

“No Road Between the Shining Sun”

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Part 1: Abigail

It started with the spinach.

No. It started the season before, with the tomatoes. It was an anomaly in Abigail's garden, losing an entire plant. The still-green tomatoes had split open and rotted, turning black and brown. The sickly sweet odor of rotten tomatoes made her wrinkle her nose and grimace. When Abigail had grabbed one of the tomatoes, it had squished wetly in her hands, sticky and putrid. Parts of the dark ooze had dried out and it crumbled in her hands like cornmeal. There wasn't any cause that she could puzzle out. If you overwatered tomatoes the skins would split, but she was always careful with how much water she gave the plants. And she had been delicate entwining the plant's shoots with the light wooden cages that gave them support, as she always was, so that the tomatoes didn't break open or bruise. The decay didn't seem quite natural.

She didn't have time that day to spare, to fret over one plant. A new group of colonists was set to land on shore late that afternoon. Matthew Johnson had spent the last two weeks on watch, constantly looking out into the distance with his eyeglass. His wife and daughters were due to arrive, and he had enthusiastically volunteered to alert everyone when the ship was in sight. He had rung the village bell the night before at an hour past midnight, too excited about spotting the ship to remember that he was waking everyone up. This morning, the many glowering faces told Abigail that she hadn't been the only one unable to get a full night's rest after Matthew's rude awakening. However, there was also an air of barely contained excitement, since the ship was filled with family finally undertaking the voyage. But everything Abigail had to do before and for their arrival kept her from fully enjoying the news.

Abigail sat back on her heels. She was in the middle of the large field rectangular field—she had only been passing by the tomatoes with what she needed for tonight's dinner. She glanced down at the basket of food next to her and sighed. She removed the frame and ran her hands over the leaves of the dying plant. She loved the smell of tomatoes, and the healthy leaves still gave off the fragrant and pungent spiciness. It tickled her nose and made her want to sneeze. She grabbed the base of the stem, the dark green streaked with white and leaking the same black goo, and pulled the plant from the rich brown dirt, making sure that all of the roots came with it. She walked past rows of corn, squash, and carrots and placed the sickly plant into the wooden barrel that sat at the corner of the field. The barrel functioned as a compost heap, its contents eventually becoming fertilizer for the fields. Abigail went back to where she had set down her load. She brushed off the dirt on her knees with her hands and picked up her basket, filled with freshly pulled carrots, potatoes, and turnips. They were the reason she had headed out to the fields in the first place. She would look at the tomatoes tomorrow.

Abigail shoved down her guilt and worry and headed south down the well-travelled path back toward the colony. She had already stopped earlier in her small herb garden for the parsley leaves and thyme. She knew the leaves were wrapped in a clean piece of cloth, but her hand reached down to touch her pocket as she passed the small plot, making sure the small bundle was still there. Nothing could go wrong today.

She turned the final corner of the worn path, toward the town square and the imposing, gray town hall. Dinner with the new colonists would be held in the large dining room tonight, the only time they would eat in the room until Christmas, and Abigail was in charge of preparing the evening's celebratory welcome meal. She was rarely assigned to work in the kitchen, not that she was often welcomed there anyway. Given the extent of her

responsibilities elsewhere and how much the women of the colony, often relegated to kitchen duty, hated her, she had come to accept it. But it was custom for the Shepherd to make the first meal for newcomers, and the women had reluctantly accepted that Abigail would need to lead dinner preparation for tonight. The responsibility filled her with anxiety and dread. While Abigail had acted as Shepherd for seven years, tonight would be important. This was her first and only chance to make a good impression with the hundred or more men and women who would arrive.

She planned on using her father's favorite recipe for the meal—a thick stew, hearty and rich, for men, women, and children who had spent the last six months traveling through under the stars and only eating dry, tasteless ship rations as they made their way to the new world. "Their feet have not touched ground for months," her father had said, years ago, when he first taught her the recipe, back in their home in England.

She had been barely nine years old, but that lesson over the stove had felt just as important as the ones he taught her in the gardens. They had worked together in the same kitchen that her great-grandmother had cooked in; her father had shown her how to cut the carrots, potatoes, and turnips into perfect pieces so that they would cook evenly and be ready at the same time. "For the first meal they should be filled with the delicious blessings God has provided from the soil and sun of their new home," her father had said, pushing her hair back from her face.

It was the perfect meal; easy and familiar enough to her after almost twenty years of making that she would never ruin it, even if she was nervous.

As she came closer to the village with her cumbersome, heavy load, two of the older boys approached to help her. Their faces were vaguely comical to Abigail: the attempted severity of manhood looked amusing on faces still lined with baby fat. They had obviously been waiting for her—the grassy area where they sat was typically filled with much younger children playing. There were a few running around playing catch with a small ball, but their game had stopped when they spotted her. Some glared at her, and others turned away to keep playing.

"Mother sent us to see if you need anything," James said. He was the larger of the two, with a coarse smattering of dark brown hair sprouting on his upper lip and a greasy, pimply face. The smaller boy, Thomas, looked at her with distrust as she handed both of them what she had gathered. Abigail remembered when he had run to her when she had returned from the fields, his golden hair glimmering in the dim sunlight and blue eyes sparkling. He had loved her the most; every Sunday, after church, he had begged to know when the raspberries would be ready. Now he looked at her cautiously, eyebrows furrowed, and she found herself missing how his sharp elbows had jabbed into her middle when he hugged her.

She touched Thomas' shoulder, stopping him to give him instructions on how the women in the kitchen should clean and cut the vegetables. He flinched from her hand and she fought to ignore it. *The seasons aren't the only thing that change*, she reminded herself.

Freed from her burden, the walk back to the home that she shared with her younger brother David was quick. Their lodging on the far southern edge of the colony was larger than most, made to accommodate a Shepherd's many duties. The door opened into a sunlit room that smelled like soil and newly sprouted bean shoots. It was a square room, with a large freestanding table in the center. Three-legged stools were pushed under its high top to make more room. The left wall had a large set of shelves next to a chest of drawers, and

the top was covered with just-planted seeds. A chest sat in the corner directly to her right as she walked in, and the door in the back right corner led to her kitchen. It was her favorite room in the entire house. There was plentiful room to plant seedlings and sturdy metal hooks on the back wall providing extra space for trowels and hoes. Most days she would have stopped to see if any of the tiny shoots needed extra water, but there wasn't time for that now.

She went through the wide doorway that led into the kitchen. The dark stain on the counters made the room seem small, even with the open windows across one wall. Across from the doorway, a large porcelain basin of water sat on a wooden washstand, with a small looking glass on the wall above. Abigail splashed the tepid water on her face, trying to remove the coating of sweat and dust that covered her skin in a thin layer of grime. She took the tough bristle brush from the top drawer and scrubbed furiously at her hands. Dirt was caked under each short fingernail, and she tried to remove it without scrubbing her hands completely raw. She would make sure that her hands were clean, at least, even if she couldn't remove the callouses. When she looked up at her reflection, a streak of dried soap was across her face, covering her eyes. She sighed. Her younger brother David always seemed to end up touching the mirror and leaving a mess.

She would clean it later. She rushed to her room and removed her dirty clothes, putting on the formal skirt and the long sleeved coat that fastened tightly, high on her neck, and made her feel like she couldn't breathe. In a desperate hurry to get to the kitchens, Abigail's coordination with the small buttons seemed to disappear. She finally managed, but it wasn't easy with shaking hands.

"David?" Her voice cracked, and she took a deep breath and cleared her throat. "David?" she called again. She had hoped that he would just answer her for once. Their father had said that David had a tendency to focus so intensely that he barely heard anything around him. Abigail thought David only heard what he wanted to hear. He had left his muddied boots by the door, so she knew he was home.

A preliminary search of his room found nothing but the dimming orange light against the wall. He wasn't in the other bedroom, where he tended to go when his room was too bright for a nap, and he wasn't in their small library. As she approached the room where they ate dinner together, she heard his soft humming. She entered the room and found him, finally, sitting in one of the high-backed chairs at the large oval table. Of course, he was in the dining room; it was the last place she would look for him. His broad back was to her. The table was covered in small bundles of flowers, each tied with twine. They were the traditional gift from the Shepherd to new colonists, and were "symbolic". There were anthuriums for hospitality, asters for patience, and daffodils for rebirth and new beginnings. The roughness and simplicity of the brown twine around the stems showed that "all of the good in this world only came with hard work and a modest life". Each family would receive one of the bunches tonight at dinner, along with a blessing for their new home. Abigail didn't really like the tradition and found it all a bit heavy-handed, but knew the new colonists would expect it.

Abigail had cut all of the flowers early this morning, before the heat of the sun could wilt the blossoms. But she hadn't had time to tie the bundles together herself in her rush to do her everyday tasks and gather the ingredients needed for dinner. She had placed David in charge of the flowers. All he had to do, she reasoned, was select one of each and tie them together with a simple knot. Looking closely at the flowers on the table, a pulsing pain

began to throb at her temples. The asters and daffodils were there, tied together, but the bright red anthuriums were absent from every bundle.

“David!” He turned around quickly and attempted to stand, nearly knocking over the chair. At over six feet tall, he was one of the tallest men in the colony, and one of the strongest. His wideset brown eyes sat underneath angled brows, and his mouth, her father’s mouth, was twisted into a scowl. David wasn’t one to smile often, but every time he did she could see the little part of her father in him. He looked more like his mother, Rachel. They both looked more like their mothers.

He glanced at her face, and his frown deepened into a grimace. “What? I did the welcome flowers. They’re all ready; you just have to put them in a basket.”

“Where are the anthuriums?”

His eyes widened for a split second before he crossed his arms over his chest. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“David.” Exasperation bled into her voice. “How could you forget them? I told you that the flowers were on the counters in the kitchen and the sunroom.”

“No you didn’t,” he countered, “you only said they were in the kitchen.”

Abigail’s headache worsened as her teeth ground together. She tried in vain to find the sense of calm that she had already lost. She knew what she had said, but spending time arguing wasn’t a luxury she had at the moment. “You’re going to need to add them, then.” She cut through his stuttered protests and put as much steel into her voice as possible. “David, this is important. Someday you’re going to do this, and you won’t have me there to remind you to remember the little details. A job done right is a job done well.” Their father’s phrase, so often uttered during a lesson or while kneeling in the dirt, felt wrong on her lips, weak and fragile.

The muscle in his jaw flexed. “Fine. I’ll bring them when I come for dinner.” He sat down and started to pull apart the knots he had already tied. His shoulders were tensed as he bowed over his work, and his head was bent low. His hands moved quickly, but the movements were sharp and unsteady.

Abigail hated when they fought, but it was important that this was done the right way. “Thank you, David,” she said. She placed a hand on his shoulder, but as soon as her skin made contact with the rough linen of his white shirt, he shrugged her off. She pulled her hand back as if she had burned herself on a hot stove. “Make sure to wear your church clothes.”

He waved his hand in the air, wiggling his fingers. It was an acknowledgement and a brush-off combined.

As she walked briskly to the community’s large town hall and the kitchen within, she couldn’t help but think about David. There had always been a distance between them, the nine years separating them like a fence between the wilderness and a garden.

He had been eleven when they set sail with their father and eleven and a half when they landed without their father at New Haven. In those early years, he had been an impatient and stubborn child, and she hadn’t had the power or enough time to wrangle him. He fought her decisions and commands at every turn, embarrassed her in front of their neighbors by ignoring her, and often shouted that she had no right to be the boss over him. It didn’t matter that she was twenty years old and grown-up; attempting to raise David on her own was nearly impossible. In their home, originally built to house three,

there was plentiful space for the two of them, and Abigail had often used the room to avoid his tantrums and sulking.

