

“Do you think this is real wind, or do you think they manufacture it?” Imogene tossed off. She watched the fabric bob up and down against her body.

“I don’t know, ma’am. How does real wind work?” Myrra asked. This wasn’t what they were supposed to be talking about right now. Imogene’s voice didn’t sound like she was sleepwalking, but could she be sleepwalking?

“I don’t know, actually.” Strange, to hear Imogene say, “I don’t know.”

“Something to do with changes in air pressure,” she continued. “Maybe the world is big enough to create wind on its own.” She let out a single short laugh. “But that’s the problem, isn’t it? We all call this a world. It’s a ship.”

“There’s lots of ways to make a world. This is a world,” Myrra replied. Don’t contradict her, she thought. No telling what might set her off. Just get Charlotte.

Imogene rolled her eyes skyward. “Fine, it’s a world. You know it was Marcus’s firm that came up with the terminology, back when our ancestors boarded? There was a whole PR campaign. As per usual, it was the workforce that really took the bait.”

Bitch. Myrra couldn’t help the word popping into her head. Imogene tossed out small insulting barbs to Myrra out of habit, but now was not the time.

“I would have liked to feel real earth under my feet,” Imogene said.

“We will.”

“No, we won’t.”

Myrra didn’t know what that meant or why Imogene would insinuate such a thing. At the mention of it, Myrra felt a different kind of fear, something larger and vaguer than the fear she had for Charlotte. Maybe Imogene was trying to belittle her again. She just wanted to frighten her. Only Imogene would have the balls to talk like this while also threatening to throw herself off a building. If that was what she was doing. Myrra was usually able to navigate tense situations, but here she was at a loss.

“I hate to involve you in this at all, really, but . . . well, I know I’m making the right decision here, I really do. I feel at peace with the whole thing.” With one hand, Imogene briefly touched the side of her head to check that her hair was in place. Her calm was slipping; her eyes kept darting between Myrra, Charlotte, and the drop. She might actually jump,

Myrra realized. Imogene was afraid. Myrra dared a few more steps forward.

“But when I came up here, I—well, it’s the baby... I can’t do this with the baby. It’s stupid, really, but I don’t think I have the stomach for it.”

“Not stupid,” Myrra said. She inched closer to Imogene, close enough to brush her skirt. “Can I... can I hold Charlotte for you?”

She stretched her arms up. Imogene pulled Charlotte away reflexively, and Myrra flinched at how close she was to the edge. She froze, kept her arms aloft, and prayed that Imogene would meet her halfway. Imogene let out a small sigh, and her shoulders slumped.

“Yes, yes, you see, that’s why I called you up here. I need some- one to take the baby. I’m so glad you took my meaning—I know it’s hard for you sometimes.” Myrra clenched her teeth, resisted the urge to snap something at her. She was about to throw herself off a building, for God’s sake.

Uncharacteristically, one of Imogene’s manicured hands flew to her mouth, and her eyes widened with guilt. She stood silent for a second. Myrra could tell she was choosing her next words with care.

“I apologize,” Imogene said. Unheard of, to hear Imogene say, “I apologize.” Myrra fought the urge to empathize with Imogene. She’d been burned by that feeling before.

“Will you please take Charlotte for me? I can’t jump if I’m holding her, and I don’t want to leave her out here in the cold—” Imogene crouched on the balls of her feet, lowering Charlotte. Without another word Myrra closed the gap between them, and gathered the baby in her arms. Imogene let out a small animal-like cry upon releasing her.

A wave of relief engulfed Myrra. Charlotte was safe, still sleep- ing, nuzzling her head against Myrra’s chest, completely unaware of the peril she’d been in. Myrra turned her energy back to Imo- gene. Now to get Charlotte’s mother down, if she could.

“Ma’am,” Myrra ventured, “maybe if you came down and talked about it, we could figure something out—”

“Stop playing therapist, Myrra, you’re not at all subtle,” Imo- gene snapped, then looked guilty again. Myrra wasn’t used to Imogene looking so regretful.

“Look, Myrra—I’m sorry. I know I’ve put you in a terrible position. I just—I don’t know how to handle this,” Imogene con- tinued, changing her tone. “You’re probably smarter than I give you credit for. You must know—you must have sensed that some- thing is going wrong.”

“I know you and Mr. Carlyle have been having some trouble—” Imogene cut her off. “It’s nothing to do with that. My God, the idea that Marcus would ever drive me to—” Imogene let out a short laugh, then her face crumpled. She was crying. It was hard to track her ping-ponging emotions. “Honestly, if I were less of a coward, I’d take Charlotte with me. It’s cruel, leaving her to suffer.”

Myrra didn’t know what to say to her. She felt small and insignificant and confused. Something was happening here that she wasn’t grasping. She clutched Charlotte tighter, as though she would anchor Myrra in some way.

“Please come down,” Myrra said, her voice sounding higher than she wanted it to. A cold wind streamed up Myrra’s robe, flowing between her legs and around her belly.

“I can’t,” Imogene said through tears. She was still crouched, her eyes drilling into Myrra’s. “I don’t have it in me, to see what comes next. If we’re going to die, I want to go out on my own terms.”

Myrra stared back at her, uncomprehending. These are ravings, she thought; she’s snapped, we need to get Imogene to a hospital. And then, one horrible, insidious idea: What if something terrible was coming? What if Imogene was talking sense?

“Surely you must have noticed something’s wrong,” Imogene repeated. Her voice sounded distant.

A slideshow flitted through Myrra’s unwilling brain: the past twelve months, men from Parliament rushing in and out late at night. Every time they’d handed their coats and hats into Myrra’s waiting arms, she could smell the flop sweat and fear on them. She’d talked herself into thinking that it was all to do with the next election, but now that she thought about it again, that didn’t make much sense. They’d never looked that scared before.

“What’s wrong?” Myrra asked, almost to herself.

Meetings at all hours, shouting through the wall, then whispers so soft that Myrra couldn’t make out a syllable even with her head flush against the crack in the door. Scientists and physicists over for tea, with red puffy eyes and wheezing breaths behind loosened ties. Marcus’s desperate clutching, the violent downward-sloping charts littering his desk. What Myrra read when she practiced her reading: “Surface Stability.” “Hull Integrity Patterns.” “Oxygen Depletion Reports.”

There had been another earthquake last week. Myrra had panicked at the time, not over the shaking but because she had been cleaning crystal stemware; she'd desperately dashed around the table, arms and fingers splaying out in all directions like a juggler's, trying to catch each piece before it fell and shattered. It was the third earthquake in a month. The seismic reports said that they were only supposed to happen when the world passed certain gas pockets in space or came too close to a star. Something had changed.

The wind's icy fingers slid across her skin again. She started shaking. It was so cold. She wanted to believe that she was scared because of Imogene standing on the wall, scared because she'd almost taken Charlotte with her, but there was another reason to be scared.

Something was wrong with the world. The ship. The world.