

A dark force is trying to silence the Gaia speakers and take the power of this world. What will they have to sacrifice to stop it.

Bringing Hope Home

By Renee W. Peek

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bringing hope home

BOOK 5



Renee W Peek

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Chapter 1

Maddison poured tea for the group, “Sophia, tell us about your time on Didymo. How long could you stay?”

Sophia’s excitement was palpable, “We had to leave after four hours. The atmosphere is hard to deal with. Daniel and I were both struggling with it nearly the whole time. But the planet was as amazing as you’ve heard. The colors are so rich. Maybe it has something to do with the suns distance or whatever it is that’s in the air, but it’s hard to not be awed no matter what the reason.”

Maddison was intrigued, “Where did you go?”

Sophia was happy to share, “Oriana brought us to a small community on the edge of a large body of water not unlike our first campsite when we arrived on Adelphi. The residents were originally from Earth.

“She introduced me to several healers. Maddy they are so powerful. You could feel it emanating from them. I felt more powerful just being near them.”

Daniel agreed, “She’s right, I actually felt stronger when I was with them.”

Zon was curious, “You said they’re from Earth? So what, six or seven generations on Didymo and that big of a change. If they were just able to become the people they were meant to be on Earth, can you imagine how different everything would be?”

That statement knocked them all back a bit. Maddy was shocked. “I would never have met any of you, we certainly would not have traveled here, wow that’s kind of overwhelming to think about.”

o o o o

Jimmi and Quinn sat on the beach watching Tam and Aliyah paddle the outrigger just beyond the point. They threw out an anchor and both dove deep to gather seaweed.

Jimmi took the opportunity to question her young visitor. “So Quinn, tell me, what’s the story with Harper and Aliyah? Why have we not met Harper yet?”

Quinn laughed, “You really are direct, aren’t you? I can tell you they raised me, they’re the kindest, most powerful, and compassionate people I know. I can tell you I would do anything for them. And I can also tell you I love them dearly and wouldn’t ever betray their trust in me by sharing their story without their permission.”

Jimmi was pleased with herself, “So now I know there *is* a story to tell. Can you at least disclose how Aliyah came by those scars? They’re pretty serious.”

Quinn sounded plaintive, “Jimmi please I can’t. I know they want to tell you and they will eventually, you just need to be patient.”

Jimmi was aghast, “I need to be what?”

That brought a smile back to the woefully stressed Quinn. “What was I thinking asking Ke’ala Kekoa to be patient. Jimmi do what you do best, be upset and angry.”

Jimmi reached out and grabbed Quinn’s hand. “You really *are* getting to know me. Now what say we go up to the house and fix some food for our seaweed divers?”

Both women started to head toward the house when Jimmi cried out and collapsed. Before Quinn could help the distressed woman, she too felt a stabbing pain. She gathered all her strength and got Jimmi back in her chair when she cried out again, “Tam, my Tam, no no no, she’s drowning, Tam is drowning.”

Quinn looked out in the water and saw Aliyah struggling with an unconscious Tam. The young woman knew she was not strong enough to swim out and help, all she could do was watch and hope.

o o o o

Daniel pulled out some of Noah’s fermented beverage and the two couples made their way down to the lake to build a fire and continue their conversation. Sophia questioned Maddy. “You haven’t been to Didymo yet have you?”

Maddison seemed reticent. “No, not yet. Zon went with Nadia and Noah. But there is something, I don’t know, just something nagging at me, that it would be bad somehow if I went. I have no idea why or what, but I just can’t get past that.”

Sophia was understanding, “You know I’m a big believer in listening to those little voices in your head. If you ever want to try to explore that I would be happy to---”

Sophia gasped, her muscles tensed, and she fell unconscious. As Maddison and Daniel reached to help her, they both fell to the ground themselves.

Zon attempted to pick up his wife when she began choking and coughing. She clutched her husband’s arm. “Tam, you have to get to Tam.”

Zon refused, “Madds I am not leaving you like this, now let me help you.”

Maddison would not relent, “Please she needs you more than I do, please, please go, I’ll be fine.”

Zon reluctantly ran to his horse, allowing Maddison to focus on helping Sophia and Daniel. Sophia was not moving, Daniel was trying to wake her, but he was suffering himself. “Maddison what’s happening to us? It feels like I got punched in the chest and the wind knocked out of me. My head is pounding, and I can’t think straight. Why is this happening?”

Maddy tried to focus her thoughts and clear her head. She knew this had something to do with the planets, the pain she was feeling was not her own. “Daniel, I need you to search your mind, Gaia speaks to you, is this coming from her?”

He couldn't take his eyes off his immobile wife. Maddison needed to jolt him back. She took him by the arms and forced him to look her in the eye "Damn it Daniel Bentham, if you want to help your wife you have to think! Is this pain from Gaia?"

