



Epilogue

BLAKE LAY WITHOUT MOVING, LISTENING to the gentle splash of waves on the beach. Since taking up residence in the Bahamas, he'd been waking every morning at dawn. *Nice of Matlock to loan us this island*, he thought, not for the first time. "Stay as long as you want—a year, ten years, I don't care. I never use it," Matlock had said with a wave of his hand. "Besides, it's about time my security force down there earned their salary."

Blake's thoughts floated to the day's projects. After a lengthy discussion, he'd finally persuaded Matlock to launch a not-for-profit company that would license his quantum communication technology and then use the revenues to support scientific research. He had some fresh ideas for refining the device that he wanted to explore before lunch. Then there were e-mails he needed to respond to, plus a Skype media interview that afternoon, hopefully followed by a run on the beach. That evening he was sitting in on guitar with the local ripsaw group at an outdoor bar across the channel, and tomorrow Blue and Caroline were arriving for a week's stay in one of the guest cottages. Serena had also said something about Nell and Henry visiting later in the month—for a "spiritual retreat," whatever that meant.

His attention was diverted by the smells coming from the kitchen: Bacon, toast, eggs and freshly brewed coffee.

"Still in bed? You'd make one pitiful soldier!"

“Thank God for that!” said Blake. He turned to look at Serena standing in the doorway. “Do we have a few minutes before breakfast?” He patted the mattress invitingly.

“Have you already forgotten our conversation?” Serena folded her arms. “I told you when I agreed to set up house with you, I’m not one of your rock-and-roll nymphos or cradle-robbing Russian professors. If we’re going to have a non-sexist, non-manipulative relationship, that means intimacy takes place on a case-by-case basis.”

“When can I present my next case, your honor?”

She rolled her eyes. “Maybe after lunch. Now stop acting like a frat boy. You have responsibilities.”

As she spoke, Blake moved to a desk by the window and began reading from the computer screen. “Two weeks since Fish took his oath of office, and things are already going to hell,” he announced. “Yesterday, the Senate had to stay in session past midnight to pass the new legislation repealing the Rock Ban. The Republicans kept threatening to filibuster but the public pressure was too great, so a bunch of them finally caved.”

“That’s good, isn’t it?” said Serena. “You’ll be free to go home.”

“Sure. But it’s going to be like this every step of the way,” Blake said, shaking his head. “The Republicans are already saying that Fish’s election was a fluke. Passing his economic justice package is going to be an all-out battle.”

“He said, living free on a billionaire’s island,” snorted Serena. “Anyway, what about the Boundary Water Commission? That should help the progressive agenda.”

“Except now the Republicans are trying to walk back the whole scandal. The latest story they’re peddling is that Rogers was on the CIA payroll, giving us information about other terrorist groups—and that the nuclear attack scheme was a reverse sting operation gone wrong.”

“It’s a long fight,” said Serena, walking back to the kitchen. “Nothing changes overnight.”

“At least they aren’t trying to get rid of the UZ anymore,” Blake called after her. “Can you imagine the Zone with no blackout, no IDs—and no walls?” His mind wandered to his buried trove of records

in La Jolla, and the plastic-wrapped package in the desert. *Some day soon...*

“That’s right,” Serena’s voice piped up. “In fact, when you get down to it, it won’t even be the UZ anymore.”

“Hmm. I hadn’t thought of it that way.”

Pulling on a pair of pants, Blake walked to the front door and looked out at the ocean, framed by a grove of palms. Serena had a point: What would become of the Kidz and the Tangles and the rest of them, now that the Rock Ban was lifted and there was no need for channelers anymore? It was hard to envision.

“So if we can’t believe in radical change, what *can* we believe in?” he asked.

Serena came to stand next to him. “Empathy...communication... the emotional connection between human beings,” she said, slipping her hand into his. “And probably some other things I’m forgetting.” Looking toward the dining alcove, Blake saw that she’d placed the eggs and bacon under covered warming dishes. Still holding his hand, Serena began to tug him toward the bedroom.

“But I thought...” he began.

“I changed my mind,” said Serena, shaking her head in exasperation. “Haven’t you heard? It’s a bodyguard’s prerogative.”



“Thank you so much for this wonderful sendoff,” said the man at the podium. “The opportunity to serve as our nation’s Director of Homeland Security for the past seven and a half years has been the most singular experience, and honor, of my life. After this week, however, the only security I’ll be directing is that of my own home—something my wife is definitely *not* looking forward to...”

As laughter washed across the banquet hall, Smyth drifted to the back of the room. Glancing around to make sure no one was looking, he slipped through the door into the hotel foyer, then turned and headed for the circular bar at the end of the lobby.

“Chivas on the rocks,” he told the bartender, settling into one of the wicker-backed stools.