With her father gone, it had become her duty to complete David's training as a Shepherd, just as her father had taught her. Trying to raise David and teach him how to be a Shepherd while taking care of an entire colony's fields at the same time had been a nightmare. Explaining how to be a good man was easy. Teaching someone how to cultivate a field, how to plant what herbs at what time, how to organize a garden so that the onions and leeks repelled the pests that preyed on the carrots...that wasn't difficult either. But to do all of that and watch over all of the food to feed more than a hundred people was nearly impossible. She had made due. And after the summer David turned 14, it hadn't mattered. He knew basically everything she did, and by that point, he hated her more than he loved her.

Her feet pounded into the ground as she walked, and her fingernails dug into her palms. It wouldn't be long before David went his way, heading toward one of the newer towns in one of the southern colonies. She had arranged for him to assume the position as Shepherd in a village where the current Shepherd was growing old and weak. Shepherds weren't easy to train, and the colonies were desperate, so his youth and inexperience was ignored. He would be welcomed with open arms and his physical strength would be a great asset, but his predecessor would also oversee and guide his work. A part of her did not want her brother to go. Even if he mused the mirror, put all the tools in all of the wrong places, and fought with her, tooth and nail, even over the smallest things, he was all she had left of her family and one of the few people in the colony who still spoke to her.

When she reached the kitchens, she took a deep breath and shook her head in a futile attempt to focus. The next few hours passed in a blur of steam and the nutty scent of fresh bread. The stew went together easily, just as Abigail remembered, and she breathed a sigh of relief when she finally placed the lid on the large cast iron pot. It would sit undisturbed and cook for the next several hours, and she was finally free from the clutches of the kitchen. She approached several women who had started making sweets now that they were finished with the bread: bitter, candied orange peels, warm oat cookies, and chewy molasses candy. She had borrowed an apron from one of them—she thought it might have been Martha, or maybe Anne. Both of them sneered at her in the exact same way, so sometimes it was hard to tell the two of them apart. She placed the folded apron on the counter in front of the women, muttered "thank you," and walked away. After years of being yelled at and called a bevy of names, of being told that she was the reason that so-and-so's cousin or sister or mother couldn't be on the council, she had learned that it was best to make any encounters brief.

As she passed through the kitchen door into the hall leading to the main dining area, she could hear the clamoring murmur of people. The typical moderately loud din had swelled into a dull roar, with the voices she knew augmented by a hundred or more she didn't. Abigail felt her hands grow sweaty, and the voices became loud and echoing in her ears. It reminded her of the times she had gone swimming as a child and had heard people talking when her head was submerged. The anxiety that had briefly disappeared in the kitchen leapt back into her chest. It felt alive, like a bean vine twisting around her heart and lungs. She pressed one hand against the wall, leaning into its firm weight. When she could finally draw a full breath, she entered the large room.

It was the largest room in the colony, filled with rows and rows of heavy tables and solid benches. On either side of the main walkway, there were three long tables. They spanned the length of the room, and each could seat at least forty people. A much smaller table sat on the opposite side of the room, perpendicular to the rest. At all the dinners Abigail remembered, they had only needed four of the long tables when they all gathered together; now each table was filled and children were pulled onto laps to make room. It was the largest group of people she had seen since boarding the ship back home.

The door shut loudly behind her, and all eyes in the room turned to her. She could tell who was new to the colony and who wasn't. All of the people who she had lived with the past seven years quickly looked away and kept talking, ignoring her. She could see how confused the new colonists seemed to be, staring at the people next to them in disbelief. She knew they would learn soon enough, but it still stung.

David stood at the front of the room, next to the small table. It was where she sat because she was Shepherd, and where the pastor and elected council members sat with their wives. David used to sit with her, but had pleaded to sit somewhere else a few years ago. She hadn't been able to deny his request. Why would her younger brother want to sit next to the town pariah? Why would anyone?

He made eye contact with her and nodded toward her seat. In front of her chair on the table was a basket filled with flowers. She nodded, and he walked toward one of the long tables bustling with people. She saw him squeeze his way between two men who clapped him on the back and starting talking to him with exaggerated gestures and wide smiles.

She made her way up the center aisle, determined to grab the flowers and introduce herself to as many new people as she could before the other colonists decided to. A man stood in the main walkway, the path between Abigail and the table. He was staring at her, hands rigidly grasped behind his back and feet braced as if he was standing against the roaring gales of a hurricane. He was tall, though not as tall as her brother was, and he looked muscular, like a man who had spent his life at work. He was appraising her, and she didn't like how he seemed to look down the length of his long, aquiline nose at her, didn't like the judgement she could see written into the lines on his face. He had the bearing of someone who thought power was the mightiest weapon a person could have; the way his chest puffed up and the tilt of his eyebrows all seemed to be an evaluation, as if he was questioning if she could possibly measure up. His gaze didn't waver as she walked closer, and he actually stepped out to intercept her, as if they had planned to meet in the middle of the room before she took her seat. She couldn't pass him without ramming into one of his broad shoulders, so she stopped.

"Shepherd. I'm very excited to make your acquaintance." His voice was autumn, cold and husky with leaves brushing against the frost-covered ground.

"Likewise. Do you need me for anything in specific? Dinner won't be served for another hour or two."

His frown deepened. "I didn't come to ask about dinner. I simply wanted to introduce myself. My name is Jon Cayce. I'm the Proctor."

Abigail's heartbeat quickened, suddenly a thundering staccato in her chest. She buried her sweaty palms into her skirt, attempting to hold onto her composure. The colony had been without a Proctor, the judge who oversaw disputes and fair punishment, for their

first nine years. Proctors were just as important as Shepherds were, though in a much different way. She supplied the colony with food, but the Proctor enacted justice.

“Abigail Yarrow. I’ve looked forward to your arrival.” She hoped the lie sounded sincere. This man was the reason that she hadn’t felt like she could catch a full breath for weeks.

“I knew your father.” The sudden switch in topics left Abigail’s head spinning. “He spent some time in my city helping our local Shepherd. Peterborough barely survived, but it was due to him.”

Abigail remembered that. There had been so much rain that Peterborough’s fields had flooded and the crops had started dying one by one. Her father had left to help, leaving her alone to watch all of the fields and David. She had only been fourteen.

He continued. “He was a good man and one of the most capable Shepherds I’ve ever met. I was very sorry to hear about his death.”

“Thank you. My brother and I miss him every day.”

Jon nodded. “Well, I’m sure we will have ample time to get to know each other as time and the harvesting permits. However, I wouldn’t want to keep you from completing your duties correctly.” He gestured meaningfully at the basket of flowers on the front table. “We can speak of him to a greater extent at a later time.”

He turned and gestured for her to walk with him toward their seats at the front table. She followed. He walked briskly, arms still clasped behind his back and eyes focused ahead. He reminded her of an oak tree, tall and unbendable. When they reached the front table, he nodded at to her and walked toward his seat at the table, the one on the opposite end from her own. Abigail’s breath left her in a small, contented sigh. Her back, held stiff during their conversation, relaxed. Her hands, grasping the fabric of her skirt, relaxed, and she could feel faint tremors running through them. She shook her head, straightened her spine, and picked up the basket of flowers. She had a job to do.

There were 37 new families, and Abigail went to each one of them. The men shook her hand, the women bowed their heads, and the children were grumpy and ready to eat dinner. The returning families met her with chilly silences and a mumbled and often begrudging “thank you, Shepherd.”

“Take these flowers as a sign of all the good that will grow here for you. May your family take root and the sun shine down upon you.” The words felt wooden and old in her mouth. “And I hope you’re happy here.” That was her own addition, and she stuttered over the words a little every time she said it. No, it wasn’t the traditional end to the traditional blessing. But wasn’t it important to let them know she cared, and that she was looking out for them?

Going from family to family took time, and the conversations she heard walking from table to table often turned back to home.

“The dust is so thick in the streets that you can’t even breathe during the day. I saw a man with a black horse, and when he took of the saddle she was white underneath!”

“More and more people coming into the cities each day... here we’ll have space to stretch our arms.” “Until you’re six feet under, you mean.”

“So, tell us about this Shepherd.” The speaker was one of the new women. Abigail was out of her sightline, weaving between people bringing food from the kitchen. She tucked herself into a small space next to one of the supporting pillars that jutted out from the wall. She was close enough to hear what was said, and she could catch a glimpse of the

table by peering around the edge of her hiding place. The woman who had spoken had the palest complexion Abigail had ever seen. Her hair, red in the low light, peeked out from under a knit yellow hat. She had a sharp chin and piercing blue eyes. The young boy who sat next to her had to be her son, with the same heart-shaped face. Abigail guessed that the burly man next to her was her husband, or at least her sweetheart—their fingers were intertwined atop the table.

“She’s an upstart girl who thinks she’s more than she’s actually worth.” The voice was one she knew, but she had to look to make sure. She leaned forward, edging past her hiding place until she could see. She was right—Robert Conroy had his back to her, and he had his right arm draped around a thin woman next to him. A young woman sat to his left. “She’s high and mighty as the devil,” Robert said.

Abigail’s cheeks flushed, and she pulled back quickly so that no one could catch her eavesdropping. She looked down and noticed she was crushing the bundle of flowers she had in her right hand. She placed them back in the basket before she could ruin them further. The stems were askew and a bit bent, but she would be the only one who could possibly tell.

“She acts like she knows so much better than the rest of us.” Robert’s rant continued.

“I’m assuming she does.” The other man’s voice was like thunder, low and rumbly, with an accent she couldn’t place. “That’s her job. To know more about plants than anyone else.”

“It’s just... the way she does it.” Abigail’s eyebrows furrowed. Curiosity overcame her; she edged around the pillar again, trying to stay hidden but desperate to see the new colonists’ faces. The woman’s face was pinched, and she glared at Robert. “Why so bitter? It’s her job. It’s how she keeps you fed.”

“They should send us a different Shepherd. Someone better. There’s a colony about an hour northwest and their Shepherd... he’s the smartest Shepherd on the planet. Why don’t we have him, eh? We’re one of the largest colonies on the new world; why not give us the best?”

The woman scoffed and the man shook his head. Abigail smiled a little. Robert Conroy’s opinion seemed less important when the listeners were acting as if he was a petulant child.

He must have been able to tell that the new colonists didn’t care. “You don’t know!” His voice had risen and was saturated with bitterness. “Two growing seasons ago—”

Abigail stepped out quickly from behind the pillar, and walked toward their table. She couldn’t afford for him to say more, not when she was trying to make a good impression.

“Shepherd!” the new woman saw Abigail first and spoke loudly, trying to cut Robert off before he got any further. “It’s so good to meet you. Robert was just telling us about you”

Standing behind him, Abigail could see Robert’s ears turn bright red. She tried to keep from smiling, but the woman looked so mischievous that she couldn’t help herself. She grabbed a bundle, avoiding the rather crumpled one on top, and handed it to the woman “Take these flowers as a sign of all the good that will grow here for you. May your family take root and the sun shine down upon you. And I hope you are happy here.”

“They’re beautiful! Thank you, Shepherd.” She held them reverently, showing them to her son when he peered at them.

“You’re welcome. What’s your name?”

“Rose. Rose Calandra. This is my son, Matthew, and my fiancé, Espen Sture.”

“It’s very nice to meet all of you. I’m Abigail Yarrow. Welcome to New Haven.” Espen smiled at her, and she couldn’t help but smile back. Matthew stuck his small hand out, and she reached across the table and shook it. Abigail turned toward Robert. His shoulders were raised, almost touching his ears, and he looked away from her.

“Robert, won’t you introduce me to your family?” She wasn’t sure she entirely kept the smugness out of her voice, but Rose’s eyes, dancing with laughter, made Abigail think she wasn’t all that successful.