Daniel shook his head trying to clear the confusion from his mind, but the more he concentrated the greater the pain grew. "Yes, yes it is Gaia but more, it is the people we left there. Oh my god, oh my god they're dead, so many are dead. Maddy how could this happen?"

o o o o

Aliyah was able to get Tam halfway in the boat. She started paddling back to shore dragging the unconscious woman along in the water. On the beach Quinn eased Jimmi into a light sleep to relieve both the pain and her worry about her partner. Quinn was trying to cope with the ache she was experiencing.

She started swimming out to meet Aliyah when she heard Zon riding up. He told her to wait, he would go out and help. He stripped down and dove in closing the distance between them quickly. He easily laid Tam in the boat and powerfully paddled in. By the time he pulled the craft up the beach Oriana had arrived.

Zon carried Tam up to the others. Quinn instructed him to lay her on her side. Quinn laid her hands on Tam. In moments she began to cough and sputter expelling the water she had inhaled. Oriana verified Aliyah was not injured.

Zon looked at the council member expecting an explanation. “What’s happened Oriana? I left Maddy and Daniel in agony and Sophia unconscious. What’s going on?”

Oriana was anguished, “Nearly 100 lives were taken near one of Gaia’s sacred places, 37 of those were Gaia speakers. Tam, Jimmi and Sophia knew them all. For the others, their connection to Gaia is carrying her pain and suffering to them. They will come back to themselves in time, but the loss will be felt deeply. Quinn, Aliyah we must return to Didymo, Grey Bird is in a bad way.

Zon didn’t understand, “What happened to Grey Bird?”

Oriana’s response was solemn, “Those lives that were lost, they were his people, what was left of his people on Earth, it appears they were all killed. He has not spoken, his heart is broken, he’s lost. The counsel fears for him.”

The group saw Maddison riding toward them. Zon ran to help her dismount her horse. She was still unsteady on her feet. Oriana asked after Sophia, “Is the healer all right?”

Maddy eased her concern, “She is awake and Daniel is with her, the pain continues. Daniel was able to explain to me what has caused this. I contacted Nadia and Noah they will come to stay with Tam and Jimmi.

“Ethan is aware of what’s happened, he will do what he can to help. Anna is caring for Ro, and is sending out a comm message to everyone. Collin and Erin are with

Isabella, she is desolate.” Oriana thanked Maddison for her efforts.

Tam woke and called out for Jimmi. Maddy let her know she was fine. Zon helped ease her into a chair next to her partner.

Oriana approached Tam, she kneeled in the sand next to her. “I know the pain you are in is beyond words, but you are a powerful empath, I have no choice but to ask you to search for the cause of this tragedy. The council will do so as well, but we need all the information we can find, to insure this not happen again.”

Tam sat up and Maddison rushed at Oriana, “What do you mean, how could this happen again? Oriana what’s going on?”

Oriana held up her hands and backed away. “There is not time to explain this now, suffice it to say Earth has become embattled. There are dark forces at work and their focus seems to be those joined to Gaia. Please use your connections to uncover the dangers. Trust that I will tell you everything I know in time.”

Maddison relented, “We do trust you, of course we trust you, you saved us all. Go, do what you need, we’ll search for answers.”

Oriana hugged Maddy, joined Aliyah and Quinn and left. Nadia and Noah rode at speed across the beach. Nadia lept off her horse, “What the hell is going on?”

Chapter 2

Several days of searching for answers brought out information no one could ever have anticipated, or for that matter, dreamed possible.

Gathering at Tam and Jimmi's, the group awaited Oriana's arrival. She had news to share, she did not arrive alone, Aliyah and Quinn were with her.

Jimmi rushed to hug Aliyah, "You dear woman, I didn't get a chance to thank you for saving my Tam."

She perpetrated the same crushing embrace on Quinn, "You too you sweet child, I owe you big time." That brought a smile to those gathered, easing the stress of the impending discussion of serious and dangerous issues.

Maddison, Sophia, Nadia, Anna, Jimmi, Tam and Alexis awaited Oriana's news. "First I want to thank you all for coming. There is much to talk about, please ask questions, or if you have something to add, do so."

Maddison had a question, "How is Grey Bird?"

Oriana's tone held her frustration, "He is better, but he feels his connection to this event leaves him unable to participate, he has sequestered himself, cutting off all contact with anyone, council or other."

Sophia sensed her ire, "You disagree?"

Oriana let loose, “Of course I disagree, he needs to acknowledge and deal with these emotions, I know better than anyone how unpleasant the effects of letting feelings like that fester inside you can be. Especially for someone like that, what did you call him Jimmi, that arrogant giant pigeon?”

Jimmi smiled, “You got it exactly right.”

