Chapter One

The wagon shuddered in and out of a rut big enough to swallow the Grand Canyon. Lisa held the side of the wagon in a death grip and glanced over at Carla, sitting on the other side of the wagon.

“Is your butt getting sore?” Carla asked, raising her voice to be heard over the creaking of the wagon wheels.

Lisa shifted on the uncomfortable wooden bench fixed to the side of the wagon.

“A little.”

Actually, it hurt like hell. The bruises she had collected during the plane crash were multiplying. Carla never complained, so Lisa gritted her teeth and tried to be positive. “At least we’re on our way to get help, right? And sitting is better than walking through dead grass in four inch spike heels.”

When Carla glanced down at Lisa’s feet, Lisa felt an urge to curl her feet under the bench, out of sight. The new Manolo Blahnik ankle boots were sadly scuffed from walking. When she got home, she would throw them out. She would throw out everything she was wearing. She didn’t need a reminder of the last few horrific days. She would relive the terror of weightlessness as the plane fell, the screams and prayers of the passengers, and their dead, mangled bodies in her nightmares for years to come.

Lisa tried to distract her thoughts from the dead and dying by looking around. The sky was the deep, cloudless blue of late Indian summer, sharp against the dried grass covering the bare, rolling hills like worn out gold velvet. That was all there was to see. Not a street, house or town in sight. Only this old-fashioned wagon, pulled by two horses, and a surly driver, and six men who walked alongside, dressed in badly fitted canvas overalls, shapeless hats and work boots.

“It could be worse,” Carla agreed, but her voice lacked conviction. “At least the pilot was able to land the plane without killing everybody.”

“That was a landing?”

By the look on Carla’s face, Lisa’s attempt at a joke had fallen flat. Out of the one hundred people who had boarded the plane in Minneapolis, less than half were still alive when the plane came to a stop. After the plane had ceased shuddering, Lisa and the survivors had tried to help the injured while waiting for help to come. When no help arrived, the co-pilot decided they couldn’t wait forever for rescuers. Too many were dying without medical attention, so she organized three teams of two to go for help. Lisa had been flattered to be chosen for the mission. It showed someone thought she was good for something besides pouting for the camera. She and Carla had been paired up, an international fashion model and a country music star, and sent south to find aid.

“I wonder if anyone else has found help yet?” she asked Carla.

“I hope so.” Carla was grim. “It’s been over a day.”

The wagon jolted over a rock and Lisa’s mouth, open to ask Carla another question, snapped shut hard enough to bruise her teeth. “Hey, try to be more careful!”

Lisa chastised the driver’s back.

He ignored her, just hunching further into the collar of his work coat, probably in an attempt to avoid sin.

Lisa congratulated herself for squelching the urge to flirt just to embarrass him.

He was part of an odd, religious cult she and Carla had found this morning. Elder Pringle had told the women to keep quiet on the ride. Their escort had been ordered to pay them no attention. Elder Pringle had lectured the men about avoiding sin as Lisa and Carla climbed into the back of the horse-drawn wagon. Lisa had privately gaped at that lecture, but she did keep quiet, only talking to Carla now and then.

Carla tossed her thick brown hair over her shoulder. She also tossed an unhappy glare at the driver’s oblivious back. “I hate to sound like a little kid, but are we there yet?”

If the driver heard, he didn’t answer. The wagon wheel hit another rut, and Lisa’s teeth snapped together again. If this kept up all her cosmetic dental work would be ruined. No wonder people in the olden days had bad teeth.

“I sure wish we would have found somebody to help us besides these people,” she said to Carla, as quietly as she could and still be heard.

Carla’s look of disgust toward the men walking alongside the wagon was eloquent. She didn’t bother to keep her voice down. “I can’t decide if they’re Amish or fundamentalist wackos who don’t believe in technology.”

“Remember how excited we were to find them?” Lisa sighed unhappily. The plowed fields indicated real live people, the first sign of people they’d seen since leaving the plane. The tall stone wall indicated this was the protected mansion of a wealthy farmer or rancher.

Carla’s mouth twisted sourly. “Yeah, and I remember how *un*excited we were

when we saw the guards at the gate had guns.”

“I thought the owner must be paranoid.” Lisa tried to smooth her wind roughened

hair. “Or Mafia.”