His voice was quiet and he mumbled as he spoke “this is my wife Rebecca and my daughter Elizabeth.” Both women nodded toward Abigail, and Rebecca accepted the flowers and blessing without a word. After a final, “I hope you all find New Haven to your liking,” Abigail continued to the other families at the table.

But she could tell that the damage was done. More and more of the new colonists started to glare at her as she approached. She had wanted so badly to make a good impression.

After almost two hours, Abigail was finally done. Other colonists had been bringing in the bread, plates, and silverware while she had roved across the room, so everything was ready when she finally was able to take her seat at the small front table. Several strong men went out the door to the kitchen at their wives behest, and they returned with the large cast iron cauldron between them. They stumbled a bit under its weight, but managed to bring it to the front of the room.

Abigail was too tired to be nervous anymore. She stood, bowed her head, and clasped her hands. Everyone in the room quieted. “May the road rise up to meet you./May the wind always be at your back./May the sun shine warm upon your face,/and rains never fall upon your fields./And until we meet again,/May God hold you in the palm of His hand. Amen.”

The room echoed her. “Amen.”

The next day, with the burden of her duties lessened considerably, she returned to the tomato plants and looked over every single one of them, inch by inch. Even with her training, it wasn’t possible to go through a season without losing a plant or two, but that didn’t keep her from worrying that the odd disease would spread. She kept an eye on the rest of the tomato plants for a week, checking them each morning and afternoon. But a week after that the beans had needed to be hoed and the strawberries started to ripen, and she only had time to run her hands over the tomatoes and check the plants once a day. When the gourds were ready for harvest a month later and the tomatoes started pulling away from the vine and her days were spent stewing and canning and preparing for winter, she began to forget about the odd loss. It became a single mark in her ledger, a smudge of ink that fell away from the forefront of her mind as the cold months approached and her days were filled with preparing the colony and readying stores of food.

If her mind hadn’t already been distracted by the extra work that new mouths brought, the winter erased the single tomato plant from her mind. The cold was not shocking for her; she had been surviving these winters for years and the chills that racked her body for months had become standard. The new colonists had none of Abigail’s hardiness. They complained about the houses and how the wind whistled around them,

they moaned about the freezing mornings and the frost that covered the paths, and there were almost tears when they talked about how warm their original homes had been. Abigail took sweet pleasure in the fact that of all the things the new colonists moaned and railed about, no one ever grumbled about tasteless meals or going hungry.

The planting the next spring had gone more easily than she had expected. David had welcomed the chance to get out into the fields and away from all of the new people, and he had listened to her without a single complaint. In late March, the week before her birthday, everything was coming up, reaching for the sun, green and unfurling. It was a pleasant year; her last birthday had been bitterly cold, but this one was so warm that her shirt was soaked with sweat just walking from home to church.

David had been the one to find the spinach.

“Have you been to the far east field in the last couple of days?” It was a day after her birthday, and they were eating dinner.

“No, not since Monday, I think? I had to meet with some of the councilmen last night to decide what they wanted me to bring in for Easter in a few weeks. Why?”

He didn’t meet her eyes, and he started snapping open the peapods on his plate and ripping the peas out. “It doesn’t look right. Something’s growing on it, but I can’t tell what it is, and none of the books describe something like it. It doesn’t look natural.”

“I’ll go look at it. There’s no reason to worry over a bit of spinach that’s off.”

But it hadn’t been merely “off.” There were two plants in the center of the field that had turned a sick, milky white color, and the tips of the leaves were curling and black. David was right; it wasn’t natural. Spinach could sometimes have grey patches on the leaves from leaf miners, but that wasn’t a problem in New Haven. Abigail knelt down and grabbed the plants, viciously ripping them from the soil and throwing them away into the compost barrel. Despite what she had said to her brother, she was worried. It just didn’t make sense. She went to the shed that abutted the field and grabbed a bottle of her father’s weed killer, a potent blend that burned the inside of her nostrils. She hadn’t had to use it once in this field, or even in the last seven years, but she dumped the entire jar into the soil where the plants had rooted.

It was only that evening, when she marked down the two losses on her Shepherd’s ledger, that she remembered the past fall and the crumbly, black tomatoes.

A week passed without incident. She went to the weekly meeting with the council leaders and Jon, and she took her daily morning walks with Rose, who was busy preparing for her wedding the following summer. By all accounts, excluding the spinach plants, it was a typical week for a typical Shepherd in the new world.

But the next Friday, some of the cabbages had looked odd, and by Saturday, they were destroyed; the outer layers had molted off and the inner core was a squishy, brown mess of rot. Abigail added ten more marks.

On Sunday morning, she found two bunches of red chard that had been broad and leafy wilted into yellowed, shriveled mess. Abigail added two marks.

On Sunday night, four stalks of corn had been just the cob and slime when she peeled back the husk. Abigail added six more marks.

On Monday, she scoured the fields and found plants throughout the fields that were starting to go bad. She was thorough, grabbing anything that was starting to show signs. By

the end of the day, she had added twelve more lines to the rapidly filling pages of her ledger.

Eventually, Abigail would have stopped ignoring it. David just made it happen faster.

“Abigail, something’s wrong.”

She sat in the entrance room of their house, sitting on a stool and bent over diagrams of the fields, counting seeds and writing inventory requests for the weekly Wednesday council meeting later that evening. He stood in the open doorway, sun streaming in behind him, and Abigail could barely make out the basket he was holding. When he stepped in and closed the door, the stink hit her nose and she barely managed to keep from gagging. The basket was filled with blackened, crumbling tomatoes, and bits of dark red liquid dripped through the woven wood and onto the floor, a sickly blood against dark gray. Abigail was suddenly filled with panic.

“Did anyone see you? Did you pass anyone?”

“What does it matter if anyone saw me? Something’s wrong, Abigail. The spinach before, and now this? I told you before, and you didn’t listen to me, and I was right.” He pointed his finger viciously at her, the basket held in the crook of his other arm. It left a gash of red seeping down his chest and pant leg, but he didn’t even seem to notice. “How could you have let this happen? I told you weeks ago about the spinach, and you made it seem like nothing. But I’ve seen the ledger, Abigail. Twenty-eight already this season. That’s more than we’ve lost since...” His voice trailed off. “It’s more than we’ve lost in a long time. And you’re not taking it seriously.” His face was nearly purple from shouting.

She slapped him. The basket dropped from his hands and tomatoes squelched as they hit the floor.

“You. Will. Be. Quiet.” She said between gritted teeth. “Don’t forget, David, you’re not the Shepherd. I am. It’s not your job to tell me something’s wrong or what to do. I know. I’m going to fix it.”

“How—”

“That’s none of your concern.” He opened his mouth and she silenced him with a glare. “You will go gather everything for Father’s weed killer. You will dispose of the tomatoes without anyone seeing you. You will do what I tell you, David, or so help me, I will tell the Southern Colony everything you don’t want them to know.”

He blanched.

Abigail grabbed the sheets of paper on the table and folded them, shoving them into a canvas bag that she seized from one of the wall hooks. “The recipe is in the chest.”

The sturdy wooden chest sat in a shaded corner of the room, holding all of the seeds for the next season and her father’s journals and recipes. It was covered with a white, green, and blue patchwork quilt that Abigail’s mother had made before she died. It was only thing of her mother’s that they had brought to the new world. Since her father’s death, that corner of the room was the closest Abigail ever felt to her parents. Now, one of the rotten tomatoes rested against a corner of the blanket, quickly turning the soft blue fabric to a muddy purple.

“I’ll be back after the council meeting.” Abigail shoved past David, her shoulder knocking against the top of his arm. Slamming the door as loud as she could was all the anger she allowed herself to feel; she did not have time for being emotional and irrational. She knew he was right. She had been ignoring what was happened because she was scared.

But David had been right before, and he was right now. Something was wrong. Abigail blamed her watering eyes on the brisk wind.

The council meeting went well; Jon agreed to all of her requests, even for seeds for the rarer and more expensive fruits. Abigail couldn't bring herself to celebrate, or to really listen to the other meeting topics. What did it matter what the schoolmaster taught, or what they had for dinner for Easter. If Abigail didn't fix what was happening in the fields, there might not even be food to make.

Jon stopped her before she could escape out the door once the debates and votes were finished. "Is everything alright, Shepherd? You seem out of sorts." The assessment was delivered with a sort of drawling condescension that made her clench her hands into tight fists and hold back a scream. Abigail wondered if Jon Cayce had ever felt "out of sorts" in his entire life. The image of a child-sized Jon, still stiff and reserved, sprung into her mind, and she couldn't completely suppress a hysterical giggle. She tried to mask it with a cough, but by the way his eyebrows rose in questioning disbelief, she didn't think she fully succeeded.

"Everything is completely fine, Proctor. I'm just concerned with all I have to do, with Easter coming up and David leaving soon."

"If you ever find yourself flagging, I know plenty of men who would be willing to help." After hearing more about her time as Shepherd and the harvest three years ago, Jon had constantly looked at her with suspicion, waiting for her to admit a weakness. She felt like his eyes were always watching her, judging her for fault lines hiding just under the surface.

"That won't be necessary." She wanted to tell the pompous that man that it would never be necessary, but she held her tongue.

"If you're sure."

"I'm very sure. Now if you'll excuse me, I was hoping to be home before sunset." The sky was already pitch black through the windows, and Abigail watched his eyes as he looked out and saw the dark sky and misplaced stars.

"Of course." Abigail started to pass him, but his voice stopped her. "But Abigail... I will be watching. Failure is not an option, not this harvest, not with this many people."

She glanced over her shoulder, nodded, and pushed the heavy door open.

Her house was dark when she entered, and silent. The cloying smell of the tomatoes wasn't as strong, but it still lingered. It stuck to the roof of her mouth. She made her way to the kitchen, stepping gently, mapping the way by memory alone. The kitchen smelled of garlic and crushed chilies, mixed with vinegar and soap. It was spicy and sour, and while not her favorite scent in the world, erased the stench of the tomatoes. From the moonlight streaming through the window, Abigail could see two large pots filled with her father's weed killer, enough to cover all six fields she tended if need be. She hoped that this would set everything to rights. The jar she had used before had been seven years old, and Abigail tried to comfort herself by believing that age had killed its potency. A new, fresh, strong mixture would leave the blight vanquished and screaming.

Abigail didn't have the chance to use her father's recipe for several days. She and David checked each field twice, and everything had seemed normal. By the third day, Abigail felt hopeful.

But on the fourth day, Sunday, David found the pea plants. Almost a quarter of them were dead, crisp and dry like blackened and burnt twigs. Some of the pods had opened up, as if they had been unzipped down their length, and the peas inside were like tiny shards of sharpened glass. They had quickly pulled all of the plants, doused the ground in the weed-killer, and took the remains to the field farthest from the colony, where they burned them to fine, powdery ash.

The next day another quarter of the pea plants were the same way, and the spinach field looked like a morbid chessboard, squares of white against dark green. Abigail let herself cry that day, alone on her knees pulling up hundreds of plants she had worked for months to grow. The drops fell warm and fast on her hands, and she paused to look up at the sky, wondering what was happening to her fields.

She sat with her brother Tuesday night and pushed the baked potato on her plate around with her fork. She hadn't had enough energy to cook much else, but she couldn't even bring herself to eat. Her stomach felt like a coil of knotted rope, and her eyes felt puffy and raw. She hadn't been able to sleep the night before, alone and scared in the darkness of her room. David sat across from her, head held in his left hand, fork in his right. He was eating more slowly than she had ever seen, taking time to break off small pieces with his fork and pausing between bites.

"You were right." Her voice cracked and David's eyes shot up from his plate.

"What?"

"You were right. What's happening isn't something I've seen before. I can't find anything from the journals or in the books. I don't know how to handle this." Any restraint Abigail had over her tears evaporated.

"At this rate..."