Oriana continued, “Speaking of Grey Bird he has been told that there are eight of his people that live though they have been taken by those that killed the rest.” That news shocked the group.

Nadia broke the silence, “So you want us to go there and find them?”

Oriana put up her hands trying to pull back the path they were on. “No, no no no, let me start again. We do want you to travel there but for another reason entirely.

“I must start over here. This is what we know for sure. There has been an escalating conflict. It started with the silenced ones. When the fourth world ended, they awoke somehow, but...”

Sophia stood, “Back up, who are the silenced ones?”

Oriana explained, “I’m sorry, it is a term the council uses to describe those who were born to Gaia but through pain, hate, cruelty, or some other method were cut off, silencing Gaia’s voice.”

Maddy understood, “You mean indigenous peoples, like my people. You’re saying these murders were perpetrated by natives?”

Oriana’s exasperation was set free. “Stop, you all need to stop. In the past I have admired your intuitive aggressive leap to action, but please, please let me get it all out before you attack.”

Maddy apologized, “You’re right, I took offense, it is a reaction borne of necessity, from a life of accusation because of the color of my skin.”

Oriana visibly relaxed. “Thank you for those words Maddison, that is at the heart of this tragedy, color. You are aware Gaia speakers are from all races. When the silenced ones woke, they wished to reclaim all that was taken from them.

“Lives filled with, as Maddison explained, accusation, persecution, and overt hatred drove them to want to purge their lands from all that were not like them. The Gaia speakers were cognizant of the issues and were working peacefully to bring them back to her. Then something went terribly wrong.”

Oriana had trouble continuing. She started to shake, Anna and Alexis were able to ease her into a chair. “I’m sorry the pain of loss is still too fresh, as I’m sure it is for all of you.”

Tam went to get some food and tea before they continued, this discussion would be challenging. After

everyone had something to drink and some food in front of them, Jimmi got the ball rolling again, “What was the something terrible that went wrong?”

Oriana smiled at the very direct round woman. “Thank you Ke’ala Kekoa for your clarity and candor. For some, as yet unknown reason, both factions became aggressive and threatening.”

Sophia had trouble believing that. “The Gaia speakers were threatening?”

Oriana recanted, “I’m sorry, no, there are two factions attacking Gaia’s people. There is a military like group made up of people with white skin, they are attacking the silenced ones. For many months the conflict has been with fists and blades, pushing and shoving, verbal assaults.

“Gaia and her people have been mediating the combat, things were resolving. Then suddenly the fear and anger escalated to hate. At the same time the weapons used advanced. Both sides have many guns and explosives, that’s how we lost so many lives in but an instant.”

Sophia stood and spoke for the group. “What can we do to help?”

Oriana smiled at them all. “Thank you, the task the council has given to you, is to convince a young woman to lead the people back to peace and begin again to rebuild their world.”

Maddison spoke up, “And let me guess, Gaia doesn’t speak to her.”

Oriana understood the reference. “Actually, Gaia began speaking to her when she was just a child, she has chosen not to listen. Likely the reason she is unwilling to lead her people.”

That was beyond Maddy’s ken, “I don’t understand, why won’t she speak to Gaia?”

Oriana became cryptic, “That is a story you will need to hear from her. I should warn you she has faced challenges in her life, and it has left her---stubborn, headstrong, willful, tenacious. Pretty much the same qualities of the team I am sending after her.”

Maddison agreed, “And proud of it.”

Sophia addressed Nadia, “You haven’t said anything Nadia, how are you feeling about this?”

Nadia was not paying attention, her mind was far away. “Sorry, I’m fine, ready to go.”

Sophia pushed, “Really, you’re okay with all this, going back to Earth?”

Nadia tried to appear nonchalant, “Sure, why not?”

Oriana joined in, “Nadia Pelayo, tell them now or I swear I will.”

Nadia took offence, “Will you two stop listening to my thoughts!”

Sophia tried to ease the growing tension. “Sorry it’s hard not to, you’re just as jelly in your head as you are out loud.”

Jimmi broke in, “Will someone tell us what’s going on?”

Nadia stood up and took a few deep breaths. “Some of Storm De Wees’s bunkers survived the end of the fourth world. There will likely be people that have been ordered to kill me or worse. And after listening to Oriana analyze what’s happening there, I have no doubt his company and his minions are involved.”

Oriana was curious, “Explain, if you would please.”

Nadia reluctantly quoted her father. “Storm De Wees always said, ‘get your enemies to duke it out among themselves then you can swoop in and take it all.’ You see no matter what, if you go to battle, you will have losses. But when you sit on the sidelines and watch, you are at full strength when the rest are at their weakest.

“As I see this, the Gaia speakers are at the sacred places, power places. They are the strength on the planet. Someone is pushing the other two factions to take that power down, by any means necessary, then destroy each other as well. Leaving the as yet unidentified dark entity to walk in and take it all.” That left the group speechless.

