.

Vawn’s reign was finally over...

I bent down and stirred the ashes with my hand making absolutely sure that nothing remained of Vawn. As I did so my hand passed over something in the ashes which I



withdrew and held up. It was a gold key on a chain, a key identical to the one that had disappeared into my hand back on Earth. The only difference was that this one had the name “⊕essina” etched into it. I knew it was a gift, a wedding present, that Vawn had made for her, and had wanted to give to her.

It was strangely fitting that I was now in possession of the necklace, this original key, the one Vawn had made for his love whose full name I now knew from traveling Vawn’s memories, had actually been ⊕essina Key. I was the 21<sup>st</sup> version of her.

Because the necklace was forged out of love, it was actually pleasant to hold. I could feel their love, and found it easy to place the necklace around my own neck. Here was the best part of Vawn’s life. His hopes and dreams were embedded within it – and they were pure and innocent when the necklace was created.

I wrapped my hand around the key hanging from my neck and smiled feeling the love that had been between Vawn and Tessina. It was a small measure of goodness in an otherwise horrific story, one I needed to drink in to balance my equilibrium again.





## Chapter 23 - Resolution

I truly felt, then, I understood who Vawn had been, a man who'd had a decent beginning, who'd loved deeply, and whose life had become grotesquely distorted. But there was more to his story – and mine. So much more...

It was then, while I was standing in the fire pit emotionally exhausted and lost in the healing power of love that was being communicated to me from the Tessina Key necklace, that Zack burst into the room.

He'd felt Vawn's demise, of course, but when he saw me in physical form he stopped and gasped. "You are reconfigured," he whispered in awe.

I walked to the edge of the fire pit and extended my hand outside the flames as I had to Vawn. This time it was to Zack who immediately ran to the edge of the fire, and hauled me easily up and out of the flames – and into his arms.

My logical mind wanted to focus on the many things that had to be taken care of – Theo had to be found, the Earth Tessinians E.⊕s given homes, the shadow and light sides of ⊕essina explored, a peace-keeping committee

had to be formed – but my physical body became fully aware of Zack and my focus turned completely to him. Maybe, it was the necklace. Maybe, it was just Zack’s effect on me.

He was touching my face with one hand, looking closely at me. “Are you alright?” he asked with concern. Then he started to frantically check my arms and legs for burns. “I couldn’t get back in here. There was some sort of force field or barrier keeping me out. I should never have left the room, but I couldn’t think. I didn’t know what to do. I needed to get away to be with my own sadness. I never suspected you were really alive. Then I heard you talking telepathically; and, ever since then, I have been trying to get back in here to help you.”

He hugged me tightly and I could hardly breathe. “I thought I had lost you. Never again will I let you out of my sight!”

“That’s silly,” I laughed trying to bring my hands up to his chest between us.

“Never again! You are never leaving my side.”

I laughed again and Zack said, “Don’t laugh. I’m serious.”

“You are squeezing the breath out of me, and you clearly tried to keep me at your side once before – and your trickery failed.”

Then he pushed me up against the wall and pinned me there.

“What are you doing?” I asked trying not to let the position completely cloud my logical mind. Damn, I was very attracted to this young man and could not think straight.

“I don’t know what I am doing. All I do know is that you are not getting away from me again,” he grinned looking down at me through hooded eyes.

“Where would I be going at this moment?” I asked softly, feeling how quickly I was losing my grip on the situation and succumbing to Zack’s concern for me – and his charm.

“How do I know you aren’t going to run away again? You are very unpredictable, Mindy T. Barnes,” he whispered my name into my ear which sent delicious chills running up and down my spine.

“This is a compromising position,” I fought to sound unmoved.

“Well, that all depends on how you look at things.” Zack leaned his head back to beam one of his charming smiles at me. He was back on his game now since he’d determined I was not injured in any way. “I bet you have superior strength or skills, and can free yourself if you want to.”

“That might be, but do you want to make this a test of strength or skills?” I asked, a hint of seduction escaping in the tone of my voice that I couldn’t take back. *Damn.*

He shook his head slowly and answered, “Neither.”

“Did you know that you have robot DNA?” I made an attempt to retrieve a logical train of thought. Why, I did not

know. I guess there was still a part of me trying to resist him. He'd lied to me – big time – more than once. 'Remember that,' I told myself to my comment.

"Did you know that the human part of you and chimpanzees share 96% of the same DNA?" Zack responded easily.

I scrambled for another retort as Zack breathed against my neck, and my mind became less and less available to me.

"...You also have Vawn DNA," I finally said.