But inside the wall was not the palatial residence of a wealthy man, but an industrious little village with a blacksmith, smelly chickens running around everywhere and men wearing plain clothes who called each other ‘Brother’. She and Carla had been taken to a couple men called Elder Pringle and Elder Cruz, who told them this was Odessa. They were a farming community who preferred to live separate from the worldliness of their neighbors. They had no phones, computers, cars or any kind of electricity at all. And, going by the endless prayer Elder Pringle droned while their lunch had gotten cold, they were fundamentalists. Lisa believed people and their religions should be respected, but having some dried up stick pray for her “worldly and clearly damned” soul rubbed her the wrong way. Clearly damned? Really? It had taken all her meager acting skills to keep a smile on her face and her mouth shut instead of screaming, “Judgmental, much?”

But the cultists were taking the time to transport her and Carla to the nearest town where they would be able to get help for the plane crash survivors, so Lisa tried to be magnanimous. Elder Pringle said the mayor of Kearney would know what to do with them.

“I can’t wait to get back to civilization,” Lisa said. “I hope there will be a decent hotel where we can get cleaned up. If a flight is available right away, I might still make it to the bikini shoot on time.”

Carla’s mobile brow arched. “Really? After your plane crashes, you’re planning to go to your bikini shoot? How many of your bruises will the bikini hide?”

“I don’t have that many bruises,” Lisa fibbed.

Carla had a point. Over the last decade in the cat-eat-cat world of modeling Lisa had learned a model was never more vulnerable to other models than when in a bikini. Lisa could already hear the other girls sniping at her in those sickly-sweet tones of concern that hid gleeful acid. She could imagine Cherilyn speculating with overdone innocence what she and Brent had done to give her those *interesting* bruises, when she knew very well that Lisa had thrown Brent out more than a month ago. Cheri never missed the opportunity to make Lisa feel bad. Bitch.

The wagon wheel ruts cutting through the grass shifted gradually to dirt and gravel. It was rough, but clearly a road. The ride was still bumpy but better than it was.

Carla loosened her death grip on the side of the wagon. “We must be getting close,” she told Lisa hopefully.

Lisa dug through her bag for her comb and lip gloss. A town meant people and media. Even a small town would have a paper and TV news crews. She knew she looked hideous, but if there were any media people there she wanted to look as good as she could. It was a pity about her clothes being torn and so dirty, and she was embarrassed by her broken fingernails, but there was nothing she could do about that. Maybe the media people would use it to show that she was a heroine. A moment after that thought, she sighed. Some heroine. The real heroine was the co-pilot, who had kept it together even though she was badly hurt.

Carla watched her with an arched brow and a small smile.

“You think I’m vain, don’t you?” Lisa asked. “Shallow, too?” Carla shrugged and her smile turned a little sheepish.

“Well, I am vain,” Lisa admitted, running the comb through her sadly limp blond hair. “I need to look good whenever I’m in public. My face and my figure are my fortune. I have to take care of them, just like you have to take care of your voice and your musical instruments, right?”

Carla nodded. “I guess.” Her face tightened. “But my guitar is somewhere out there, smashed to pieces.”

There was real grief in that smooth voice. Lisa felt a pang of sympathy for the country singer she’d spent the last day with. She and Carla might not have ever become more than acquaintances normally, but after the past twenty-four hours she felt like they were true friends. Lisa didn’t have many friends. That would require trust. She had competitors who smiled at her face while sticking knives into her back. She didn’t think

Carla was like that. For one thing, she wasn’t a model. Carla wore a dark green western-style blouse with jeans, a big buckled belt, and a dark red fringed leather jacket with matching red cowboy boots, all torn or scuffed and dirty. She looked just like what she was: a young country music star. Her hair was beautiful in its healthy shine and thickness, although it was currently dulled by dust. Carla went for the wholesome girlnext-door look and it worked for her. It was different from Lisa’s glam look, and it had survived the trauma of the last day better, too.

“Maybe you’re a little vain,” Carla agreed with a smile. The smiled faded into flat sincerity and she looked pointedly at the bloodstain smeared over the front of Lisa’s sweater. “But anyone who watched you back at the crash site would know that there’s a lot more to you than just your looks.”

Lisa shrugged, uncomfortable. She had done what a lot of other survivors had done after the crash: she had tried to help the injured. As she swiped the pink gloss over her lips she noticed Carla staring ahead. Lisa dropped the lip gloss into her purse and turned to see what Carla was staring at. Was that the town? It couldn’t be. Could it?

