

CHAPTER 3

THE AGREEMENT

Nico and Maddie trekked through the space station and crawled over every inch of it. His parents had just ... vanished. Where could they be? Nico was beginning to worry, and Maddie wasn't very good company. She was tight-lipped and focused. All she wanted to talk about was finding Nico's father, Nicodemus. She opened up a bit once they found a working automated meal machine, but he could only glean that she came from a planet named Elvendish and was an only child. She had to be an elf. He was sure of it. Though they were vastly different in disposition, her being an only child comforted him. At least they had that in common.

Entering his room, Nico flopped on his bed. Exhausted, his stomach tightened into a knot. *Where could my parents be?* They had never left him before. He peeked over at Maddie, who was standing near the window. Something about her eased his mind. He sat up, realizing he hadn't checked his parents' bedroom. He slapped his forehead.

That's where they were. That's where they had to be. Why hadn't he looked earlier? He would feel very silly when he opened their door to find them napping or working on some project.

Sheepishly, he mentioned it to Maddie, and her face reddened. She mumbled a few things under her breath, stating he was an idiot.

Standing at his parents' door, he knocked. Nothing. He knocked again with the same result.

"Oh, just open it, will you?" Maddie exclaimed, manipulating the door controls.

They wouldn't budge. She tried pushing them open.

"That's not going to do you much good. They're hydraulically sealed."

"Well then, what do you suppose we should do? What if your parents are dead in there?"

Nico's felt the color drain from his face.

Maddie's face went somber. "I'm sorry. I ... didn't mean that. I'm sure they're fine."

Nico ran out of the room, turned a corner, and grabbed a small leather bag. He bolted back in, finding Maddie had flopped onto a nearby chair, biting her lip. Unzipping the bag, he extracted a small screwdriver and dismantled the door controls.

"What are you doing?" Maddie jumped up and marched over.

Nico didn't say a word. He popped open the control's faceplate, and within seconds, the door whipped open with a deafening sucking sound. The force violently pulled Nico into the room. A gaping, jagged hole replaced what once was a wall. Darkness and stars beckoned him to join them. Nico hung onto the door jamb, screaming. Maddie jumped at the doorway, her body weight propelled by the rush of exiting air. She landed, feet planted on either side of the door, straddling the opening. Maddie reached down and pulled Nico toward her.

"Close the door!"

Parts of the room dislodged and flew toward the vacuum created by the gigantic hole. Maddie was in a full squat, holding Nico at the waist just outside the doorway. Nico scrambled to reverse what he had done. The screwdriver was long gone by now, sucked into space. He searched for something to work with.

Realizing he had nothing but himself, he pulled the panel wires up to his teeth and used them like scissors to snip two of the wires. He frantically stripped them and then twisted them together. The door slammed shut, and both Nico and Maddie crashed to the floor.

“What in Tameria’s garden were you thinking?” Maddie railed.

Nico rubbed his head, trying to figure out what had happened.

“You could have killed us,” Maddie continued. “Don’t go opening locked doors in a space station.”

“You’re telling me you knew that would happen? It was your idea to figure out how to open the door!” Nico was getting more comfortable with his new visitor, and her pompous attitude was wearing on him.

Maddie crossed her arms. “Of course, I knew that. We’re on a space station, and your parents are missing. It only makes sense they were lost in space. And I didn’t tell you to open the door.”

Nico froze. Until that moment, he hadn’t put two and two together. His parents had been sucked out.

Maddie stood as Nico went catatonic, like a wax dummy. She bit her lip, and her eyebrows raised. “I mean, I knew there was a breach in one of the walls. Maybe your parents are outside repairing the damage.” She grabbed Nico’s hand. “Let’s go have a look. I have an extra suit in my spacecraft.”

Nico tugged away. “No, thanks. I have my own, thank you very much.”

“Well then, let’s grab it.” Her response was snappy and quick. “Where’s the nearest access to spacewalk? I need to find Nicodemus.”

“Ugh ... why is it so important to find my dad?”

“That’s my business. Look at it this way. You figure out where he is, and I get to ask him my questions. Let’s stop this bickering and work together. Deal?” She extended her hand.

Nico squinted his eyes, not exactly trusting her, but

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something about the events so far told him he needed her. A growing feeling inside him told him they were more connected than either of them realized. He grabbed her hand. “Deal.”