"And  $\oplus$ essinian DNA – as you do," Zack responded easily again while I was losing the battle with my physical needs.

That wasn't the half of it, I thought. Since I was actually made in  $\oplus$ essina's image, I undoubtedly received a heavy dose of her DNA – and that, by itself, probably made me victim to Zack's charm.

"What no more retorts?" Zack whispered into my ear when I did not respond.

I snapped back to the moment and my predicament – if that was what it could be called. "You are about 50% synthetic products," I responded.

"Actually, only 1.9% – and you are no part synthetic."

"You are 105 years old," I countered continuing this silly game.

"Well, only on Tessina, but probably about 18 or 20 years old in Earth time."

“Are you going to let me go?” I forced myself to address the obvious again.

“No. I think I’m going to kiss you,” Zack whispered moving about three inches from my lips.

“And why aren’t you already?” I asked, barely able to breathe.

“I’m asking you.”

I shook my head slightly to clear it, and asked, “What exactly is the question? I’m already pinned here.”

“You’re right. It’s not a question. It’s a warning.”

“Ah, then I have to warn you that I am going to kiss you back,” I laughed softly, “and I will not be held responsible for what that does to you.” Then I continued more boldly than I intended to. “You know, the fantasy you made up about me is nothing compared to what is really going to happen. It doesn’t even come close.” (*Damn. Where did that comment come from?*)

Zack’s body responded immediately to my suggestive words. He managed to say, “I can take care of myself.” He was now about two inches from my lips.

“Sure you can,” I answered. “Me, too.”

“Two lies. They cancel each other out,” he said moving to about one inch from my lips.

“Perfect,” I breathed.

Our lips barely touched, and I felt something like a jolt of electricity shoot through my body. “Did we ever do any of this before?” I managed to ask.

“No,” Zack confessed.

“I could never imagine I would act as – let’s say, wantonly, as you made me out to be.”

“It was a fantasy, Mindy. Please stop talking.”

“But it doesn’t come close to how the real me responds to you.” ...*What the hell was I saying? WAIT!*

Even though, it was almost physically painful, I pushed Zack a few inches away. “We must communicate what has happened to the Sax/tons  $\text{S}/\text{T}$  at X7-18. Although, your close proximity to me is quite pleasant, you are clouding my mind.”

“Hmmm... I am going to hold onto the ‘quite pleasant’ description,” he responded good-naturedly then sighed releasing me completely, “Let’s send a message from Vawn’s communicator.”

I shook my head again to clear it and followed Zack to the communicator on the far wall. It was a simple black screen. “Just write on the screen with this.” He handed me a writing instrument that looked like a stick sculpted to match a fingers-thumb grasp. “When you’re done, I’ll punch in the location.”

Then Zack stood aside waiting patiently for me to act.

After a few seconds of reflection, I send a message utilizing a combination of  $\text{T}$ essinian and Sax/ton  $\text{S}/\text{T}$  symbols I’d learned from the Knowledge Download Stones



to make sure that the message was recognized as coming from me and was not a trick or manipulation from Vawn himself. (I couldn't resist adding one new symbol of my own, but I did so because I knew Kel would accept it without question.) My message read:

omo to all underground  
at X7-18 on ⊕,

⊥ have our own ⊕ !  
Vawn's rule is ●. He has  
been eliminated. Zack and  
I are ⊕ and will return in  
a few hours when our ⇒  
begins to rebuild in the  
name of ○ and ⊕. All  
voices will be heard  
including those of the s/4s.

May ⊥ be one ⊥ on this  
new ⊥.

In ⊕ to all, Mindy of the  
New World of ⊕

**Communication** to all  
underground at X7-18 on  
Tessina,

We have our own **Great  
Event!** Vawn's rule is **ended**.  
He has been eliminated.  
Zack and I are **well** and will  
return in a few hours when  
our **journey** begins to  
rebuild in the name of  
**group intention** and  
**cooperation**. All voices will  
be heard including those of  
the **Sax/tons**.

May **we** be one **family** on  
this new **day**.

In **devotion** to all, Mindy of  
the New World of **Freedom  
for All**

Much ✨ for your ☒, Mindy  
of the New World of @••

III we await your return to  
begin our ⇒•

Kel's immediate response:

Much **appreciation** for your  
**wisdom**, Mindy of the New  
World of **Freedom for All**.

**Together** we await your  
return to begin our **journey**.

Then I heard Kel share the news of Vawn’s elimination with the other Sax/ton s/+s scientists and a cheer rang out at the X7-18 location. Relief and satisfaction washed over me, and I closed my eyes to absorb it fully.