Maddison tried to bring them all back to the task at hand. "Where will we be going?"

Oriana was happy about the change of subject. "Maddy you Sophia, Quinn, Nadia, and Aliyah will be starting at a place called Madeline Island in Lake Superior."

That took Maddison by surprise. "Lake Superior is a lake again?"

Oriana was pleased to report the lake was restored at the coming of the fifth world. She continued with her assignments. "The council is asking you Tamara Akana and you Ke'ala Kekoa to return to Oahu Hawai'i. There is a struggle there over the telescopes and the sacred places.

"It is becoming embattled and needs your knowledge and wisdom. Anna and Alexis Prasana, your support and strength are required there as well. Please know none of you are obligated to do this. It will not be easy for any of you, Nadia your struggles are obvious, Sophia you will have challenges you may not expect."

Sophia was surprised, "I don't understand."

Maddy did, "You're white, you and Nadia will be at risk with many of the people we will be encountering. We will have to be extra vigilant to keep you safe."

The discussion and revelations had left them weary. Oriana knew it was time to let all this information sink in. "I will return Quinn and Aliyah to Didymo. You can all take

the time you need to decide if you are willing to take on this responsibility.”

Jimmi laughed out loud, “Do you think there is any way we will be stopped from helping. There is no decision to be made, we are in, all in. Give us some time to formulate a plan. Please bring Quinn and Aliyah back here tomorrow so we can get to work. Now off you go.”

o o o o

Zon continued to pace in the kitchen while Maddison put Katie to bed. She quietly closed the door and returned to the table, pouring herself a cup of tea she sat watching her husband, waiting.

He finally spoke, “I can’t say I’m happy about this Madds. You know what you said about Nadia and Storm’s people, you were a pretty big thorn in his side too. There may be a price on your head as well.

“There are so many actions that could take this thing sideways. Maddison you know I support you in whatever you do, but I’m having trouble sending you in to the lion’s den without me.”

Maddy took a long pull off her tea and looked her husband in the eye. “I’m frightened too. I think we all are, but this really isn’t a choice. If we do nothing, they will kill Gaia’s people, take the sacred places, and Gaia will fall. If we’ve learned one thing from Storm De Wees it’s that nothing is ever enough, they will be back here again.”

Zon was resigned, “I know, I know. Just remember you promised you would always come back to me. I’m going to hold you to that woman. Say, you were an attorney maybe we should put that in writing, you know just in case you try to wriggle out of it.” Maddison hugged her husband.

o o o o

Noah was ranting, “I can’t believe what I’m hearing. You’re walking onto a battlefield, both sides armed with weapons, while Storms acolytes stand on the sidelines waiting to do god knows what to you. Is that what you’re saying?”

Nadia smiled, “Yeah, pretty much.”

Her casual demeanor did nothing to calm her husband. “Damn it Nadia this is crazy, seriously crazy. I can’t believe you’re considering doing this. No, I take that back I *can* believe you’re doing this. What I can’t believe is you’re asking *me* to agree to it.”

Neither of them spoke for some time. Noah put some more wood on the fire. Nadia set a pot on to boil. They both sat in silence staring at the flames. Nadia was the one to break the stillness. “I won’t do this if you don’t approve. I can’t be out there knowing how you feel. My mind would be back here putting me even more at risk.”

Noah stood up and looked at his wife. “You Pelayo women are a manipulative bunch, aren’t you?”

He stood Nadia up and enfolded her in his arms. “You go, do what you have to do. I’ll be here when you get back, but you owe me woman. I’m going to expect some extended alone time, just you and me, no adventures for a while.”

Nadia leaned into the embrace, “I promise, just the two of us.”

o o o o

Anna set dinner on the table and gave Alexis a nod to go ahead. “Mom and I wanted to talk to you both about something.”

Ro smiled, “We are more than aware of what’s going on here. Caleb and I talk too, you know. We can both tell when something is afoot. You two are not as hard to read as you might think.”

Anna laughed, “So mister powerful shaman man, what do you think is going on?”

Ro winked at Caleb, “The council wants you to help with the situation on Gaia and it will be fraught with danger. You will likely be asked to put yourselves in harm’s way and you want our blessing to go?”

Both men folded their arms, sat back in their chairs and smiled at each other. Anna could not help but laugh. “You look pretty proud of yourselves. Is there anything you have to say about our plans?”

Caleb took the lead. “We both knew what we were doing when we got involved with Prasana women. We have actually started a support group with Noah, Zon and Daniel, they suffer too with women that will not stand down.

“There is no stopping any of you. So why don’t you just tell us what the plan is, at least we can weigh in with thoughts and suggestions.”