“Is that Kearney?” she asked one of the men walking beside the wagon.

He only grunted, tugging his wide-brimmed hat further over his forehead to avoid looking at her. What was wrong with her? Okay, her makeup was minimal and her hair was uncurled. Yes, her powder blue cashmere sweater was stained with blood, and the hems of her five hundred dollar jeans were shredded after getting caught on some jagged metal when she climbed out of the plane. But not answering a polite, direct question was just plain rude. She hated rudeness. Her hand brushed over the unnatural stiffness of her sweater and her stomach lurched.

Carla leaned toward Lisa. “Are you okay?” she asked with compassion. “Are you

thinking about the little boy?”

Lisa nodded jerkily. Unlike some children she had encountered on planes, the four-year-old redhead sitting in the seat in front of her had been a perfect angel, quietly coloring and playing giggling peek-a-boo games with his mother. When the plane had finally come to its metallic screeching stop on the prairie, the mother was dead and the little boy so badly hurt that he could only cry almost soundlessly. Lisa had picked him up and numbly carried him out of the plane, allowing Carla to help her down to the ground, but never letting the boy go. She had hummed to him while he bled and cried and finally died. Lisa didn’t know what his last name had been. His mother had called him Alexander. All she had left of him was his blood on her clothes and the memory of his half-smile when he looked up at her right before he died.

That memory was too precious and too painful to linger on at this moment. There were other people counting on her and Carla now, those too hurt to go for help themselves, who needed doctors so they could live. The mayor of Kearney, Nebraska would get the crash survivors the help they needed. Even the crazy men from Odessa had done what they could to help by bringing them here. For the two hundredth time, Lisa forced her thoughts away from the crash to focus on the here and now.

She stared past the driver’s shoulder. “Is this an actual town? It looks as

rundown as some of the abandoned houses we passed on our walk.”

Buildings looked like they had been half torn down and their windows taken away. There was a familiar fast food restaurant to their right, looking like it had been out of business for fifty years, abandoned for the elements to fade and wear away.

“The recession must have hit this area hard,” Carla suggested doubtfully.

Further in, roads became smoother, and it looked like efforts had been made to clean things up. They rolled past walls that separated whole blocks. The road went from dirt to something like cobblestones. The wagon seat bounced like a car with bad shocks. Even Carla, who Lisa thought was a rough and tumble tomboy sort of girl, looked a little green. Lisa was afraid her lunch was going to escape. Soon they saw people, all men, come out of buildings and take notice of them.

“Women!” shouted one, pointing at the wagon.

Lisa smothered a scowl. Paparazzi could be anywhere, and she didn’t want to show up in any gossip rags with a frown on her face. Still, how rude of those men to point and stare as if they’d never seen a woman before. This town didn’t look much better than the weird religious fort they had just left. No cars, no street lights, or stores that she could see. The wagon slowed to a stop with a jangle of harness and a stomp of hooves in front of a gate in a wall. The farmers spoke quietly to the man at the gate, indicating Lisa and Carla with a wave of his hand. The gate guard craned his head to look at them with an open mouth.

“Yep, the Mayor’s home,” the guard said, still looking at Lisa and Carla with wide eyes. “Probably in his office.”

The gate opened and they were waved through. Carla arched a brow at Lisa.

Lisa shrugged.

Inside the wall the scenery went from urban disaster to country sprawl. It was pretty. This is what Lisa had expected from the walled fortress she and Carla had found this morning. There was tall meadow grass growing on either side of the road, and a big white Victorian house with pillars guarding its veranda at the end of the gravel drive. Some smaller houses were there too, and a barn and some other buildings that looked well maintained. The wagon rumbled down the drive to the front of the house. A couple of men came out onto the wide covered porch. The wagon stopped about ten yards from them. One of the men, big-bellied with brown hair and a grizzled, graying beard, came down the steps to stand a few yards away from the wagon.

One of the Odessa guards stepped forward to shake the man’s hand. “Mayor

Madison,” he said loudly, and then lowered his voice to speak further.

Lisa exchanged a half-laughing, half-horrified look with Carla. Mayor? He looked like a beer-bellied, aging hippy with a hangover. Carla stood up and swung herself over the side of the wagon, landing on the dirt driveway with easy grace. Lisa doubted she could do that even if her feet hadn’t been killing her.