Zack punched a few more buttons next to the black screen and said by way of explanation, “That erased the transmission from the communicator’s memory. Now, how about we get back to you showing me how the real you responds to me.”

I smiled up at him. I was so tired of everything that had transpired in the past few hours especially fighting my response to him. (It was almost harder than it had been to stay one step ahead of Vawn.)

I had no more fight left in me and decided to surrender to my feelings, hoping I was making the right decision. I let go of any remaining reservations about Zack’s character and my concerns about my own ⊕essina DNA, and

wrapped my arms around his torso pulling him as close to me as I could. “Okay, let’s do this,” I said.

Zack groaned and, in turn, wrapped his arms around me. We had each other in this moment. It would only be a short time before we would be called into service again. Vawn was gone, and there was a tremendous amount of work to be done. But right now, there was time to celebrate being alive and well, and to participate in some much needed recreational activities.

I was so tired, and yet so alive in Zack’s arms – and I needed to forget everything – just for a while.

Tomorrow was another day.





## Epilogue

Amalla, 2<sup>nd</sup> in Command of  essina, stood up to speak.

She'd called an emergency session of the Council and was grateful that everyone had managed to get to headquarters in less than an hour in the middle of the night. Looking out at the anxious faces of the 100 members, she stated without emotion, "The Supreme Leader is dead."

Gasps of surprise along with murmurs of disbelief circled the room. Amalla allowed the emotion to be expressed. Her own earlier response had been the same as that of the Council members.

As Vawn's 2<sup>nd</sup> in Command, Amalla was genetically tied to him in ways that monitored his well-being. No one else on the planet had ever met or seen him – except for herself, the 30 members of the Supreme Guard and, of course, VNA1. And no one even knew him as Vawn except for them. To everyone else he was known as the Supreme Leader.

As far as Amalla knew, she was the only one tied to Vawn as per his design. She was the only one who knew the horrific pain he had suffered, as well as, the exact moment his heart had stopped beating. This knowledge and

awareness carried with it great responsibilities that she was well prepared to carry out.

She knew  $\oplus$ essina's honored and respected Supreme Leader could only be dead if someone had eliminated him. He was, after all, a member of the Forever Bloodline. There was no one known who would have or could have performed this ultimate, brutal act of treason.

Someone extremely dangerous was out there, and that person was in possession of Vawn's monitoring device – the Tessina Key necklace. It had probably been taken as a trophy of the elimination, but it would be that person's undoing. It would lead the Supreme Guard directly to the traitor. Retribution would be theirs. The Guard would be dispatched within the hour, and Vawn's tradition of clear, compassionate leadership would live on.

Amalla spoke again and this time with great conviction. "As I take over the position of 1<sup>st</sup> in Command of  $\oplus$ essina, I promise you this: The traitor will be found, and our lives and families will be protected!"

A cheer rang out that traveled quickly to the top of the 20 foot ceiling of the chamber, and seemed to echo across the planet.

"And I cannot emphasize this enough. You are to tell no one about the Supreme Leader's death. More information must be gathered before anyone in our cities is notified. Thank you in advance for your discretion."

As Amalla spoke...

Mindy, almost asleep in Zack's arms, stirred. She thought she heard something then discounted it. Within seconds, she succumbed to her overwhelming need to rest and fell deeply asleep.

Even though the message wasn't audible or visible in any way, if she had not been as tired or as blissfully peaceful as she was beside Zack, she would have known that an alert had been activated by a mechanism inside the Tessina Key necklace around her neck.

Accordingly, everything began to unfold without her knowledge while she slept...

THE END







## Appendix



## List of Characters in Book 1

(Listed in order of appearance)

- Mindy T. Barnes – main character; 21<sup>st</sup> Key
- Bradford Barnes – Mindy’s brother; 2<sup>nd</sup> in Command of Civilians
- Phillip Barnes – Mindy’s father; Guardian
- Laura Barnes – Mindy’s mother; Healer
- Jessica Thomas – one of Mindy’s 4<sup>th</sup> grade schoolmates
- Sasha – family dog; Sax/ton s/+ servant to the Barnes family
- Aunt Tessie – Mindy’s aunt; sister of Phillip Barnes; 20<sup>th</sup> Key
- Matthew Sanders – 8<sup>th</sup> grade student
- Chloe, Mia, Ruby – the “cool” 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls
- Emma Hansen – Mindy’s 8<sup>th</sup> grade friend; creator of Emma’s Wonders
- Zack Smith – Mindy’s 1<sup>st</sup> boyfriend; also known as VNA1
- Sax/ton s/+ Scientists – 10 with different specialties at X7-18 on ⊕essina
- Professor Lam – s/+ head of the underground facility at X7-18 on ⊕essina; shorter than Mindy; wears a cranberry colored robe
- Wise Ones – share prophecy and guidance; of Sax/ton s/+ descent
- Earth Tessinians – E.⊕s – those who live(d) on Earth

