Being Recalled - Angel Colony

Scenes developed for or integrated into the Angel Colony story.

pages ∙ words

**.·. Isolation’s end**

I had cut my ties to the project pretty thoroughly when I left. The last thing I would have ever expected was for them to track me down several years later and ask me to come back to the project and rejoin the space program. Imagine my surprise. I had been out of contact for some time, so he had to track me down at my current home in Scotland. I was there alone. And now that the past, in the form of one captain O’Neal, had intruded on my isolation, I was forced to realize that I was lonely.

**.·. Recruitment**

A breeze teased the scent of new rain around the room. Apart from a cozy sphere of illumination cast by an antique lamp on the low table, the house was steeped in shadows. As twilight deepened the afterglow of evening’s passion, I was savoring the last bite of my meal. Setting the bowl down on the table my hand paused. I noticed the strange hesitation—the chopsticks in my fingers hovering at the rim of the bowl—as a sudden thrill darted up my spine to snarl at the nape of my neck. Purely out of habit, I covered up the betraying hesitation by deftly aligning the slender utensils in a chord intersecting ninety degrees of arc along the rim of the bowl. Rising from the cushion, I glided over to the side board and gathered tea settings for two, and fetched the pot from the hot plate. As I was setting the tray down, I heard the front door sliding open and shut. A brief wind cut through the house, peppering me with droplets, and dancing against the paddles and ribbons of the wind-chimes, conjuring a delicate rain of notes to welcome my unannounced visitor.

“Ms. Sinclair,” he greeted me from the shadows. He slipped out of his jacket and hung it on a hook inside the door. “don’t you think you went a bit out of your way to cut your ties with the project?” He asked as he entered the room, pausing outside the fall of light.

I shrugged, “I doubt I could ever put a safe distance between me and their meddling.” He had been a friend once, perhaps he understood. I met his eyes, even though they were obscured by shadow. “did it really take this long to track me down or did they hope I might forget it all if they waited long enough before ‘finding’ me?” I asked, rhetorically. When he offered no comment, I slipped away from the table and pulled a hot towel out of the warmer. Stepping back into the pool of light, I continued politely, “please, come in, have a seat. I’m sure you have had a long walk. I have made tea, if you would like.”

O’Neal—that’s Alan Eric O’Neal in full—sensed the change in my manner and accepted the invitation gracefully. Stepping forward, he accepted the towel from my outstretched hand, savoring the heat on his face and hands. He settled onto a cushion, one leg tucked in, the other stretched under the low table to spare his knees. I folded gracefully into an accustomed kneel and poured for us. He accepted his cup with a quiet thanks, content to absorb another measure of warmth through his hands for the moment.

I sipped from my cup, peering at him through a veil of steam. He wore a dress-down uniform, which told me he was now in the navy. From his insignia I discovered he had attained the rank of captain. It would be child’s play to sift his thoughts for the news he brought, but I had been too well trained to dare such a gross invasion of privacy. (that does not apply to surface thoughts, as they tend to invade my mind from all points like a constant bath of light.) Instead I questioned him softly about his walk and the inconvenient timing of the down pour. He smiled, confessing to mixed ire and wonder at the elemental display. “in all probability, this could be the last I’ll enjoy for years to come. I have so much work to do in the belt getting the ships built that I might never feel rain again—on earth, at any rate. Who knows what we’ll find out there. The next time I taste rain on my lips could be at the end of the line, opening new territory to build a home for people who have never and will never know earth. They will be conceived here, but they will not be born until a place has been found and prepared for them.” He gazed into the middle distance after that thought and then folded the towel in his lap with a sigh.

“Which,” he added as his train of thought intersected the matter that had brought him, “only makes me wonder if what I came here to say is really good news or bad.” He looked at me with sudden sobriety. I held his eyes for a moment and then nodded slightly for him to continue. “Arden,” he sighed once more, then committed himself. “you have been recalled. You will be notified as early as dawn to report back to the project for your assignment. Those orders are non-discretionary,” he stated. “at the moment, though, you have a choice. The project—well, friends on the faculty—sent me tonight to *ask* you to come back.” He held my eyes with his as he asked, “will you come back?” He maintained eye contact as he finally took a sip of his tea.

I took a deep breath, held it for a short count, and then said, “tell them that I will discuss the matter with my mother.” He coughed, almost choking on his tea. That was not a yes or a no. O’Neal understood the answer well enough, and the matter had to have been in his thoughts, but he hadn’t figured out how to address it delicately. My blunt approach caught him off guard.

“Arden,” he began to protest and dropped it, dabbing at his shirt front with the towel. As he sopped up the puddles on the table, I poured him some more tea. “they’re just people,” he began again, “people make mistakes, and sometimes other people get hurt. Are you ever going to let it go? What do we have to do for you to forgive us?”

I didn’t know how to answer. I might have wanted some kind of apology for what the project had done to me, but that would require that they understand the childhood they gave me—understand *me*.

“Arden,” he interrupted my reflection. I flushed slightly, wondering how long a silence had passed. Seeing that he had my attention again, he continued. “I understand how you feel, but that is history now. We really need you now. *i* need you,” he emphasized.