The second man flowed down the steps with the lithe grace of a cat and when the sun hit him Lisa caught her breath. His hair was golden, a halo of curls around his face. His face was elegant, sun-kissed to a creamy golden tan, perfect in each clear-cut feature. As a model, Lisa had worked with many handsome men, but none of them could top this one. Such beautiful blue-green eyes with dark lush lashes shouldn’t belong to a man. That wide, gracefully curving, kissable mouth made Lisa wonder what he would taste like. He could almost be called pretty, except that his jaw was hard, his chin square and his shoulders broad.

He came and stood beside the wagon. For once she didn’t notice a single thing that could be enhanced in the appearance of someone she was meeting for the first time. He was a golden god. Lisa stared, besotted, into his beautiful, dark-lashed eyes until she heard Carla snort. *Oh, my God*, she said to herself. *I must look like a freshman mooning over the high school quarterback*. She felt the heat of a blush rush to her cheeks. Hoping she didn’t look like a fool, she smiled at him and waited for him to speak.

Chapter Two

“Can I help you down?” asked the golden god. Even his voice made her want to swoon. The deep tone touched something inside, striking a spark between her thighs.

“Oh,” Lisa began, but before she could say anything else he stepped up on the wheel axle, put his hands on her waist and lifted her without effort to the ground. She stifled her gasp of pain when he put her on her feet. “Thank you.”

“Are you hurt?” he asked with quick concern.

The concern warmed her, but Lisa hurried to brush it off. “No, just a little sore.” She could have stared at him all day, but she gave herself a brisk, inward shake. She extended her hand. “Hi, I’m Lisa Anton. And this is Carla Zimmerman.”

He nodded politely at Carla and turned his eyes back to Lisa, taking her hand like it was breakable, spun glass. “Eddie Madison. Pleased to meet you.” He seemed to have to force himself to look back at Carla. “Pleased to meet you both.”

Carla nodded back distractedly, apparently more interested in the conversation between the bearded, aging hippy and the farmers than this Greek god come to life.

There was a line between her brows as she looked from their escort to Mayor Madison. The golden god was listening too, so Lisa tried to focus.

Skinny? The mayor was gesturing at her, saying something about her being skin and bones? And Carla too? Carla was by no means obese, but she was at least twenty pounds too heavy for her height. Lisa tried to follow the conversation, but all she could grasp was that the farmers were talking about her and Carla like they were used cars they were trying to sell to a skeptical buyer. And the buyer kept pointing out flaws, like he was trying to get the price dropped down.

“Hey!” said Carla loudly. “We need help. The plane we were in crashed. People are hurt. They need to get to a hospital.”

All the men—and some more had drifted over from the other houses and building in the area—stared at her. The mayor pointed triumphantly at Carla. “And they’re crazy!”

he shouted at the farmers, as if that were a clinching argument.

“They’re fertile,” the farmer countered, “and still young enough to have twenty years of child bearing ahead.”

Lisa blinked. The words floated over the top of her mind before sinking in.

“*What*?” she gasped.

“The blonde is too skinny to be fertile,” the mayor argued.

The farmer responded but Lisa didn’t hear it because the golden god had put his hand on her arm and whispered, “I don’t mind that you’re skinny. I’ll see that you have plenty of food so you can fatten up.”

Lisa pulled her arm away, half-offended, and caught up with the conversation.

“Eddie,” the mayor said, “why don’t ya take them gals up to the porch where they can

set in the shade. Fetch them some water, too. They’re probably thirsty from the drive into town.”

“Sure, dad,” Eddie said, reaching for Lisa’s arm again.

The farmer grabbed Lisa before Eddie could, and jerked her away so violently that she stumbled on her aching feet and almost fell. “They can stay put until we finish our business.”

Eddie’s beautiful face was hard and angry. “You be careful with her. You wouldn’t want to damage the merchandise,” he added sarcastically.

Carla was looking like she couldn’t believe her ears. “Didn’t you hear me?” she yelled. “I said, there’s been a plane crash and people need medical help!”

Eddie’s dad looked over at her with a serious expression. “Don’t you worry, ma’am, we’ll discuss that as soon as these gentlemen and I finish our talk. I promise, we’ll figure out what’s best to do.”