Alexis took Caleb’s hand, “First and foremost you need to take care of Finn till I get back.”

o o o o

Ziv jumped up in Sophia’s lap as Daniel tried to wrap his head around the news that his wife was returning to Earth. “You’re serious about this? You have no trepidation about the fact that the color of your skin makes you a target?

“I know you’ve dealt with prejudice over your healing abilities, but woman, this is something you have never experienced.”

Sophia’s own worry could be heard in her answer. “I know, I talked to Maddison to try to fathom the reason or purpose for those feelings. She explained they are beyond both reason and purpose, it is fear turned to hate.

“There’s no meaning no justification for such behavior. No matter my trepidation, my skills and abilities will be essential. I have to go.”

Daniel agreed, “I know you do, and I support you in that, but you’re going to have to explain it to her.” Daniel pointed to the wolf dog sitting on her lap.

o o o o

Tam walked out of the water up the beach. She wrapped a towel around herself and sat in a chair beside her partner. Both of them just stared out over their calm little bay. Jimmi spoke without taking her eyes off the horizon. “Are you worried about returning there?”

Tam smiled, “You didn’t say home, you said there.”

Jimmi was calm, “This, this is our home, there is no doubt about that. Things there will not be at all what we remember, and there’s no telling what the people will be like. They’re under attack, that can change a person.”

Tam reminded her partner, “My love, we have been under attack more than once and we are still the wonderful women we always were.”

Jimmi took Tam’s hand, “Indeed.”

o o o o

Harper was trying to talk sense into the two women in front of her. “You know I love you both and want you to have all the freedoms you deserve, but this, seriously? You have no responsibility to this planet Earth.

“You have both lived your lives here on this world, as have I. Our ancestors may have come from there, but you owe the people there nothing.”

Aliyah stood in front of her escalating partner, “It’s not just us, *you* are part of this, we’ll need you to be our lifeline, our way to keep the council abreast of our progress. You, my dear, will be with us every step of the way.”

Harper capitulated, “Fine, I’m in, not happy, but I’m in.”

Quinn smiled at them both and broached a new subject. “You two are going to have to think about sharing your story, maybe not with everyone on Adelphi, but Tam and Jimmi at least.

“They’re asking more and more questions that I can’t answer. And if Harper is going to be our connection here, the questions will intensify. I love you both and I know those on Adelphi do as well, they deserve to know.”

Aliyah was thoughtful, “I agree, but I’m not able to do it, perhaps Quinn you might do that for us?”

Quinn hugged them both, “It would be my honor.”

Chapter 3

Oriana looked upon the women gathered before her. “This is brave of you all. I can’t imagine it was easy convincing those who love you to let you take this journey. I am going to assume you are ready, but we have to wait for two more that are joining us.”

Maddison was confused, “There are others coming?”

Oriana could not help but smile. “Indeed, they were both adamant they accompany you, to keep you all safe. The council agreed.”

The congregation watched as Caleb rode up followed by Finn running alongside. Daniel was riding with Ziv sitting behind him on a pad. Both wolf dogs joined the women, sitting, prepared for their adventure.

Oriana was satisfied, “*Now* we are ready. I will take Tam’s team first. You will be going to an observatory on Oahu where there is to be a conclave of differing factions soon. You will have time to engage all parties. Tamara Akana you are a powerful empath, I will be able to hear you, just call out if you need help.

“Your communication devices will keep you in contact with all your people on Earth. Please stay safe, do not risk yourselves. This world needs you too.” Oriana waved her hands, and they were gone.

o o o o

Jimmi gasped as they arrived at the place she had known so well. The damage to the buildings was dramatic, as was the dearth of trees or any sign of life. Oriana apologized to the shocked woman, "I'm sorry there was no way I could prepare you, remember this land is experiencing a new beginning, the winds and rain washed it clean. What was, is no more, see this world with better eyes and an open heart."

Jimmi looked at her, "And a new hope?"

Oriana embraced her, "Indeed Ke'ala Kekoa, indeed." Oriana waved her hands, and she was gone.

She returned to Maddison's team. "I will remind you the woman you seek is painfully strong willed, she will resist, well, everything. I have no idea how you will cajole her into stepping up to lead her people, but if anyone can do it, I know it is you. I will caution you Nadia Pelayo she can yell louder and longer than you."

Quinn enjoyed that, "I had no idea that was possible, this is some woman you are sending us to see."

Oriana took a serious tone, "You will have to go carefully, this life has not been kind to her. Thus, the walls she has constructed to protect herself are thick and strong."

Sophia heard the warning, "We have dealt with such souls before. I promise you we will not cause her any further pain, thank you for letting us know."

Oriana was again assured these were the right people for the task. “Harper is a powerful empath, she and Aliyah’s connection is strong, so she will be with you on this journey. If there is any fear or danger she will know, and I will come for you.