"I know. If things keep dying the way they are, we won't be able to feed the colony." Abigail brought her sleeve over her cheeks to collect the drips running down her cheeks and near the curves of her nose.

"Are you going to tell Jon?"

Of course David would ask the question she didn't want him to ask. How could she tell Jon that she had failed? Telling him would be admitting that she didn't know what was happening to her own fields. He'd drag in a person he thought was capable, someone with a pristine record, and she would lose everything: her place in the colony, her home, and her way of life. She couldn't give up being a Shepherd; it was the last thing that connected her to her father.

"No." He opened his mouth to protest, and she cut him off. "Not yet. I'm going to go North. I'll visit Ellinor." Abigail put her head in her hands. "I may not know what's going on but she has to know. She's been here twice as long as we have. Maybe she's seen this before. She has to have seen this before and dealt with it somehow." Abigail made her voice firm, as if she could will her words to be true.

"Jon won't like it," he said.

"Jon won't like everyone being dead, David."

Her fork scraped across her plate, punctuating the silence with a shrill screech. David grimaced.

"What should I do while you're gone?"

"Take care of what's left. Burn anything that starts showing signs. Start planting the seeds we have left in the chest."

“In the field?”

She sighed. “No, David, not in the field. In the entry. The far field, the one in the east—it’s showed the least amount of blight. Get any soil you can from there.”

“How long will you be gone?”

“Three days, maybe four. You’ll be in charge while I’m gone.” His chest puffed up, and Abigail could see a small smile playing at the edge of his lips. She wondered how he could smile at a time like this. Maybe being in charge for a few days would be good for him, would knock him down a few pegs. She rubbed her chest. The anxiety felt like acid, burning a hole in the space below her sternum. “If Jon says yes.”

“No.” Jon’s voice rang out like a thunderclap.

“You haven’t even heard the reason why I want to go!” Abigail flinched, realizing too late how petulant and whiny her voice sounded. She cleared her throat and folded her hands on the table where the council sat. “I’m not going for personal reasons. I want to meet with Ellinor for business.”

“What business?” Pastor Andrew asked. Jon glared at him, eyes boring into the older man. The pastor sat back in his seat, chastised. Abigail smiled at him. At least he had tried. Andrew had always been an ally; he was the only man in the colony who still treated her like his equal.

Abigail scrambled for a plausible answer to Andrew’s question. “I-I need to ask her for some information about field organization, for next year’s planting.”

Jon’s eyebrows rose to his ashy blonde hair, and he echoed her. “Information about field organization?” He stretched out the words until they became a question and a statement of disbelief all at once.

“Yes.” Nervous sweat was beginning to roll down her neck and pool at the base of her spine.

“No.” Jon stood, leaning forward with his hands on the sturdy table. Abigail tried to meet his eyes, and found that she had to look at his eyebrows to keep her lips from quivering. “It’s not worth the time or the expense.”

His words jogged her memory.

“It’s for some of the seeds I requested last week.” Jon’s eyes narrowed, but Abigail barreled on, hoping if she talked loud and fast he wouldn’t interrupt. “You said it was alright. I just want to make sure that I’ll be able to plant them. In the best places, so they survive.” she coughed the last words onto the table, a sort of offering. She would expose her weakness to Jon, admit she was fallible, if he would just let her go. “I wouldn’t want to order seeds and have them die due to my own error.”

His twisted smirk made her nauseous. “That isn’t very reassuring, Shepherd.” He was trying to goad her, she knew it, but she stayed silent. It wasn’t the first time someone had gloated and shamed her for daring to make mistakes.

Jon paused, waiting for her to take the bait and fight, to clarify that she knew what she was doing. His smirk shifted into a grimace. “Who will monitor the fields if you leave?”

“David. He’s capable, and at this point most of his work will be maintaining the fields until I return; there isn’t any planting to do, and nothing should be ready for a large-scale harvest for several weeks.” She tried to measure her words and keep them slow and steady, but a leaf of hope was unfurling inside her. “I swear I’ll be back in a few days.”

Jon stood straight, taking his hands off the table and crossing them over his chest. He looked livid, with anger creasing his forehead, his jaw jutting forward, and his feet shoulder-width apart. "I'm giving you four days, Abigail. But after you return, the council will meet to discuss your performance as Shepherd."

It felt like a death sentence.

"I understand, Jon. I'll be leaving tomorrow."

"Four days, Abigail," Jon said. "You have four days."

"Tell me what happened again, dear." Ellinor's home was warm and filled with light, and sitting in her kitchen was as close as Abigail ever felt to being at home. The stone countertops were cream-colored stone veined with sparkling bronze, and they ran along the length of two walls. The cabinets they sat atop of were a pale golden wood, and the walls were ornamented with copper cooking pans of every size. The light through the slim windows near the ceiling hit the pans and was thrown in every direction, making it seem as if the rays were dancing gently along the walls.

Abigail's home here had never felt as beautiful or as calm. She watched a patch of sunlight that was dancing on one of the wall panels, not quite able to meet Ellinor's eyes as she told her story. She started all backwards, first talking about the spinach, then switching to when she found the tomatoes.

"And now there's not much left. If things keep dying at the rate they have, we'll all be dead before next winter. I'm having David plant while I'm away, but it won't matter soon. A few extra beans and corn cobs won't keep a colony from starving." The last word came out like a croak, and Abigail realized she was crying. She looked up into Ellinor's brown-black eyes. There was no judgement in her gaze, only empathy, and at that, Abigail started to sob in earnest. She couldn't remember the last time someone had cared when she cried, but she knew it was probably more than four years ago.

Ellinor waited until Abigail's tears dissolved into small, gasping, hiccuping breaths. "I've never seen something like this, my dear. Not with the variety of different symptoms, nor anything that comes and goes like this, nothing that suddenly appears and covers a field in a matter of days." Her broad lips pursed, and pulled at a single silvery-white curl as she walked to the fireplace that filled the third wall of the kitchen.

The silence stretched between them. Abigail knew that she should be wracked with despair; even Ellinor didn't have an answer. But all she felt was an odd sense of peace. Even walking around earlier, Abigail had been happier here than she had in the last months at New Haven. People smiled and her and waved, and she wasn't bumped into or tripped by people passing by. It was surreal to her.

A young man burst through Ellinor's door. He knocked once the door was already open, trying to rectify his misstep by pretending it never happened. "Ellinor?" His voice cracked, and Abigail hid a laugh behind her sleeve. The boy was tan, with dark brown hair and green eyes. He looked to be around thirteen, with his gangly limbs and general aura of awkward clumsiness.

Ellinor turned away from the window. Her absentminded stare was gone, and her face broke into a smile. It suited her; her aged face, lined and wrinkled, was made for big smiles. "Charles! What brings you in, dear?" She held out her arms, and he hugged her tightly. "Mother said to come and get some of your ginger-raspberry tea. She said it helps with the baby."

“Of course.” Ellinor went to one of her cupboards and pulled out a large, square tin. She went to another and selected a small, cloth bag. As she scooped the tea into the bag, she asked Charles questions about his mother, her pregnancy, and his two younger sisters. She tied the bag shut and handed it to him, beaming. “Here you are. Tell your mother that there’s plenty more of that if she needs any.” Charles he nodded quickly and ran out the door.

Ellinor closed the door behind him and sat down next to Abigail in one of the chairs they had drug in front of the hearth and the blazing fire. “He’s a good boy, Charles.”

“No one at New Haven comes to me like that.” The words burst from Abigail’s lips, and she could feel more tears threatening to fall. She looked to the ceiling, both to try to keep her tears from falling and because she didn’t feel like she could look at Ellinor. “After that harvest—Oh, Ellinor, what am I going to do?”

Ellinor grabbed at Abigail, pulling her into a tight embrace. Abigail stiffened then collapsed into the older woman’s arms. She hadn’t been hugged like this since her father had died. She couldn’t help but think of him: his laughing eyes; his silly jokes; the way he had held Rachel, David’s mother, on their wedding day; his warm voice telling her what to do as she planted her first seedling in her first garden; and his proud smile when she gathered her first harvest. She missed her father. He would have known what to do.

Ellinor’s hands ran over Abigail’s hair again and again, until Abigail felt her heartbeat slow completely.

“I have an idea.” Ellinor’s voice sounded odd, echoing through her chest. “The Shepherd who trained me told me once that you shouldn’t compost your own tomatoes, since they might spread disease into your own garden.”

Abigail’s eyebrows furrowed. She had never heard that. Ever her father, who had known everything, hadn’t taught her that. She thought back to the tomato plant from so many months ago. “So it is my fault.”

“Abigail, you know that’s not what I’m implying. I’m not surprised you don’t know that rule. You and your father were the greenest thumbs on the Earth. And tomatoes are so easy if you keep an eye on them. I doubt you ever lost a tomato plant in your entire life before this. I wonder if whatever killed that first plant got into your compost soil, and that’s why it’s in all those different places in your garden.”

“So what do I do?”

Ellinor pulled away and stood up. She clasped Abigail’s calloused fingers in her own dry, brown hands. “You trust me, dear.”

It was silent when Abigail made her way into New Haven. She had made Ellinor explain her idea, forced the older woman to repeat it twice more until she understood it backwards and forwards, and had immediately set out for home. The journey had dragged on, but Abigail hadn’t been able to sleep. She spent the night with her head resting against the window, staring at the stars. It had felt so odd that the constellations were still hanging in the sky. Worlds away from home, and the stars were the same, just tilted out of line. She had only just drifted off when the sunlight started edging over the horizon, lighting up the plains around her into a hazy, dusty red blur.

The silence in the main square was only broken by her footsteps. The crunching of gravel grated against the silence, loud and obnoxious in Abigail’s ears. It was odd for the town to be so bare in the mornings, except on Sundays. Now that she was paying attention,

Abigail saw that one of the doors to the church was opened. Abigail stopped walking, strained her ears to hear Pastor Andrew preaching, the echoed responses, the out of tune hymns. But all she heard was her own breath and the heavy thumping of her own heart. She kept walking. The timing would actually work out to her benefit—she could grab the tools she needed from her house, then head out to the fields while everyone ate together after church. She would fix everything and they wouldn't even know she was home.

Abigail let herself feel hope for the first time in weeks. Ellinor was the oldest, most experienced Shepherd on the planet. For the first time in weeks, she felt like she could take a full breath.

The sight of her own door shocked Abigail for a moment. She couldn't remember taking the turn toward her house, or walking up the slight hill toward her door. It gleamed in the late morning sunshine, and tiny rays of light bounced off its burnished front and directly into her face. She scrubbed her hand across her face, trying to get rid of the tiredness that caked the inside corners of her eyes and made her skin feel tight and warm. She took a hold of the door handle, but didn't open the door. Her body moved forward until her forehead rested against the cool surface, a brief moment of stillness after weeks of panic. She took comfort in the fact that the ordeal was almost over.

When she raised her head and went to open the door, it stuck, as it was prone to do. She grimaced, and then shoved her shoulder into the door, forcing it open with her body. She stumbled through the doorway when it gave, and blinked rapidly to try to adjust to the dimmer light.

She heard Jon before she could actually make out the details of the figure sitting at the table in her entry room.

"Abigail."

"Jon? What are you doing here?" As the sunspots in her vision began to fade, his face became clearer and clearer. Abigail couldn't pinpoint the right word for how he looked. Livid? Outraged? Murderous?

But the look on his face meant nothing to her compared to what he was wearing. Bile rose in her throat as she took in the articulated armor. Light blue fabric covered ceramic plates, forming a scale-like armor that could stop concussive grenade blasts as quickly as it would a bullet. Jon typically wore plain clothes, and Abigail couldn't comprehend why he was wearing the official Proctor armor. Jon stood, and Abigail saw the small stun baton in his right hand and the bright silver handcuffs in his left.