“*You* need me?” I echoed inquisitively. “what is it exactly you’re asking me to involve myself in? I was never exactly vital to the project. I was competent and I could work well with my mother, who *was* indispensable. That doesn’t mean I’m qualified to complete her work for the project,” I pointed out.

“Yes, but that’s not what we want,” he deflected. “I admit the project expended very little effort to keep tabs on you. You needed the time to yourself. Some of the board would have been happy to have lost you altogether. You did not leave a lot of friends behind by the time you left.” I opened my mouth to comment on that and he stared me down. “I am not going to argue whether you had cause for your grief, but your temper burned a lot of innocent people along with the guilty,” he criticized with a level gaze. I bit my lip. I couldn’t argue, my self centered foolishness ranked up there with that of martin Craig, the project director who hadn’t a thought to spare on anyone as long as the work proceeded on schedule. O’Neal leaned back and closed his eyes as if in deep contemplation and went on, “what I am here about concerns only the future. In spite of your experience with the field systems and interface drive, you were never considered for a technical position on this project; in any case the research has already been completed and is being developed. In that sense they can get along quite fine without you.”

“Curiouser and curiouser,” I murmured. I rubbed a thoughtful finger over my lips. “You said *they* want me back; *you* need me. Why?” I prompted. “give me an answer that makes sense.”

He smiled and shook his head in apology. “sorry, I thought that it was obvious.” He fished a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket and looked to me for permission. I stood up and led him out onto the garden verandah. He lit the filthy thing and took a couple of deep drags before resuming. “there is a list naming about seven hundred registered psi actives. Classified. Each individual tests above four on the access scale, or over a hundred on the geometric scale. If the government were willing to admit that it was possible, they would all be registered as class three actives,” he explained. He turned to make eye contact. “your name is on that list.”

I did not say anything. I had learned about the list from my mother—at the moment of truth. She had been on it too. I just waited, quietly calculating the odds that O’Neal would get to the point on his own. This was a man who had spent too much time around telepaths. He was trying to catch me with my hand in the cookie jar. I had to ignore the bait and pretend that I hadn’t noticed the trap either. Latents may have limited abilities to communicate with each other, but their conversations are more efficient at least. To my surprise, he got right to the point. “I have two ‘class three’ actives committed to my staff. I need to have one more assigned to complete the group for my ship. Each ship in operation exodus has been assigned a three man team from actives on that list. Only about two hundred are volunteers, which means that about a third of the assignments are under duress.” He took another deep pull on his cigarette, with a disgusted frown on his face. “try to imagine what you could do if you were on one of those ships against your will,” he suggested.

“They would never get me on one of those ships if I didn’t want to be there,” I growled.

He turned a flat look in my direction and said, “if it came to that I wish it were true.”

All at once I realized what he was really telling me. Why he was really here. “they assigned me to you,” I concluded out loud, putting the pieces he had given me together. “you knew I would not willingly go back to the project. You knew they would somehow manage to force me to accept the assignment. Knowing that, you did not want me on your ship.” I turned an incredulous look on him as he calmly puffed away. “you also knew that if I had any kind of warning at all they might not be able to find me if I got away in time. My god, you’re actually giving me a choice!” I laughed, feeling slightly numb. “you are aren’t you?”

He returned the slightest of nods.

I ran my hands through my hair and gazed into the garden rain. I contemplated the details he had slipped me, and weighed them against my grudge. All of a sudden it didn’t matter, I knew what I wanted to do. I turned back to face him. “so, what exactly are my responsibilities, captain?” I asked.

**.·. Childhood’s end**

If experiencing the death of my mother had not been bad enough by itself, this horrible union of our minds also destroyed my childhood. The truth about psionic research, the government cover-up, the use of psionic ability by the government to develop technology for the exploration of space and all the other experiences and memories of my mother’s life exploded through my mind at the instant of her death light years away.

If anything, that revelation inspired my anguish to turn into rage against the project. I could not deal with what I learned. They had created an ideal place for me to grow up—far better than the civilian world outside it. They had given me a perfect childhood and it had turned out to be a carefully crafted lie. Among the terrible secrets I never suspected were hidden in her mind, which became mine, was that one of her responsibilities was to destroy *me*, should I ever prove mentally unstable; inclined toward violent, or abusive behavior. I find it amazing that I or any other child on the reservation survived growing up, in light of that discovery. But, as artificial as life on the reservation proved to be, I realized, in time, that it was only part of a greater effort intent on assuring that the world at large never had to deal with the fact that I was one of the most dangerous human beings ever born.

**.·. Fame and infamy**

As the first public psi, my time was kept too occupied for me to indulge in much self-pity, anyway. i devoted my time to public relations soothing institutional and individual fears of psionic potential. It didn’t take a genius to imagine the potential for evil and mischief present in the real and imagined powers of psi. Educating the public about the realities of psionics and the means available to deter and police psionic misbehavior was too big a project for me to handle alone, and eventually I was able to bow out of the picture and retire from public life. By the time I was finally a free and independent citizen I had gotten over my loss. In my mind the events of my past were closed. I entered the private sector and assumed that the government had forgotten about me.