“Your communication devices will serve to keep you in touch with all your people on Earth. You must keep safe. This world and her people need you to return.” Oriana waved her hands and transported them to the shore of Lake Superior on Madeline Island.

Maddison was in awe, she had trouble catching her breath, her eyes teared, “It’s beautiful.” The last time she saw the Great Lake it was nearly empty, nothing more than a huge hole in the ground. “This exceeds my wildest dreams, I never imagined this was possible.”

Oriana was circumspect, “I am happy you are pleased with the changes, not all will gladden you, be prepared for that. The woman you seek lives near here. Her name is Bizaan Ayaa Wolf. Anyone you ask will know where to find her. The council’s hopes are with you.” And Oriana was gone.

Maddison was having trouble dragging herself away from the lake, she was drawn to the power of the waters. Reluctantly she followed the others up the beach toward the homes. They found several people walking down the road.

Quinn approached them asking if they knew where to find Bizaan Aya Wolf. They directed the troop up the hill to a large home with a beautiful view of the lake.

When they arrived, they found a young woman splitting wood with a large maul. Her hair was contained under a bandana keeping it out of her way, her clothes were torn and well-worn from hard work.

Her attire did not enhance, nor did it hide the fact that she was beautiful and fit. She was powerful and skilled. Each swing hit its mark with force.

Maddison walked closer keeping clear of the maul. "Bizaan Aya Wolf, we would like to speak to you."

Without turning around, she answered them. "I have no intention of getting involved in any of this again, you agreed to all the terms yesterday. If you've already broken it, you can figure out how to solve your own problems. I'm out."

Maddison persevered, "That's not why we've come, please will you just speak with us?"

She spun around throwing the maul up on her shoulder. Her face showed that she had been punched, she had a nasty black eye with a few stitches in her brow. "So why exactly *have* you come?"

Maddison stepped closer, "Just to talk, is there a place we can sit and chat?"

Bizaan Ayaa chortled, “Chat, you want to chat? I have work to do here, be on your way.”

Quinn picked up an axe laying by the pile of wood. “Let us help you get this done and then we can sit and explain why we’re here.” She returned to her work and the others joined her.

When the final piece was split, they started gathering it up, each of them followed her up to the house. They were surprised when she knocked on the door. An older woman came out, “Bizaan Ayaa you have helpers with you, who are they all?”

She turned to them, “I have no idea, they just showed up, they want something from me.”

Sophia spoke up, “We are just visitors, we need Bizaan Ayaa’s help.”

The old woman stepped out on the porch, “Sophia, Sophia Bentham is that you?”

Sophia was shocked, “I am Sophia. Do I know you?”

The woman smiled and clapped her hands, “I am Winona, Winona Red Eagle. I would know that Welsh accent anywhere.”

Sophia ran to hug the old woman, “I am honored to meet you in person. I have loved listening to your stories for years. You have been such an inspiration in my life. I can’t believe I’m here with you.”

Aliyah stepped up, “Perhaps you would like to introduce us?”

Sophia was startled back to the present. “Sorry, sorry, it is just so amazing. Winona, these are my dear friends, Maddison Bear’s Heart, Aliyah Pierro, Nadia Pelayo, and Quinn Courage Bear. I want you to meet the most incredible woman, Winona Red Eagle. We have spoken for decades through Gaia.”

The wolf dog ran up on the porch and sat next to Sophia. Winona knelt down and embraced the beast. “So that means you are the infamous Ziv, it is an honor to meet you.” Ziv wrapped her front legs around the tiny woman.

Winona opened the door, “Once the wood is stacked you must all come in for tea and cookies.” Bizaan Ayaa showed them where to pile the firewood. She over saw their work, insuring it was stacked safely and securely so it would be easy for Winona to get to.

By the time they finished, Winona had set out sweets and tea for them all. Once they found a place to sit, Winona addressed the group. “What is it that you need from Bizaan Ayaa, it must be important, I know you have come a very long way. Unfortunately, whatever it is, she will say no, she is a painfully contrary woman.”

That got Bizaan Ayaa’s ire up, “You are not so easy to get along with either old woman.”

Winona’s assertion was verified, “What did I tell you? Disrespects her elders.”

Maddy stood up and tried to rein the situation in, “Can I ask how you two know each other?”

Winona complied, “I took Bizaan Ayaa and her sister in when they were younger, in their teens. Their parents chose a different life and the girls wished to be close to the Lake. We did not live on the island then, we were forbidden.

“When the water was sold and the lake gone, the houses here were abandoned. We were able to move back. My sweet Bizaan Ayaa has taken care of me and the other elders on the island.”

The troop was impressed. As Oriana had told them, there was more to discover about this woman. Maddison continued to engage Winona. It would be easier to learn about Bizaan Ayaa through her. “We have heard there are factions in conflict over the lands here. Is that true?”