"Abigail Yarrow. You are under arrest." As Jon started speaking, two men stepped through the doorway from the kitchen. They wore the same uniform, but she couldn't see their faces through thick plastic visors. The dull ringing in her ears made it difficult to concentrate on what Jon was saying.

"For your crimes against the people here, for jeopardizing the New Haven Mars colony, you will be tried."

Later, Abigail would remember scrambling backwards as Jon moved toward her, struggling against him as he pushed her to the ground, and screaming as he drove his knee into the center of her back. She would remember the tears on her cheeks as he jabbed the stun baton into her side, her body seizing as the electricity tore through her muscles, and the way Jon looked standing over her as the room spun and faded and went black.

Part 2: David

It started with the bloody politicians.

No. It started with scared people ignoring the signs. David knew that if people were anything, they were stupid when they were scared. He wondered if it had really been a surprise when no one listened to the scientists saying that the world was warming. He assumed that the warnings about carbon dioxide and the raising temperatures went thoroughly ignored, with everyone burying their heads in the sand. When the water rose and people were finally ready to listen, it was too late. Populations were at an all-time high as the ground underneath them sank into the ocean and the food to feed them dwindled.

David found it was easier to focus blame on the people who were supposed to be in charge than it was to blame everyone who was stupid and scared. There were always a lot of stupid and scared people.

His father hadn't wanted to leave Earth, but he had stayed silent and listened to the orders that the bloody politicians had given. David had yelled about it, screamed and cried for hours, and Abigail and their father had just sat and listened. He hated it. If being forced to leave his friends and his home and his planet behind wasn't enough to make him scream, their silent, sheep-like acceptance had made him angry enough to throttle something.

And then his father was dead, weak heart ruined by the lower gravity of the ship and the strain of planning how to feed an entire colony. His body was left in the pathway between planets, stuck forever floating in the gap between the blue of their old world and the red of the new. There hadn't been a place or a way to keep his father's corpse from decaying; none of the ship's engineers had prepared for bodies. At home, his body would have become biomass used to fertilize a tree. But, instead, his body became a piece of detritus in the darkness of space, and David was forced to leave his father behind as well.

That's the way it was, though. No one listened to the people who actually knew what they were doing, you never got what you wanted, and the wrong people ended up in charge.

"Do you know what your sister did?" Henry Ashford, one of the council members, with his ridiculously small spectacles and bushy grey eyebrows, stared up at David. Sitting at the metallic witness stand felt surreal to David. He had never been in the hall of justice in the town hall, and he really had never expected that he would end up here. He kept touching the smooth, cold surface in front of him and running his hand over the words carved into the top: "justice for all before mercy for one."

He met Ashford's eyes, hoping that direct eye contact and uncomfortable staring might help the older man actually listen. "No, I don't know what she did. Or if she did anything. I'm not privy to what she does in the fields, I never have been. She's the Shepherd; I'm not the one who makes decisions." He had told the other two people who questioned him the same thing.

"No plans? No odd substances around the seed stores? You didn't see her acting strangely? Leaving early? Coming home late?" Ashford's voice rose with each word, the edge of hysteria making his voice sound strained and hollow.

"She was spending more time in the fields in the last few weeks, but it's spring. I thought she just needed more time to tend all of the additional food to feed the new colonists."

"She didn't tell you about this." Henry seemed to grapple for the right word.

"It's some form of blight, Ashford. No, I didn't know." The lie slipped off David's tongue, smooth and oily on his lips. "I'm telling you, councilman, I don't know anything. I don't know if you retained this after the first two times I said it, but I was meant to leave for the southern colony at the end of spring. My time was devoted to other things than obsessing over my older sister's comings and goings. Stop asking me questions that delay me from my duties, Ashford. Keeping me here won't save any of us."

The other men in the room looked disgruntled with his answer. Or maybe just his tone. Or maybe they were just scared and trying to hide their quaking knees with stern brows. David sighed. Decorum wouldn't save the dying plants or keep people alive. No, it probably wasn't easy to hear, but someone had to be realistic.

Jon cleared his throat and stood up. He had been sitting on one of the benches. There were rows and rows of them, arranged in two parallel sections in the room. A mezzanine was above the main area, for extra seating. The town council members were the only ones present and had congregated in that area. David thought it was because they all wanted to look down on him.

Jon, sitting in the second row on the ground floor, turned around and leaned against the back of the bench behind. He cleared his throat. "Gentlemen, I believe we should call it a day. There are, obviously, more pressing matters." The men above him started nodding and gathering their things. Jon pitched his voice so that the other men could hear him over the rustling papers and creaking wood benches echoing against the high ceilings. "We'll reconvene tonight for the council meeting to discuss how to tell the colony what's happening. I'll see you at seven." David stood, eager to stretch his long legs. He closed his eyes and reached his arms up above his head, trying to work out the tense muscles in his shoulders. Jon's voice, suddenly so close, surprised him. "David. I know you have work to do, but could you stay just a moment?" When he looked down, David saw that Jon had moved to the same desk that Ashford had sat at.

David nodded. He really didn't have the time to stay, but he would make time for Jon. Unlike Abigail, he knew that fighting with the person in charge wouldn't help him get ahead. If Jon needed all of the details about the irrigation system in the fields or the way the planting worked each spring, David would find the time to explain it to him.

The room slowly cleared, but David stayed standing. He had been sitting all morning answering questions. Jon sat at the desk writing down notes with a stylus and a digital screen. David watched the way Jon's pen swiftly crossed the page and how a deep furrow appeared between the Proctor's eyebrows as he concentrated. When the room was finally silent, Jon looked up at David from his writing. "Would you walk me to the fields? I haven't had a chance to see it myself since last Thursday. I'd like to see if things have changed."

"Of course." David let Jon lead him out of the hall and through the main building. The older man walked with purpose and didn't dawdle, but David still had to slow his steps so as not to outpace his companion. When they finally reached the outside, he let out a sigh. He hadn't realized how much the confining space had bothered him until they were free. He paused to look up at the sun through the pressurized plastic dome that covered the settlement. It distorted the sun's position, but David still knew that it was around three o'clock in the afternoon. He had arrived for questioning at seven that morning.

When David lowered his eyes, Jon was a few paces in front of him, looking back. "Sorry," David said, rushing forward. He could feel his cheeks grow warm under Jon's scrutiny. "Which field do you want to see?"

“The one with the worst of whatever this is.”

“This way, then.” David led their way through the town, heading toward one of the fields to the east. It was one of the few fields on the entire planet that had both a traditional greenhouse set-up and a hydroponic garden. David knew that the east field wasn’t actually the worst off, but he needed to add nutrient solutions for the strawberries, cucumbers, and radishes in the hydroponic set-up, and that was only the first thing on a long list of things he needed to do. The list got longer and longer every moment he wasn’t in the fields.

Jon interrupted David’s list making once the town was out of hearing distance. “Have you ever seen anything like this before?”

Henry Ashford had asked something similar twice already. “No!”

Jon raised an eyebrow. “I’m not accusing you of anything, David. I just wanted to talk when you’re not surrounded by men who don’t trust you because of your sister. You’ll have to forgive them—they’re frightened.”

David’s shoulders relaxed and he sighed. “I understand that they’re scared, but you’d think they’d listen to me the sixth time I told them I don’t know anything.”

Jon chuckled. “You’ll find, David that it’s all about how you present yourself. Being in power requires a certain demand for people’s attention. Someday it will get to the point where they stop and listen because they want to hear what you have to say.”

David couldn’t help but focus on that word: someday.

“I really don’t know anything about this thing. I’ve never seen anything like it. I’ve been going through my father’s documents, but it’s slow going since he recorded everything by hand.” Jon’s nose wrinkled in distaste. David was inclined to agree; unlike his father and half-sister, who both disliked digitizing everything, David loathed flipping through pages and pages just to find something he should have been able to use the search function for. He shrugged at Jon, “I don’t know why, but that’s how he liked to keep things.”

“Did you really not know that something was wrong?”

“I swear, Jon, I just thought she was stressed about the extra work she had to do to feed all of the new people. She spent the entire winter expanding field six. A hundred people isn’t a small group.”

“No, I know. It’s just odd that she didn’t ask you for help.”

David kept his eyes on the field that was directly ahead of them. “She’s always been stubborn about saying she can do it on her own. She probably just wanted to prove she didn’t need me before I left to go South.”

Jon made a noise of assent, a half-hearted “Hmm.”

“And she’s been having me work on other things!” His protest sounded suspicious, even to his own ears. “She had me work on things at home.”

“What does that entail?”

“Making the nutrient solutions for the hydroponic gardens, sanitizing the soil we’ll be using for some of the herb beds, and restocking the weed killer.” It wasn’t a complete lie; he had done all of those things. He just so happened to have also been in the fields as well.

Jon nodded. “Do you think there would be anything the other colonies could share?”

It was a valid question, and one that David had already considered. “I could ask around, but that’s not how most of the colonies function. Seeds are expensive. Most colonies can only afford to buy and raise what they need to survive. We could ask for help, but it would only buy us a few days. Maybe a week, at most. Have you sent a message back home?”

“Yes, but it won’t do much good. It takes six months for a transport ship to come. Even a smaller vessel wouldn’t be able to make it in less than four months, and it’s not worth the gas to try.”

They both fell silent and kept walking, now heading into one of the smaller tunnels that separated the main dome from the six fields that radiated out of the main dome like spokes on a wheel.

“It doesn’t look as bad as I thought it would.” Jon sounded impressed, and David couldn’t help feeling accomplished. It had taken all of his time in the days Abigail was gone to make the fields look like this—he had spent hours ripping away sick plants and carting them away. Maybe it was best to not tell Jon that it only looked so good because a quarter of the crop was gone.

To David’s practiced eye, the field of planters looked barren. There were twenty rows per field, each container three feet wide and five feet long. Depending on the plant and the root system, the rows varied in height. Some had been sunk into the Martian soil and were still a foot or two above the ground. The shallower planters were barely raised a few inches, so you could only see a glimpse of the blue plastic that divided the imported earth from the red, rocky dirt. The rows were spaced six feet apart, but a foot of that space was taken up by the sturdy plastic piping that served as an irrigation system. The pipes ran the length of each row and connected to the tank filled with extracted groundwater in one of the far corners of the field. The specialized plastic dome for the field kept the fields a few degrees warmer than the rest of the colony, even during the bitter six-month winter, which meant that now, in the heatwave of spring, sweat was beginning to work through the fabric of his shirt between his shoulders. It itched.

“David, do you really think your sister went to Ellinor Schiller to talk about planting?”

The question was one that no one had asked, and David paused to consider his options. Not that there really were any options. He had already lied and said he knew nothing about the fields.

“She didn’t tell me why she wanted to go; only told me that she was going.”

Jon paused. “That doesn’t answer my question.”

David didn’t know what the right answer was. How did he make it sound like he didn’t know anything but not make it sound like Abigail was up to something?

“I know my sister, Jon. And I don’t know why she hid what was happening, even from me, but she wouldn’t go to Ellinor unless she needed the help. She’s one of the best Shepherds on the planet. She takes her responsibilities very seriously. So do I. It’s an important position for the safety and survival of the colony.”

“Do you think she got an answer?”

The catch in his voice made David pause. Jon was staring intently at the empty planters, the breaks where dark brown void interrupted ordered green chaos.

“I don’t know. I hope so. Could I see her?”

Jon’s eyes whipped toward him. David felt a chill run over his skin at the scrutiny, tried in vain to keep his skin from breaking out in nervous gooseflesh. “Why?”

“I want to ask why she wanted me to lie for her. I can’t believe she thought I would do that. And maybe I can get some answers about why she left. She might have an answer, or Ellinor might have told her something.” He gestured toward the expanse in front of them. “I don’t know how to fix this, Jon. I’m really not sure. And with how long it’ll take a

message to reach Earth and for help to come? We don't have the time to wait, not if she has some way to fix this now."