Lisa stood next to Carla beside the wagon, listening in disbelief as the farmers sold them to Eddie’s dad. The other men who had come out to see what was going on began filing back and forth, carrying bundles and boxes from one of the barns to the wagon. Carla was stiff with anger, her arms folded over her chest, her large handbag hanging from one elbow. “The going price for two fertile women?” she hissed sarcastically to Lisa. “Fifty pounds of coffee, a hundred pounds of sugar, and a chunk of salt. Are you insulted? I am. I’m worth at least twice that.”

Lisa nodded numbly. She’d always thought religious people were trustworthy. But these guys really were some sort of weird cult. She and Carla were just lucky the cultists hadn’t done something worse than sell them to the mayor of the neighboring

town. She watched the Odessa men turn the wagon and drive away from the house.

“Well, now, ladies,” Mayor Madison said. “Why don’t we go on inside and get you a drink of water, and talk about what needs to be done.”

Eddie walked beside Lisa and she was aware of the admiring glances he gave her. She cringed when she thought of how horrid she must look with her unwashed, flat hair and dirty, torn clothes. When was the last time she had left her apartment looking half this bad?

The inside of the house was quietly elegant, with gleaming hardwood floors and white painted walls. The mayor led them past the foyer and other rooms to the back of the house, to the kitchen where two women, probably a mother and daughter, stood looking curious. Lisa noticed the lack of modern appliances with unease. Were the Madisons part of that weird cult too? No, the women were wearing pants, and the older one had hair cut in a short graying blond bob. The few women in Odessa had worn ankle-length skirts and braided hair under white caps. The mayor kissed the elder woman on the cheek.

“This is my wife, Darlene Madison, and my daughter, Brianna,” said the Mayor. “You’ve met my boy, Eddie. I’m Ray Madison, mayor of Kearney. Honey, these ladies will be staying with us for a while. They’ve come from Odessa.”

Eddie couldn’t seem to resist stroking his hand along Lisa’s forearm. “This is Lisa

Anton, and this is Carla Zimmerman,” he said.

“Edward,” his mother said warningly, and Eddie stepped away from Lisa with the same uncanny grace he’d moved with before. Lisa was fascinated. Maybe he was a dancer?

Mrs. Madison waved at the table. “You girls sit down now. Let me get you something to eat.”

She was a tall woman wearing a button up cotton shirt and loose denim pants, with a large bosom and broad hips, and a face as beautiful as Eddie’s. Obviously he took after his mother in looks, not his father. His sister was built like their mother, her blond hair was brassier and curlier than Eddie’s, her face not quite as pretty. She joined them at the table, looking at them with wonder. Mrs. Madison served them all slices of apple pie and glasses of water, and they sat down at the table.

“Now then,” the mayor said. “Tell us about this plane crash. Where is it?”

The Madison family looked startled as Carla and Lisa explained everything that had happened since yesterday morning when they boarded the plane in Minneapolis.

Brianna and Mrs. Madison made sounds of horror and sympathy when they described the way the plane bucked and fell, nearly completely out of the pilot’s control, to the earth. The blood and the screams of the dying … Lisa’s mind stuttered to a stop when she remembered Alexander. She struggled silently with tears when she remembered him crying so weakly in her arms until his struggling heart finally stopped beating.

Under the table, Carla patted her knee and continued the story matter-of-factly.

“Some of us survivors were sent to try to find help, since the plane’s radio wasn’t working and neither were anyone’s cell phones. We walked yesterday until sundown without finding anyone, and started off again at dawn. The first people we found were at Odessa. They brought us here. We need to send an air ambulance. Some people were badly hurt but still alive when we left the plane.”

“An airplane,” said Mayor Madison, shaking his head. “You think it’s about thirty or forty miles west of here, and a bit north. You can leave that to me. I’ll round up some men and we’ll get things taken care of. Meanwhile, you gals should go on upstairs and get a good rest.”

A weight fell off Lisa’s shoulders. She had actually been worried that they wouldn’t be able to get help for the survivors they had left behind. She paid attention the pie on her plate. Lisa normally didn’t eat pie; it wasn’t in her diet plan. But this was really good. And even though a half hour ago she had felt nauseous in the wagon, she found now that she was really hungry. When she got back to L.A. she’d skimp a little bit to make up for it, but right now she scooped up the last bite of pie with pleasure.

Mrs. Madison noticed. “You look like pie isn’t on the menu for you too often.”

“Not too often,” Lisa agreed with a smile. “It was wonderful. Thank you.”