Winona was happy to share, “Not since the day before yesterday. My Biza brokered an agreement between them all. She was amazing, they listened because she speaks from her heart, she speaks only the truth, and she holds nothing back.

“It doesn’t hurt that she can shout over them all, she does need to learn to duck better though, she tried to break up a fight and got walloped.”

Bizaan Ayaa stood up, “No more talk till I know who sent you.”

Quinn offered an answer, “Gaia.”

That started a rant, “Are you serious? You can leave right now, she is at the heart of every bad thing that has ever happened in my life, just go, get out.”

Winona took the young woman to task. “First, this is my house, you don’t give the orders here. Second you will respect these women, they have put themselves in harm’s way to come here.

“Lastly and most importantly you know in your heart you want to hear them out. Now sit back down, drink your tea and listen for a change.”

Winona extended her hand to Maddy to continue. “Bizaan Ayaa it is very simple, we have come to ask you to do what you did here, mediate, just on a larger scale.”

Biza looked around the room, “You’re going to have to explain that.”

Maddy hesitated, “We want you to lead all the peoples of this continent, to stop the fighting.”

Biza’s yelling ability came to the fore. “Are you insane? I’m nobody. I have no desire to lead anyone, ever. I just want to be left alone. Why would you think I could ever do something like that? Where are you from anyway that you would come here to me?”

Winona stood up and hugged the young woman. She turned to Maddison, “You need to tell her, tell her everything, she deserves that.”

Sophia walked to Bizaan Ayaa. “I am a healer, if you will allow me, I can ease your anxiety.”

Biza nodded. Sophia took her hands, the young woman visibly relaxed. Sophia settled her back into a chair. “We have come from another world. The council of elders sent us. We know this is a lot to take in, but there’s an urgency here, your people and Gaia need you.”

Biza quickly escalated again, “Seriously, they need me? Where were they when I needed them?”

Winona weighed in again, “My great great Grandmother was called on to lead her...”

Biza was beside herself, “Not this again, your name’s sake Winona, the great woman that returned lost lands, empowered her people, fought the oil industry, brought strength and a voice to women, she was a hero. I’m not like her, I’m nothing, I couldn’t even save my si...”

Bizaan Ayaa ran from the house. Quinn tried to follow but Winona stopped her, “Let her go child, she needs some time to take all this in.”

Nadia approached the old woman, “We’re going to need your help understanding Biza and how best we can convince her to do this.”

Winona stared at Nadia. “You, you’re Teresa’s daughter are you not?” Naida nodded.

Winona embraced her, “I am so sorry for what happened to your mother, she loved you dearly.” Nadia thanked her and asked her to share what she knew of Biza.

Winona poured more tea and sat down, “I can only tell you what I know, there is much that woman has kept to herself. She and her little sister Dakaasin were bonded to Gaia from the day they were born. Unfortunately, their parents wanted nothing to do with our people, our language, or our culture.

“They didn’t want to just separate themselves from their origins they wanted to shed who they were. It didn’t help that their daughters spoke to the planet. Biza learned to keep the voice to herself.

“Dakaasin couldn’t, that child was the personification of pure joy, when she talked about Gaia she sparkled. She shared her connection with anyone that would listen. Her mother would not allow that, sent her to some institution to get her to stop.

“I don’t know what they did to that poor innocent girl, if they beat her or drugged her or tortured her, but when she came home, she was empty, a shell. They tore her heart and soul from her.

“It broke Biza to see what happened to her sister. From that day she became mother and father to that child. When their parents wanted to move away Biza refused to go and she wouldn’t let them take Dakaasin, that’s when they came to live with me.”

Sophia interrupted, “Perhaps we could take a break and let us deal with what you have told us so far.” Winona looked around at the women sitting in her living room seeing all were shaken and teary. She poured tea and offered more sweets.

Sophia asked a more innocuous question to ease them back into the challenging life of Biza. “It seems strange to me that their mother would give them native names if she wanted to hide her own origins.”

Winona agreed, “You’re right, she called them Betty and Darcy, Gaia named them Bizaan Ayaa and Dakaasin. It is what we have always known them as and how they identified themselves.” Maddison saw everyone had calmed a bit so encouraged her to continue.

Winona took a deep breath, “Biza was in high school, she worked full time too, she wanted to pay her own way. She would come home after midnight, the first thing she did was check on her sister.

“One night I heard a terrifying scream. I found Biza holding the bloodied body of her sister. She had taken her own life. Part of Biza died that day too. I think Dakaasin said something to her, but she would never say.” Maddison walked out of the house, Sophia followed her.

Maddy stood at the edge of the yard looking out over the lake, Sophia stood next to her. Maddison’s voice was subdued, “I can’t do this, I have to go home, I’m sorry.”