There was silence for a second after he finished, and then the pumps for the hydroponic plants began gushing away. The bank of nine three foot by three foot tanks sat behind the storage shed but before the standard planters. Each separate tank had a different plant, all of them growing larger fruit at greater yields than soil planters could. It was Abigail's brainchild, something she had worked on for months several years ago. From the slight gasping gurgle, David could tell that the solutions that filled each tank were getting low. The liquids were filled with nutrients designed specifically for each plant, and they were pumped up once every two hours to submerge the roots. They would then drain again, aerating the roots. He moved to the shed and grabbed several jugs, each marked with Abigail's neat, block handwriting: "For Strawberries." He looked for ones that were close to the expiration date. It was easy, since Abigail anally sorted the containers by when she had originally mixed the solution. He grabbed the one closest to expiring: "For Strawberries. Mixed April 16, 2356. Use by May 17th, 2358."

David let Jon stand, or observe, or think, whatever he was doing, and poured the solutions into tanks ten-gallon jug by ten-gallon jug. When he looked for the solution for the spinach, a recent addition, he only found empty containers. He knew he had recently mixed up a jug, so he added that to his ever-growing list of things to do.

When he had finished placing the empty bottles into the shed and shutting and locking the door, David returned to his place next to Jon.

"Jon, you have to let me talk to her."

The other man didn't answer, just took a deep breath. When David opened his mouth to speak again, Jon held up his hand to silence him. David's teeth clicked together audibly. "If Rose hadn't gone to the field to find Abigail for their usual Thursday walk, would you have come to me, David? Would you have told me that you found the fields in ruin?"

"Yes, absolutely."

"Even though she's your sister?"

"Half-sister. I believe in the law, Jon, and the way we do things now. Justice for all before mercy for one. I'm not Abigail. Nothing is more important to me than the colony." David knew that it was what Jon wanted to hear, that it would get the Proctor to leave him alone, but he still felt sick to his stomach.

It seemed to be the right answer, because the Proctor looked at David with his lips pursed, calculating, then smiled slightly and nodded. "You can see her later. After the council meeting. I'll meet you in the council room, once you're done with everything." With a final dismissive wave, Jon turned walked away.

As soon as Abigail saw David walk down the stairs into the hallway by the cells, even though it was an hour past midnight, she rushed to the bars. "David, Ellinor thinks it's in the soil, from the tomatoes from last year. She thinks it might be some type of microorganism that started in the tomatoes and then got into the mulch and spread to everything we fertilized this year."

His sister's face had aged since he last saw her. She had never looked young to him—there were nine years between them, so Abigail was always going to look like a grown-up to him. But this was different. The typical lines across her forehead and wrinkles

around her eyes had deepened into crevices, and the deep shadows in cell made her look like their grandmother. Her shoulders were curled in, and she held her forearms to her chest as if she was protecting herself from a blow.

“Are you alright? You look terrible.”

“It’s my ribs; I think one of them is broken. Jon wasn’t exactly gentle.”

“Maybe if you hadn’t struggled this wouldn’t have happened.” That’s not what he had meant to say. It’s not what he wanted to say. Nothing was the way he wanted it to be. Maybe if Abigail had listened to him and told Jon, maybe then this whole thing wouldn’t have happened.

She glared. She knew what he meant, he was sure of it, but she shook her head at him and kept talking. “The Proctor seizes all personal effects of a prisoner- Jon will have my pack. Ellinor made a chemical mixture. You just have to add it to the irrigation tanks. It should leech into the soil enough to kill everything.”

“What if it doesn’t work?” He hated the way his voice sounded. He wasn’t six years old anymore, with his fifteen-year-old sister there to explain that his mommy had gone to heaven where her mother was, too. “What if it’s not enough, Abigail? What if it’s too late?”

Her hands reached through the meal bars, and she touched his cheek just like she had when he was young and confused.

“I don’t know, David. But I need you to tell Jon that I want access to a terminal.”

“What? Why? You hate reading digital documents.”

“There has to be a record of this somewhere. I can’t ask anyone now that I’m here, so this is the best option. There has to be something about this from the last two hundred years of Shepherds.” She reached higher, brushing his hair back from out of his eyes. “But it’ll work, David. It has to work.”

“Abigail Yarrow, you are on trial for the willful deception of the New Haven Mars Colony and for the endangerment of those who live here. How do you plead?”

“Not guilty.”

The courtroom, now filled with the entire colony, erupted into whispers of disbelief. The sounds bounced off the high ceilings until the whole room was awash with outraged gasps and muttering.

Jon, sitting above the crowd in his place as judge, said nothing. His hands were folded in front of his face, and as the room quieted all of the colonists looked up at him. “Henry Ashford will represent the colony in this matter. Councilman, whenever you’re ready, you may begin.”

Ashford stood up from behind one of the two desks in front of the witness stand. As the councilman walked toward where Abigail was seated, David could hear the polished boots click on the metal floor, even though David sat in one of the back corners of the room. There was a lofted area above him, which hid him in shadows, and one of the supporting pillars would keep Abigail from seeing him. Jon had said that David was allowed to be at the trial, if he wanted, but he would need to be out of sight.

He had said the same thing when he arrested Abigail.

“Miss Yarrow, how long have you been Shepherd?” Henry sounded like he was talking to a child, asking them what year they were in school or how long they had been reading. David saw Abigail’s lips purse.

“Seven years, since I arrived at New Haven.”

“And why were you chosen to be Shepherd?”

“My father died during the trip from Earth to here. He had a heart attack. I had the training, so it made sense for me to take his place.”

“So you weren’t the intended Shepherd for this colony?”

She paused. David noticed absently that her hands firmly clasped in her lap. She didn’t do that at home—she was always running her fingers through her hair or picking at her calluses.

“No.”

“Can you describe that training for the court?”

David assumed she was grinding her teeth together the same way she did when she got upset with him. He tuned out as she tried to answer. Everything she had done, all of her training, he had done too. Their father had taught him the same things. He didn’t need to listen to her answer to know what she would say.

Suddenly, Ashford’s voice cut through Abigail’s, interrupting her mid-sentence. “If you know so much, what’s going on in the fields you watch over, Shepherd?”

Her mouth opened and closed several times. Finally, she sat back in her seat and rubbed a hand over her eyes. When she spoke again her voice sounded like a dry croak. “I don’t know.”

“And when did this first start?” His questions weren’t questions. They were dull blades, and Ashford was going to make sure every one of them hit.

“Last year, the day the settlers arrived.”

“And when did you tell Jon, or the colony council?”

“I didn’t.” The whispers broke out again, louder and vitriolic.

“So you knew something was wrong for a year, and you didn’t say a single word to anyone?” David could only see the back of the councilman’s head, but he could easily imagine the self-satisfied smirk gracing the other man’s face. He had known that Ashford hated Abigail, had since the summer of 2354, when his family’s arrival was delayed by food shortages, but he hadn’t known it ran this deep.

“No! I only realized that it was a problem a few weeks ago!” That didn’t help her case. Now it sounded like she didn’t tell anyone and hadn’t been smart enough to see it until a few weeks ago.

“And how did you finally realize this was an issue?”

David tensed. This was the moment he had been dreading. He could lie all he wanted, but Abigail knew the truth. She paused, then looked directly at the corner where he was sitting. He blanched. He hadn’t known she could see him.

“I just noticed the pattern.”

The questioning continued and David sat frozen in place, not listening. She hadn’t said anything against him. She hadn’t told them that he was the one who really noticed it. *Isn’t that just like Abigail*, he thought.

When Ashford finally conceded that he was done, for now, and Jon declared a brief recess before Ashford could question the next witness, David made his escape. He didn’t need to hear Ashford question Rose, Abigail’s one friend in the colony, didn’t need to hear her explain how she went to find Abigail for their daily morning walk and found sick and damaged fields. He walked back home, more than ready to change out of his dressy shoes that pinched his toes.

He kicked off the shoes as soon as the door was shut behind him, and immediately went to his room to change. He tried to ignore Abigail's voice echoing in his brain. "I just noticed the pattern."

He couldn't get the phrase out of his mind as he tied his boots, as he grabbed her canvas bag with Ellinor's hopeful panacea, as he walked to each field, dumped the green powder into water tanks, and mixed them with a shovel handle. He couldn't get Abigail out of his head. Everything he did in the fields was punctuated by her voice in his head. Even the spinach in the hydroponic garden turning to black mush couldn't make him focus. He just heard his older sister's voice. "It'll be alright, David." "She's in heaven now." "I'll protect you, no matter what." "It's *my* job to take care of the colony and you, David, not the other way around."

As he washed his hands in the basin in the kitchen that night, he looked at the mirror. Abigail had hung it when they first arrived, and as he had grown, it had become more and more inconvenient. Now that he was so tall, all he could see was the bottom of his nose and his mouth.

His dirty fingers touched the glass, smearing a line of dirt and soap across his reflection's mouth. "Father's not really gone, David. You have his smile."

Before David even registered grabbing it off the wall, the glass was shattering into a million pieces across the floor. Their father was still gone. What did it matter if David had his eyes, or if David had his smile? He had said he would be there for David, and he wasn't. Abigail had said she would take of him, and she didn't.

"Tell us what you did to the fields!" Ashford was leaning across the stand, face inches from Abigail's, and as he screamed spittle flew from his lips onto her face. She was crying when she answered.

"Nothing! I didn't do anything!"

"Then why didn't you tell anyone when you figures out something was wrong?"

"I don't know. I was scared!"

The air in the room changed, even David could feel it. The trial was now nearing the end of the second long day. He had been questioned in the morning, and it had been a simpler version of the questions Ashford had asked before. The court had seemed calm then, the air tinged with curiosity and sympathy. Now it was heated and oppressively silent, like the moment before a massive thunderstorm broke overhead. Ashford turned toward his captive audience.

"She was scared!" He whipped back around, stalking toward Abigail and pushing a finger into her chest. "Your fear has killed us all, you stupid cunt!"

Jon's gavel against the wood of the judge's desk was the first crack of lightening. His bellow of "Councilman, that is enough!" the thunder.

Silence rang out again, punctuated only by Ashford's heavy breathing.

"It was a mistake." She was looking at Jon, not Henry, but David knew it was too late. Jon had made up his mind. Abigail knew that. Everyone knew that. That's what the gavel meant.

"Shepherd, you have admitted to not telling the proper authorities about this illness in the fields due to fear. In doing so you have put all of our lives at risk. You know what the law says, Abigail. It's written in front of you now. Justice for all before mercy for one." Jon stood. "If this was a first offence, it would be different." He glanced down at the gavel he

was turning over and over in his hands. He looked out over the crowd gathered and then stared down at Abigail and continued. "This colony has forgiven you before for a mistake, Abigail. You are not faultless, and New Haven knows this." Heads throughout the courtroom began to nod in assent. "As the Proctor of New Haven, I pass my judgement. For your crimes, you will face execution."

The world went soundless. He didn't hear Abigail's frantic screaming as she was drug out of the courtroom, or the apologies of the colonists as they passed him to leave, or Pastor Andrew sitting down. He only realized that the older man was next to him when a white handkerchief was shoved into his line of sight. He didn't take it.

"I'm sorry." David wanted to yell, but he couldn't when he saw the Pastor's face. The older man was crying too, openly. "I'm so sorry, David. It's the law."

"The law's wrong, then."

"No. It's just harsh. It has to be." David knew that the Pastor said was right. At the end of the world, people would kill to get out ahead—the law was the only way to make sure the people worked together instead of murdering each other for bread and water.

"It's not fair now. She's all I have."