“Now, there,” said the mayor heartily. “You’re a bit on the scrawny side, but you have nice manners. A man should consider more than just looks when he’s shopping for a wife.”

“Uh,” said Lisa blankly.

“Now, Ray,” said his wife in a commanding voice. “You get going. There’s plenty to get done, and there’s no time to waste.”

“That’s a fact.” Ray nodded and got up. “Eddie, you’re with me. Honey, we’ll likely miss supper. Don’t keep anything for us, we’ll grab a bite when we get back.”

While Mrs. Madison set a big kettle on the weird-looking stove, Bree went around the kitchen and pulled all the blinds at the kitchen windows down. “You girls will want a little wash-up before you take your nap,” Mrs. Madison said briskly. “And let’s get your clothes washed right away. Take off your boots while the water is heating. Bree, bring some nightgowns and towels.”

Lisa looked around the kitchen. No refrigerator, no microwave, no dishwasher. It looked a lot like a kitchen in a pioneer museum. “Um …” Lisa didn’t want to be rude. “It’s so nice of you to take us in like this, but we don’t want to impose. If someone could take us to a hotel, we’ll be fine.”

Mrs. Madison shook her head. “That wouldn’t be safe for you at all. We’re perfectly happy to have you here.”

Carla was a little more direct. “I need to call my parents. They will be worried about me.”

The older woman shook her head. “I’m sorry. We have no phones.”

Carla’s large hazel eyes narrowed. “No phones? You’re not part of that cult from

Odessa. Are you?”

Bree’s eyes peeped over the stack of towels she was carrying into the kitchen. She looked quickly at her mother as she set the pile down on the table. Mrs. Madison laughed gently. “No. They don’t quite approve of us down in Odessa, I’m afraid. No one has electric appliances or phones anymore, dear. Bree, get the basins. I think the ladies would like to soak their feet. I saw the way you were limping, both of you.”

“What?” demanded Carla. “No phones? Why not?”

Mrs. Madison scooped some water out of the kettle heating on the old-fashioned stove and came to the table. She set a basin down on the floor in front of each of them.

Lisa put her bare, blistered feet in the lukewarm water and closed her eyes in bliss.

Mrs. Madison smiled at Carla as she took a seat at the table. Her eyes were serious and sympathetic. “What year is this?”

Carla stared for a minute. “2014, of course.”

Bree gasped. “No, it isn’t!” she protested. “That’s the year the Terrible Times started.”

Mrs. Madison nodded. “It is 2064. I don’t know what all happened in 2014, but I was taught that evil men and women made things explode in the cities all around the world. A lot of people died. Those who lived ran away from the cities. And then people starting getting sick.”

Lisa wanted to laugh, but Mrs. Madison looked so serious that she forced it back.

Carla, on the other hand, didn’t look like she thought it was funny, and she might forget that Mrs. Madison was their hostess. Lisa hurried to say, “Who would do such a terrible thing?”

“Terrorists,” Bree answered promptly. “Mr. Gray told us all about it in school. He was alive then. He called them terrorists. The terrorists used new-clee-air devices to kill millions of people. Their great plan must have killed them, too, but not until after they made everyone sick. The Woman Killer Plague is why there aren’t too many women now.”

“That’s ridiculous!” Carla snapped.

“It’s true,” Mrs. Madison insisted quietly. “You told my husband you walked for over a day. How many people did you find during that day? How many empty homes did you find?”

A wave of cold raised goose bumps on Lisa’s arms. “But that’s impossible,” she argued weakly.

Carla’s arguments were louder and stronger. “You’re taking this pretty calmly,” she said aggressively. “If it were true, it would be pretty amazing to me to have two women show up out of nowhere and claim to be from the past.”

“You’re not the first people from the Times Before to come to this area,” was Mrs. Madison’s unruffled reply. “There were some women who came to Colorado about ten years ago. My friend saw them and told me all about it.”

Carla continued to argue, but she kept her feet in the soothing water. She went on for quite a while, until Mrs. Madison just left the table to go to the steaming kettle on the stove.

Bree said sympathetically, “You can go to the library and look up everything there. Mr. Gray has all the newspapers from the Times Before and the Terrible Times.

I’m sure he’d let you look at them if you asked. And you should talk to my brother. He’s studied all about it.”

“Come wash up, girls,” Mrs. Madison said. “You can have nice hot baths and wash your hair tonight after supper in a real bathtub, but for now you can wash up here.