Sophia was silent. Maddy continued, “We can’t stop them, there’s no way. What Dakaasin endured is not rare or even uncommon for my people, just hearing her story brought it all back.

“Native populations have suffered for centuries at the hands of power, usually wielded by white men. They were either beaten down and endured a life undone with their culture and language taken from them, or they gave up and took their own lives.

“It’s easy to see how someone could spark that hatred, driving them to want to do battle to recover what’s theirs. At this moment I could be pushed. Sophia I am so angry, look I’m shaking.” Maddison held out her hands, pulling them into fists trying to get herself under control.

Sophia spoke softly, “I’ll get Aliyah to contact Harper for you, if you’re sure that’s what you want. You might consider Oriana knew Biza’s story and still she thought it was important for you to come here. Perhaps she thought your experiences would make you the best suited for this mission, just saying.”

Maddison turned and walked back to the house, “I love you Sophia but at this moment I hate that you’re right.”

Before they made it back to the house Bizaan Ayaa came running up to them. “You, you said you’re a healer? I need you to come with me, now, hurry.”

Maddison called to the others and followed Sophia and Biza as they ran down the road. Biza led them to a home

closer to the shore. She ran inside and stood over an unconscious elderly man that appeared to have fallen. His head was bleeding, and he was in a very awkward position.

Sophia did not hesitate. She knelt next to him and laid her hands on. Biza was beside herself, “Well, can you help him? How bad is it? Do something, you have to do something.”

Maddison pulled the hysterical woman outside, “You have to let the healer work, she can’t do what she needs to and answer your questions. Can you tell me what happened?”

Biza was shivering, near to shock, “I just came to check on him. I usually fix him some food, he forgets to eat. When he didn’t answer the door, I went in and found him like that. He refuses to use his cane, foolish old man.”

Maddison tried to keep her talking, “What’s his name.”

Biza was losing focus, “Ahmik, Ahmik Feather. He is a, he’s a...” Biza’s knees gave way just as Quinn arrived, she and Maddy eased the wobbly woman to the ground.

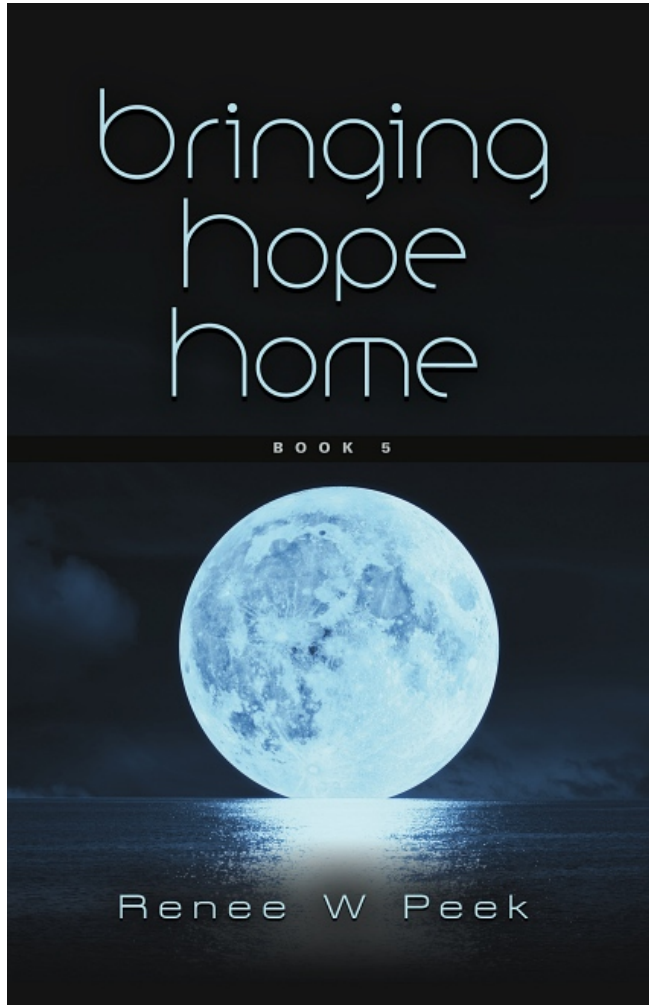
Maddison encouraged her to take deep breaths, Quinn found some blankets in the house to keep her warm. Sophia came out a few minutes later. Biza tried to get up, but her legs refused to cooperate.

The healer directed Quinn and Maddy to bring her inside. Sophia and Aliyah had moved Ahmik to his bed, so they

placed Biza on the couch. Aliyah handed her some water. She was able to stop shaking and take a few sips.

Sophia sat on a table in front of her and took Biza's hands. She let her head fall back. Everyone watched as Biza drifted off to sleep.

Quinn stood up and looked at the group, "So how do you think this is going so far?"



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