The Pastor placed his hand on David's shoulder and cried harder. "I know, son. It's always been the two of you against this world."

"Do you think I can see her?"

"I don't think that's best, David. It can be incredibly hard to see someone knowing what they've done and what's going to happen."

"It's all Jon's fault! She didn't do anything to the fields, it's just some freak accident. Why can't he be merciful, for once?"

"David, do you know where Jon lived before New Haven?" The Pastor's question caught David off guard, and he shook his head. "Jon lived in Peterborough a number of years ago. Do you remember what happened there?"

David did, vaguely. His father had been called in to save a flooding town from starving. He had basically worked a miracle and saved everyone. The newspapers had written about it for weeks.

"Jon lived there at the time, with his wife. Elizabeth was frightened; the Peterborough Shepherd wasn't truly capable of doing his job, but he wasn't terrible either. He just couldn't handle everything flooding. He ran. Elizabeth found out about what was going on, so she decided to take matters into her own hands. She stole from the city stores.

"Jon wasn't a Proctor at the time, just an apprentice. They questioned him, too, acted like he was the same class of criminal because he married her. He almost lost his position because of her, and he certainly lost everyone's respect."

"How do you know all this?" It was the only question David could think of.

"Who do you think suggested Jon Cayce for New Haven's Proctor?" Andrew looked down. "I knew him when he was a boy, and I knew that he couldn't find work with his wife's reputation constantly hanging over him." The old man looked like he had sentenced Abigail to death himself.

They sat together, side by side, until the bell tolled the next hour. Andrew looked up, startled, and then started patting the pockets of his black shirt and pants. "David, I have something to give you. It's from Jon."

"What?" David looked blankly at the envelope in front of him. He didn't even open it, just looked at Pastor Andrew in a demand for an explanation.

“The Southern colony contacted the council last night. They told us that they would find a different replacement Shepherd.” David’s fingers and toes went numb, and he felt his heart stutter for two or three beats. Andrew continued. “From what we’ve seen you are a bright young man, and you’ve made it clear in the last few days that you would be a capable Shepherd. Jon is offering you the position of Shepherd. He wants you to take over here.” Andrew gestured at the envelope. “It’s all in there, but, David, to be perfectly candid, he doesn’t want your sister’s misdeeds to affect your life.”

“What?”

“He thinks that no one else is going to take you on. He’s sure of it. And with whatever this is in the fields... well, he’s not completely wrong. The blame will fall on your sister, but it will fall on you as well. This is a chance for you, one that isn’t lightly given.” David didn’t answer, just kept looking down at the ground between his feet. In his peripheral vision, he could see Andrew lean forward and he felt the older man’s hand rest on his shoulder. “Let me take you to your sister. Just know that the offer stands until morning, David. Jon will be expecting your answer as soon as you decide. This colony needs a Shepherd, and if you say no it’s the council’s job to find someone. I know it’s an uncomfortable situation, but please, think about it.”

As they walked past the witness stand and through the hall leading to the cells, David couldn’t help but wonder if he had a real choice.

Abigail didn’t run to the bars like she had last time. She was curled up in a ball against the opposite wall, her face buried in her hands. She was sobbing, her entire body shaking, the cell echoing with her gasps for air. The Pastor had descended the stairs with him, but quickly patted David’s upper arm and said, “If you need me for anything, I’ll be going home for the night.”

David waited until his footsteps disappeared up the stairs before flinging himself to his knees next to the bars. “Abigail. Abigail, it’s me.”

She didn’t stop crying, but she did raise her eyes to meet him. “David.” She crawled across the metal floor and reached her arms through the bars. It wasn’t much of a hug, but David held onto his older sister as tightly as he could.

Her sobs quieted, eventually. She pulled back from their embrace but held onto his hand, crushing the bones together with her strong grip. “David, you have to tell them.”

He knew what she meant immediately. “What?”

“David, they think that this is some continuation of something, that it’s another mistake. They think losing that entire field four years ago is something I did, that I failed as Shepherd.”

David remembered. An entire crop, gone. A lean and bitter Winter. The way Abigail had stood in front of the council, back before everyone hated her, and told them she had accidentally mixed weed killer into the water and poisoned everything.

She had been so busy with setting up the hydroponic garden that he had volunteered to take over one of the fields. And then he had over ruined everything by mixing up the chemicals—the pH balance in the soil had gone completely off, and within a few days, everything was dead. He had just wanted to prove that he could be the Shepherd. That he was just as capable as Abigail was. That he could keep up with her. Abigail had told him that it was her fault, since she should have watched him better. But David knew that

even though she had focused on the technicalities, it had been his fault that everything in the field withered away.

“You have to tell them what actually happened four years ago. If they know I didn’t do that, they’ll have to reconsider. You know that’s why everyone of them wants my head.” She was right. She had gone from being loved to being the most hated person in the colony in a day, all because of him, because of the mistake he had made and she had owned.

“Go to Jon. Tell him what really happened.” At the mention of Jon, all David could hear was the Pastor’s voice from their conversation earlier: “He thinks that no one else is going to take you on.”

“I know that I said I wouldn’t tell anyone, but you have to tell Jon. If you don’t... David, please.” Her hand crushed his own, and when he didn’t answer, she grabbed his chin with the other to force him to look into her eyes. “David!”

“I’ll go.”

The clawed fingers on his cheeks softened, and Abigail’s body seemed to sag against the bars. She put her hand on the side of his face, and he couldn’t help but lean into her touch. “I love you David. It’s going to be alright, I swear.”

He pulled away from her touch, stood up, and brushed off his knees. Before he went up the stairs, he looked at her again. “I love you, Abby. I’m sorry.” He ran up the stairs before he could hear her answer.

The night sky was dark as he ran through town toward Jon’s lodgings. The stars glimmered and he thought of his father, dead somewhere in the inky expanse above him. His father, who had always told him that he would be a great Shepherd one day. It was all he had wanted to be when his father had died. All he had left of his family was caring for plants and feeding the people who needed to be fed.

As he banged on Jon’s door, all he could think about was his sister. But when the door opened, all he could think about was his father. “I need to speak with you.”

Abigail’s face relaxed as Jon brought her into the town square and removed the shackles. He stood at the front of the gathering crowd, next to the pastor. As soon as her eyes adjusted to the brightness, she saw him and threw herself at him, hugging him with all her might. He kept his arms stiffly at his sides, but leaned down to murmur, “Stop, Abby, you’re embarrassing me.” She pulled away, keeping her hands on his upper arms, and smiled up at him. She looked so happy and relieved, and as she looked up at him, her eyes started to well up.

He pulled back a step, and Pastor Andrew stepped forward and embraced Abigail. David started retreating slowly, stepping backwards into the crowd. He was close enough to hear Pastor Andrew say, “I’m sorry, Abigail,” and to see her confused face, but then he turned and started making his way through the colonists gathered.

He could still hear her voice; the crowd was silent except for the silent heartbeat of their unified breathing. She sounded confused. “There’s nothing to be sorry about, Andrew. The past is the past. And there’s so much to do! David started with the chemicals that Ellinor gave me. I think it might be something else, though. I’ve been doing some more reading—”

It was so quiet he could hear her shocked gasp and the thud of her knees into the concrete slab in the colony’s absolute center. David didn’t have to see it to imagine Jon forcing her to the ground and his sister moment of realization.

He walked away, but that didn't keep him from hearing her screams.

"Jon? What's going—NO! No, I didn't do it! David told you! DAVID." His name was interrupted by the sound of a gun being cocked. David started moving forward more urgently. He pushed and scrambled, but he couldn't get through the crowd. "It's not enough, what Ellinor gave you! It's something else! Please, no, stop, please!"

Jon's voice was mixed with Abigail's. "Abigail Yarrow, for crimes against the colony, you are condemned to death. Do you have any last words?"

"David, please! David, tell them! David—"

He reached the edge of the crowd and ran. He still heard the gunshot.

An Interview with the Author

Q: Where did your inspiration for *No Road Between the Shining Sun* come from?

A: I was riding the orange line to Midway airport to go home for winter break. It was sophomore year, I had just finished finals, and my flight left really early in the morning. The sun was just breaking over Chicago and my eyeballs literally hurt from lack of sleep, and the opening line popped into my head—“it started with the spinach.” At that point, I wasn’t sure what had started with the spinach. What was going on? Why was the spinach so important? As time passed, the idea took on a mind of its own: “What if the spinach was the start of everything in a garden dying?” From there, I asked myself a lot of different questions and slowly answered them, and my answers built my world. It went something like this:

Theresa 1: “Why does it matter if the garden is dying?”

Theresa 2: “Well, what if the garden is the only source of food? And if it’s dying, then the people who eat the food will die?”

Theresa 1: “Why would the people die if one garden died?”

Theresa 2: “Well, it must be the only food they have. Maybe they’re separated from other people!”

These questions eventually led to the idea of the future and Mars colonization, where certain individuals would grow food for everyone else.

To be honest, it took a long, long time for the idea to come together. It was mostly thinking about it, on and off, for a year and a half before I had a solid story plan and before I knew what was happening on Mars. Even then, I only had the bare bones ideas. It wasn’t until I started writing that I realized that Abigail had a brother, and I was probably a

quarter of the way through writing when I decided that the second half of the novel, which takes place after her arrest, would focus on David.

Q: How did the characters change once you started writing them? Did anything about plot change? How did this help your writing of the novella? How did it make it more difficult?

A: As I mentioned above, David didn't become a character until I did some reading on building an effective plot. One of the things I read was that your point of view character had to be the one doing something. The reader needed to be able to follow his actions. That didn't mean that the point of view character was necessarily the protagonist, and, in my case, David actually almost ends up being an antagonist.

The realization really hit me when my brain reminded me that Abigail's arrest meant that Abigail would be in jail. The exchange probably went something like this:

Brain: Abigail's arrest means that Abigail would be in jail for the second half of the story.

Theresa: That's fine, right? Totally fine! She can have a scene where she talks to David and tells him what to do. Then he'll come back and tell her it's working. And we can see her point of view in the trial. Then David can come, visit, and tell her how Ellinor's chemical mix isn't working.

Brain: So the entire time it'll be focused on other people bringing Abigail information.

Theresa: Yes. This sounds awesome.

Brain: So everything Abigail learns and everything the reader learns will be something another character already knows.

Theresa:... Yes. Yes, that is correct. This sounds boring, doesn't it?

Brain: Total snooze fest. I want to be where the action is! Who's doing all the stuff while she's behind bars?

Theresa: Well, I guess David is?

And, thus, David's complete control over act two blossomed from thought to reality. I thought it was going to be really difficult to write from two very different points of view, but that was not the case. David's section was a lot easier to write; I could identify with how intensely he felt things. There were several points where I actually started crying while writing David's parts: the poor boy is hurting a lot, though that doesn't make up for his terrible choices.

David's sudden rise to prominence was difficult in the sense that it meant I had to be very sneaky and subtle about his betrayal. In the original draft and outlining stages, I had thought that we would be with Abigail as she realized she wasn't being released but being executed. Keeping that secret in David's point of view meant making his decision unclear. When he arrives on Jon's door and says, "I need to speak with you," I wanted the reader to know there were two options but believe he was going to choose to confess. It was one of the most difficult sections to write in part two, but I'm really pleased with how it turned out.

Q: What was your writing process?

A: My writing process for this was like an expanded version of my writing process for school assignments: thinking, research, writing, panic. A lot of the times when I write a paper for class, I spend a great deal of time thinking about the paper. I think about the prompt while I'm walking to school, or I look at it several times in the weeks leading up to

the due date. Then I focus on research. In both cases, this includes a lot of reading to try to figure out what data and facts I need. For my English papers, this is hunting for quotes. In the case of the novella, I checked out a lot of books from the library on gardening, Mars, space travel, writing, and being a pilgrim. I organized a five-subject notebook so that each of the research categories had a section. As I would read books, I would write notes on sticky notes and attach them to the pages of the five-subject notebook.