Native Tessinians –  $\aleph \cdot \text{T}5$  – those who live on  $\text{T}$ essina

Sax/tons -  $s/45$  – native to  $\text{T}$ essina; servants; none speak except for the scientists

Professor Kel – Sax/ton  $s/4$  scientist in charge of data entry and management

Paul White – Earth  $\text{T}$ essinian E. $\text{T}$  Guardian

Dr. Olz – Sax/ton  $s/4$  scientist who published controversial social research

Vawn – 1<sup>st</sup> in Command of  $\text{T}$ essina

Amalla – 2<sup>nd</sup> in Command of  $\text{T}$ essina; head of the Supreme Guard

Supreme Guard – 30 members; Vawn's protectors; slogan – To Hesitate Is To Die

## New Tessinian Symbol Decoder

Go to <http://www.Lila-Moon.com> to get the New Tessinian font used in this book downloaded to your computer for free. (You can also download an ebook about the basic history of all of the symbols on the same webpage.)

\*... appreciated ----- A

✱... great/big ----- B

owo ... communication----- C

u ... day/awake ----- D

● ... end/disconnected----- E

III ... family ----- F

G→ ... give ----- G

✓ ... greeting/hi ----- H

)- ... listen/pay attention -- I

⇒ ... journey ----- J

φ ... well/balanced ----- K

@ ... love ----- L

o ... he/his/him ----- M

∩ ... night/sleep ----- N

- ↔ ... work ----- O
- ↳ ... act/action ----- P
- ⊙ ... devoted/loyal ----- Q
- ↪ ... run ----- R
- s/t ... Sax/ton ----- S
- ⊕ ... Tessina ----- T
- ≡ ... together ----- U
- ✦ ... victory ----- V
- ♀ ... she/hers/her ----- W
- !K ... stop ----- X
- ≡ ... we/us ----- Y
- ⊕ ... cooperation ----- Z
- ⊗ ... great event ----- 1
- III ... royal family,  
supreme leaders ----- 2
- ⚡ ... storm ----- 3
- N.⊕ ... Native Tessinian --- 4
- E.⊕ ... Earth Tessinian --- 5

- h ... hide ----- 6
- \* ... rebellion ----- 7
- ~ ... requesting assistance - 8
- ⊗ ... wise, wisdom ----- 9
- ... trust ----- 0
- ↑ ... life/carry ----- <
- \* ... success ----- >
- \* ... hero/heroine ----- #
- ... group intention ----- \$
- ~ ... move ----- %
- ✓ ... yes ----- +
- ^ ... no ----- =
- @ ... freedom for all ----- @





## A Few Words from the Author

Thank you for journeying into Mindy's secret life with me. I hope you feel inspired to know more about her story because Book 2 called **The Rebellion** ✨ in the **Secret Life of Mindy T. Barnes** series describes a whole new part of Mindy's mission to fulfill her destiny as a leader.



You will learn about the light and shadow sides of Ⓧessina, Mindy and Zack will further explore their relationship, and a cast of new characters will join them including the dazzling 19<sup>th</sup> Key and Fyndellamon. An ancient race reveals itself. A member of the Supreme Guard becomes an ally, the severe storms that occur on Ⓧessina have a role in **The Rebellion** ✨, and Zack's survival becomes the focus of everyone's concern. And there is one big secret to be revealed, but I can't tell you anything about it. (Sorry...)

Come travel with me, one more time to Ⓧessina. I promise you will be surprised and delighted with Mindy's continuing story.

*Your Devoted Traveling Companion -- Lila Moon*  
*Lila@Lila-Moon.com*

P.S. Let me know what you think about Book 1. I'd love L to hear from you!



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...Visit <http://www.Lila-Moon.com> get the **New Tessinian font** downloaded to your computer for free! (The font includes Mindy's handwriting and 44 symbols.) You'll also get a basic history of all of the symbols.

The three novellas are available for free as ebooks and for purchase as paperbacks at the website.

...to the  $\Rightarrow$  and all N.⊕s, E.⊕s and s/4s living in  
⊕ and @...