Leave your clothes behind and Bree will get them washed for you while you’re napping.”

“But what about the people at the plane crash?” Carla said angrily.

“My husband will know what is best to do for them,” was Mrs. Madison’s tranquil answer.

“It’s nice of you to offer to put us up,” Lisa said with desperate courtesy. “But we’d like to go to the hotel.”

Mrs. Madison looked at her with cool eyes a little bluer than Eddie’s. “If you went to the hotel you’d be raped and married by morning. Women are scarce here because of the plagues and some men are unscrupulous in their methods of finding a wife.

You’re far safer here. Hurry now and get washed up.”

Bathing in public was embarrassing, but not as embarrassing as the compassionate remarks Mrs. Madison and her daughter made about Lisa’s slenderness.

“Have you had bad harvests?” Bree asked sympathetically. “We have plenty, so be sure to eat your fill.”

It made Lisa glad to pull the much too big flannel granny nightgown over her head to hide a body that had been celebrated in swimsuit editions of sports magazines.

“Now you go on upstairs and take a nap until supper,” the mayor’s wife ordered.

“Bree, do you have their clothes in the washtub?”

“Sure do, Mom,” Bree said brightly. “I’ll let them soak a while before I scrub them.”

Lisa cringed at the thought of her cashmere sweater being scrubbed until she remembered the bloodstains. It was already ruined. Scrubbing couldn’t make it any

worse.

Mrs. Madison waved them out of the kitchen. “Then show the girls to the guestroom on the north side.”

Lisa followed Bree up the beautifully carved staircase in a numb daze. But she could see that Carla was stiff with anger. As soon as Bree opened the door of a room and ushered them in, Carla let the anger loose in furious words.

“How stupid do you think we are?” she demanded. “2064? Seriously?”

Bree paused in turning down the blankets on the double bed, frowning at Carla with obvious confusion. “Stupid? I don’t think you’re stupid.”

“Then why would you think we’d swallow your story about us being fifty years in the future?”

Bree’s plump, previously cheerful face hardened. She straightened with a snap.

“Because it’s the truth! I don’t know how you got here. Maybe *you’re* the crazy ones!

Why should I believe you’re from the Times Before?”

When Carla glared, speechless, Bree softened. “It *is* 2064. Think about it. Does this seem like 2014? Mr. Gray taught us about what it was like in the Times Before. There were lots of women then. Women could go anywhere they wanted, even by themselves, and sometimes they didn’t even get married. There were so many people that some cities had a *million* people living in them. And houses had lots of things we don’t have, like lights that didn’t need oil or candles, and furnaces that didn’t need wood or chips to burn to make heat. You could wash clothes without any work, and you could run a car to travel far off places, and you could talk on a sail fun to people a thousand miles away. Right? That’s what Mr. Gray says, and he lived back then.”

Sail fun? “You mean a cell phone?” Lisa said.

“Yes. When you were walking did you see anything like that? Were there lots of people everywhere you looked? Lots of women? Cars?”

Lisa exchanged a look with Carla. The singer now looked more stunned than angry. Lisa said weakly, “It’s impossible.”

“You don’t need to worry.” Bree patted Lisa’s arm comfortingly. “Honest. My dad will take care of everything. He’s busy right now doing what needs to be done. Later, you can talk to Eddie. He loves to fiddle with the things from the Times Before. He can tell you lots more. Come on, get into bed and take a rest.”

“But what about doctors?” Carla said more strongly. “Are there doctors to take care of the injured at the plane?”

“Of course we have doctors. We have two doctors, besides the midwife and the veterinarian. Two vets, if you count Eddie. He’s been studying animal doctoring with Dex Entilt since he was twelve years old. Really, it’s going to be okay. You just sleep now. I’ll call you for supper.”

Lisa got into the bed as Bree tiptoed out. The mattress sagged as Carla sat down. “Carla, do you think it could be true?”

“Of course not,” said Carla stoutly. “Planes don’t jump fifty years into the future when they crash.”

“Should we leave?” Lisa asked hesitantly. “Try to find someone else?”

“Not without our clothes,” Carla replied grimly, plucking at the collar of the granny nightgown.

Good point. Lisa tried to sleep, but so many thoughts were whirling around her head that she couldn’t. Except she did, and dreamed of a four year old boy who looked a lot like Eddie smiling up at her as he died.