After a few weeks of this, I started to write. This took the longest time. Writing doesn't come easily to me, so I often found myself sitting in front of my computer knowing I needed to write but not knowing how. This was the most disheartening part of the process. DePaul's Writers Guild meetings were crucial at this point, since they were so incredibly motivating and invigorating.

Panic is the final step for my creative and scholastic writing. For some reason the stress of a deadline helps my brain function better. For example, the stress of a deadline really helped with the final push for part two of the novella—I wrote 4500 words in two days.

Q: What was your goal for this work?

A: One of the things I find incredibly frustrating as a feminist is the idea that women are incapable of leading groups, or the fact that people seem to hold female power figures more accountable for their faults. In general, a lot of times I find myself angry about the way our society acts toward women. My goal for this work was to challenge these patriarchal values by forcing the reader to question how they view women.

This goal was the real reason for the structure of the novella and the sudden revelation that we're in the future at the end of part one. I wanted the reader to believe that

the story took place hundreds of years ago. That way, they would almost brush off the way the male characters acted toward Abigail. I wanted a reader to think, “So what if Jon the Proctor is being a dick toward Abigail? It’s 1680, right? That’s just how the time period was.” The sudden switch in time period at the end of the first section forces the reader to confront their own internalized sexism: even in the future, society treats women unequally.

Q: What things did you include to deliberately make it clear that this took place in the future?

A: Oh, there were so many. Let me tell you a few of my favorites. One of them is the fact that the plants can’t be planted and be ready at the same time. There are certain growing seasons for everything, and very little of it overlaps perfectly like it does in the book. This is due to the fields functioning as greenhouses, which help Abigail grow anything and everything all at the same time. Another favorite example is the ships. Of course, when you assume that the setting is colonial and the author says ships, you think of the Mayflower. I hope that’s definitely one that people catch on a second reading. I tried to focus less on laying in details of future technology and more on including specific details that didn’t work with the colonial time period. It was a struggle to find the right balance, and one of the best sources of feedback I received was from the DePaul Writers Guild members. They would often mention if something clued them in too much.

Q: How did you find the balance between giving the reader enough information but also trusting him or her to figure things out on their own?

A: I don’t know if I did, to be honest. This was something that my thesis advisor mentioned a few times about my dialogue. He thought I was including too much and not asking the reader to do anything at all. In the end, I tried to focus on leaving small clues, then bigger

clues, and then even bigger clues. I wanted to guide readers into the realization, if they knew what they were looking for, but I also didn't want to have them feel tricked by the reveal at the end of part one. All in all, my go to question while writing was, "if they go back and re-read this section, how will they respond to this information now that they know? It was difficult, because I was simultaneously trying to create a novella for first- and second-time readers.

Q: What happens after the last scene? Does the cure from Ellinor work?

A: In the original outlines, there was an additional scene where David discovered that the cure was working right after Abigail's death, and then there was a sort of epilogue after that where the disease comes back. In my mind, everyone dies.

One piece of information that isn't included is what everyone else in the colony is doing. They're mining, both for resources and then for shelter. While colonies could start on the surface in pressurized plastic domes, several scholars suggest that one of the best places to start creating extensive structures would be below the surface of the planet. All of those big burly men are there to excavate Mars. Actually, there's a piece of dialogue that specifically refers to this, if you know what you're looking for. It's when Abigail is walking around and welcoming families to New Haven. She overhears this brief exchange:

"More and more people coming into the cities each day... here we'll have space to stretch our arms."

"Until you're ten feet under, you mean."

The ten feet under line is actually a reference to the mining these new visitors are about to do below Mars surface.

All of this leads to the fact that the disease in the fields was actually due to contamination of the water supply. As the water that irrigated the fields began to become

more and more polluted with mining byproducts, the more the water poisoned the plants. That's why the hydroponic garden, in part two, is doing so well—Abigail and David only use mixtures of water and nutrient solution to feed those plants, and all of the solutions they're using were mixed prior to the contamination of the water supply. When David goes back to check on the hydroponic spinach after adding a fresh batch of nutrient solution that he just mixed – with the contaminated water – he finds “the spinach in the hydroponic garden turning to black mush”. That's page twenty-nine.

Long story short, in my mind David made the wrong choice, and eventually it came back to kill him.

Q: What impact did Arthur Miller's original play have on you as a reader? How did you include “The Crucible,” one of your different sources?

A: One of the main things I took from “The Crucible” as a writer was names. Abigail, the antagonist in Arthur Miller's play, becomes the protagonist here. By giving my main character this name, I'm encouraging the reader to associate her with Miller's accuser. Jon the Proctor is obviously homage to John Proctor, and in the second part of the novella we learn about his wife, Elizabeth. By using these names and the very specific associations that accompany them, I wanted to create certain audience expectations for my characters. Abigail does turn out to be a liar, but for a completely different reason than the source material. While I want the reader to focus on gender inequality, I also want them to think about how motive changes the morality of a crime.

This all really feeds into the fact that Arthur Miller's play pissed me off. It wasn't fair! Poor Elizabeth, caught in a catch-22 because of her cheating husband and the other woman. When I closed that book, I was livid. Obviously my own story doesn't have the

same outcome, but I do hope that readers feel the same way for Abigail in this story: it isn't fair that people treat her so poorly, it isn't fair that David gets to be absolved of all his mistakes, and it isn't fair that she loses her life because he was too scared to step forward and tell the truth.

Character Profile: Abigail Yarrow, the Shepherd

Date of Birth: 4/4/2332

Age: 27

Hair Color: Brown

Eye Color: Hazel

How she ended up at New Haven: Abigail comes from a long line of Shepherds in the United Kingdom. Her father was part of the second wave of Shepherds selected to go to Mars. The New Haven colony had been one of the first colonies built on Mars. The first group of settlers was primarily biologists and



other scientists. Despite their assurances that “planting couldn't be that hard” and “it's just a form of biologic science in action,” most of the four hundred plus people were dead by the next spring. After such a catastrophic loss, officials on Earth recruited a Shepherd right away. They happened to choose Jesse Yarrow, who brought along his two children, Abigail and David Yarrow.

Abigail's family consists of: Her half-brother, David, and herself. Abigail's mother died when Abigail was two; she contracted one of the many strains of antibiotic resistant strains

of tuberculosis. Abigail nearly died from the disease as well, but her father nursed her back to health. Abigail and her father lived alone together until she was eight, when her father remarried. Her younger brother was born the following year. When Abigail was eighteen and her brother was nine, her stepmother passed away unexpectedly. Two years after her stepmother's death, the government ordered her father to assume the role of Shepherd for the New Haven Mars colony. He died during the voyage.

What is Abigail's position at New Haven: After her father's death on the journey to New Haven, Abigail became Shepherd upon their arrival. She was twenty years old. She has been in this position for seven years as of 2359.

One word that summarizes Abigail Yarrow: Duty. Since she was little, Abigail's father taught her how important the role of Shepherd was for the continued survival of humanity. She learned that her job was not just to grow food, but also to guide her community. Instead of thinking about herself, Abigail constantly worries about if she's serving the colony well and how she can best care for David, who has been in her care since she was twenty years old. There is a lot riding on her, including her brother's well-being, the lives of hundreds of colonists, and her father's legacy.

Character Profile: David Yarrow



Date of Birth: 6/28/2341

Age: 18

Hair Color: Dark Brown

Eye Color: Brown

How he ended up at New Haven: Like his sister, David Yarrow came to New Haven because his father was ordered to take the position as Shepherd for the colony.

What is David's position at New Haven: At 18, David doesn't have an official position in the colony. He is currently finishing his training with his sister to take over as Shepherd for one of the Southern Colonies.

One word that summarizes David Yarrow: Sadness. David has always felt very alone as a child. His sister Abigail, being nine years older, was always treated as an adult while he was treated as a child. He sometimes felt like his father, mother, and sister were all keeping secrets from him, even though it was just them trying to protect him. David's mother died suddenly when he was nine, which hit him very hard. His training with his father ceased for a few months as Jesse dealt with his own grief; Abigail took care of David at this time, making sure he was eating and going to school. David's feelings of abandonment continued when his father died on the trip to Mars and his sister took over as Shepherd—they went from interacting everyday on the ship to Abigail being away from home during the daylight hours. David acted out a lot during this time in an attempt to garner attention from his sister. Instead, different men from the colony stayed with them and tried to teach him how to be a man. This made David miss his sister more.

What does David want: David wants to be a Shepherd so he can feel closer to his father. Ever since his father's death, David has thought that the best way he could live out his father's legacy was to be a Shepherd. He has often fought with his sister over some of her choices while Shepherding, mostly because the way she does things is not the way he would do them.

Character Profile: Jon Cayce, the Proctor

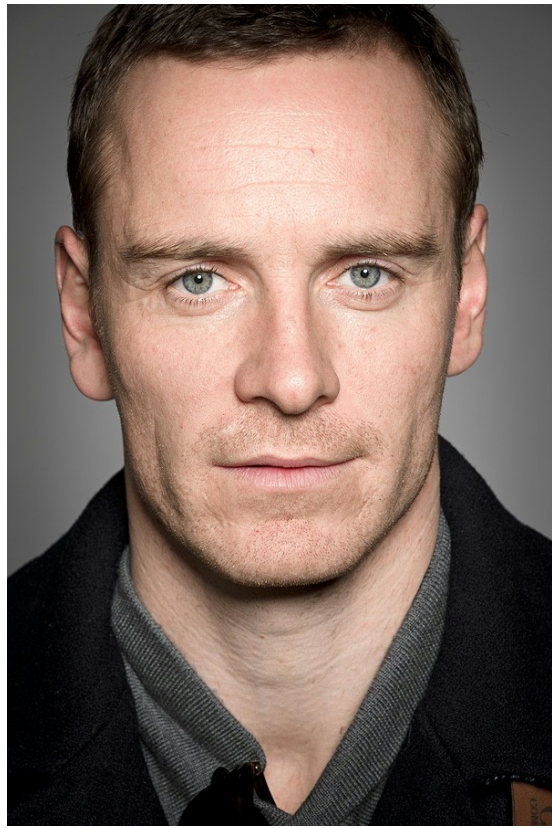
Date of Birth: 12/21/2326

Age: 35

Hair Color: Ashy Blond

Eye Color: Blue

How he ended up at New Haven: In his early 20's, Jon joined the Peace Reserves as an apprentice. He was originally stationed in Peterborough. It was here that he briefly met Jesse Yarrow, during one of the largest floods



the city had ever seen. The town barely survived. In the aftermath of the flooding, the town discovered that Jon's wife, Elizabeth, had stolen food from the city's food stores. She was put on trial, and Jon was questioned and blamed as her accomplice, despite his innocence. Elizabeth was condemned to death, and Jon fled Peterborough when the citizens began to turn on him. After several years going from place to place as directed by the Peace Reserves, he received a commission to go to Mars and serve as Proctor for the New Haven colony. Due to a logistical oversight, the majority of the first settlers of the colony perished in their first winter there—most of the Peace Reserves officers refused to go (likely due to the widely held belief in the Reserves about the power of bad omens). Seeing this as a chance to gain recognition and a promotion, Jon agreed.

What is Jon's position at New Haven: Jon serves as the Proctor for the colony. He is a combination of police officer and judge, and he also executes the justice he deals out. This position also requires constant communication with Earth and overseeing the logistics associated with running a colony.

One word that summarizes Jon: Justice. Jon has always believed that equality is treating each person the same as everyone else—there are no exceptions. His Uncle and Grandfather also were members of the Peace Reserves, and he wanted to follow their example and provide justice.

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