

Portal

Somehow, the local governing arm of Great Britain had avoided the urban sprawl in this pasture that had taken over most parts of the rest of the world. Brown, ankle high grass waved in the wind around the stone structures that had stood undisturbed in this spot for thousands of years. The archways and columns stood like giants over the group of people gathered in their center. The bustling noise from the nearby city was non-existent in this sacred place.

Gayle wondered how the stones had stood so long and so strong. She understood why Stonehenge was held in such high esteem. There was an electric, spiritual feeling in the air. A power she couldn't name or identify held sway here. She could see that the rest of her core crew felt it too.

A hand took her own gently. Gayle looked to Cooper and smiled. In the week since they'd helped the Gate Keepers retrieve the final piece of the artifact, they'd had a lot of time to talk and plan for their future. The government had been reconstituted, partly with the old senators, partly with new ones, and order was being restored to the United States proper. The military had been recalled to protect the borders and political envoys had been sent to China to work out a truce. It appeared that life would return to normal soon, and even better than usual for many of those oppressed by the former political regime. That meant business would soon pick back up and the world would return to a set routine.

Gayle was glad for that, while being happy at the same time that she'd been part of a moment in history. It appeared that the Gate Keepers were following through on their promises to return power to the people of the world, and go about dealing with their own issues. For the first time in a long time, Gayle had a real optimism in her heart about the quality of life in the United States. She could be content about the changes as long as she blocked her actions, and the shot that killed the President, out of her mind.

Alexa and Zora walked behind her. Norman and Ricardo were up ahead somewhere in the group. They'd all been invited by the Gate Keepers to see the results of their risk. If all went as planned, they'd be witness to the opening of a gate from this world into another distant one. Everyone paused in the center of the circle while the Gate Keepers huddled around their treasure.

Zora and Alexa stepped forward to be beside Gayle. The Doctor wore a sweater and jeans, and looked as relaxed as Gayle had ever seen her. "So, who wants to put money on this think fizzling out to nothing?" Zora said, grinning.

"Don't even say that," Gayle said, casting her a faux evil eye.

"Might just open up to Newark," Cooper added.

Gayle laughed. "That'd really make it all worth it." She playfully slapped him on the shoulder. "You guys need to start thinking positive thoughts. That apparently helps."

"I'm positive," Alexa said cheerfully.

Gayle pointed to her. "See, at least somebody's with me."

Alexa rocked on her feet, unable to contain a wild grin. "I'm positive there's no way we're going to see a door to another planet."

"You people are beyond hope," Gayle said, not looking at any of her friends.

Wizard Boe was now sitting in front of the assembled artifact. His legs were crossed Native American style, and his ancient spell book was open in his lap. The artifact sat on the ground, the ceramic ring portion flat in the dirt acting as a stand for the triangle like section that perched atop it. The other Gate Keepers were forming a circle around the scene. When they were all in place, Gayle's group was surrounded and the Gate Keepers were holding hands at the edges of the circle.

She turned to Cooper, her voice a whisper. "I feel like we're intruding."

"They'll let us know if we're supposed to move," he said. Ricardo and Norman were now standing silently at his side.

The business woman looked to her friends, none of whom appeared half as nervous as she felt. Despite knowing that the hard part was over, there was still some question in her mind if she'd done the right thing. In a moment, it appeared she would know.

Gate Keepers all around them began a low, rhythmic chant similar to the ones she'd heard before. Their voices merged into a deep song that filled

the air as if they were in a closed room. The men and women closed their eyes, some of them swaying side to side where they stood.

Boe was not following the same chant. His eyes were trained on the book in his lap and he seemed to be reading words off of the open pages. The artifacts did nothing, still idle on the ground in front of him.

Gayle felt like they stood there for ages, the strange song in their ears and Stonehenge towering around them. The sun warmed Gayle's face, but the cool wind whisking through the ancient structures around her cancelled the benefit. Though she had little experience with the concept of magic, she would have assumed before this that it would be a much quicker process.

Gayle lost her breath when a light surrounded the artifact and the triangle portion began spinning. A moment later, the light projected from the mechanism into a shimmering white rainbow shaped arch. The center was empty at first, then began filling with a milky film. Gayle reached out again and took Cooper's hand.

Wizard Boe ceased his chanting and stood, staring at the doorway forming before him. An arch formed around him, ten feet tall and ten feet in diameter. The edges were made of a bright white light that seemed to become more solid with each moment. The center of the half-circle was clear at first, the far edge of the stone statues fully visible beyond it. Slowly, the center space darkened until it looked like a translucent black screen.

"Oh my God," Gayle whispered.

Cooper squeezed her hand. "Think they were telling the truth," he said.

She nodded. Any doubts she might have had about the Gate Keepers had evaporated as the doorway formed before them.

Boe looked to Gayle and waved her to him. She hesitantly moved to his side. They both stared into the gateway. "My people have been waiting for this moment for centuries."

Knowing her own relief at seeing the door form, Gayle could somewhat imagine his excitement. "Are you sure you'll be able to return?" she asked.

"The great book has not failed us yet. It says the door can be opened from both sides," Boe said, his voice confident.

Gayle watched the space in the middle of the arch with growing wonder. The dark space was again lightening, but the scene forming in the area was not the one that Gayle knew was really there. Like looking at a video monitor, the image of a luxurious green hillside materialized. It could have been the rolling beauty of Ireland except for the light purple sky on the horizon, and the faint outlines of two half moons.

"We'll leave Gate Keepers here to guard the artifacts. After we've made contact with our people, we'll come back," Boe said, turning his attention on Gayle.

"Good luck in your quest," Gayle said, putting out her hand.

Boe shook her hand and smiled. He then turned to his closest comrades and began walking with them toward the gate. Boe stepped through first, his tall frame dwarfed by the large structure. The Gate Keepers' forms shimmered a small bit as they crossed over the plane, but they otherwise appeared to be stepping through nothing more than a door from one room to the next.

As the Gate Keepers began walking across the fields of another world, becoming smaller as they moved away, Gayle felt a wonder she'd never known. She'd risked everything to make this moment happen, and it had all been worth it.

"Is it time to get back to work, boss?" Norman asked.

The crew gathered around her, each of their eyes looking into hers expectantly. Back in the beginning, when she'd picked out the people who would form the brain center of her crew, she'd hoped they would all form a close family. She could see now that they had.

"I think so. If everybody has their personal issues here taken care of, I'm sure there are plenty of people and cargo that need to be moved up there," she said.

Alexa rocked on her heels beside Zora, her kind face chaffed pink from the wind. "Do you think it will ever be the same?"

Gayle felt the pressure of being looked to for such answers, but now, after what they'd been through, she thought she was prepared. "Probably not, but we'll find a new normal."

"Can we at least try to make it a few days before we have to start seeing dead bodies?" Zora asked, a smile on her face.

Gayle laughed, as they all did, glad they could do so again and not feel an overwhelming dark cloud in the background. "We can hope," Gayle answered. And in her heart, she truly felt optimistic about their future.