

Chapter 5

The Shield

Parvaneh stared with horror into Montvill's pale, cold eyes. A tiny spark of light appeared there, then grew and grew until it exploded like a starburst in the deep cosmos.

His slitted black pupils opened wide in surprise. His ghostly skull reflected a brilliant, blinding flash. Montvill roared in pain, flung his slender hands up to cover his face and reeled to the ground.

As the whole harbourside lit up, Montvill's

foot soldiers sunk to their knees, clutching their heads. Montvill groaned as he twisted and writhed, crawling by his fingertips towards the island of shadow behind the wall of the hut.

Parvaneh squinted into the light. Someone had turned the powerful lighthouse beam towards the village. A beam so bright, so strong, that it could cut through the thickest fog, turning night into day.

Parvaneh shouted to Alice, "Quick. Let's get the key!"

Alice nodded at the others. "Keep them busy here."

More of Alice's friends appeared, charging out of doorways, side streets and alleys. Still dressed in their robes, they tackled Montvill's foot soldiers, wrestling the weapons out of their hands. More of them assailed the two blond men, Montvill's drones. The old postman, the nurse and

deerstalker lady grappled with Montvill himself, wrestling with his arm, trying to stop him from activating the button on his wrist.

Parvaneh could see, as Alice snatched her hand and led her away, that Montvill and his men would still be too strong for them, even with the bright light. But they could at least buy her a little time.

Alice flung open the front door of The Haven and Parvaneh leapt up the stairs to her room. The book was still where she'd left it, the shiny, metallic cover shimmering in the lamplight.

"That's the key?" said Alice. "And to think I had it in my house the whole time."

Parvaneh tucked the book under her arm, and together they raced to the lighthouse.

* * *

In the darkness, they stumbled over the

rough path, before criss-crossing the large slabs of sedimentary rock where Parvaneh found those ancient dinosaur footprints. The door to the lighthouse was open and the lights were on.

Inside, two figures were coming down the stairs, the smaller one propping up the other. Tears welled up in Parvaneh's eyes. There was Nasim, her little brother, leading Doctor Phillips by the arm. The doctor was limping, from what looked like a leg injury. Nasim helped her off the bottom step, where she latched onto the rail.

"Parvie!" he cried, and leapt into his sister's arms.

"Nasim!" She hugged her brother tight. "What happened?"

"I went to the place my friend Conor told me about, remember? The big white house. That's where they were keeping Doctor Phillips."

Doctor Phillips smiled through tired eyes.

“Your brother was my knight in shining armour. He rescued me.” She winced and clutched her leg. “Though we had a bit of a scrape as we escaped.”

Alice ran over to Doctor Phillips, taking Nasim’s place propping her up. “Thanks for the help with the light,” she said.

“It was my idea, but it was Nasim who pulled it off,” said the doctor. “We’re quite a team, you know. Aren’t we?” She grinned at Nasim, and he blushed and grinned back at her.

“You pulled off a rescue all by yourself? I am proud of you, little brother,” said Parvaneh.

“So you should be,” said Doctor Phillips. “And of yourself too. You’ve brought the key.” She nodded at the book, still tucked under Parvaneh’s arm. “Well done. You followed my little clues. You figured it all out. I guessed you would, that’s why I gave the book to you in the first place. Now we can put an end to all this.”

Parvaneh turned the book over in her hands. A book, as her father said, was a precious thing. But she’d known, deep down, even as she first read it, that this was no ordinary book. She ran her fingers over its shimmering, electronic cover. Who knew what wonders lay hidden inside?

Just as she held it out to Doctor Phillips, the lights and the power in the building abruptly died. Everything went out, except for a few tiny, glowing green buttons on the computer console nearby. In near total darkness, fear knotted in Parvaneh’s stomach.

“No, no, no!” murmured Alice.

A shaft of dim red light appeared in the doorway. Parvaneh knew what that meant, knew what was coming. Montvill’s tall, slender figure stepped inside. In the dull red gloom, his face was calm and lacking emotion. “Your feeble friends failed to stop me.”

Acting on instinct, Parvaneh dashed over to the button she'd used before, which was right next to the door and marked 'DEFENCE: EMERGENCY USE ONLY'. Montvill merely laughed. "I wouldn't bother. My drones have already deactivated it."

Parvaneh ignored him, and hit the button anyway, glaring at him with defiance. Sure enough, nothing happened this time. The little horns built into the inside rim of the door frame remained still, and the shrill alarm was silent.

Montvill stared at her, with more than a whiff of cold amusement. "You humans, you really are pathetic. Now, back!"

Cradling what looked like a metallic pen between his fingers, he motioned Parvaneh back towards the others. She could tell by Alice's sharp gasp, and the look of fear on Doctor Phillips's face, that it was much more than just a pen. "I will strike down the first person that moves," Montvill

growled.

Parvaneh moved in front of her brother, blocking him, while Montvill's eyes searched around the dimly-lit lighthouse interior. "What have you built here?"

"Something that defies you," said Doctor Phillips, gazing proudly up and around at the walls and the ceiling. "This lighthouse was constructed to last. The whole structure is built around an iron frame." She gestured at the bank of controls. "I've constructed a defence system, and linked it into the frame, so the lighthouse acts as a transmitter."

"Ingenious," said Montvill with a sniff. "But, if you think that one transmitter will be enough to stop us then you—"

"No," Doctor Phillips interrupted. "But do you really think this is the only one? See those lights?" She pointed out the glowing green lights that surrounded the rectangular slot on top of the

controls. Parvaneh recalled seeing them the first time she visited the lighthouse, except on that occasion they'd glowed red, not green. "Each one of those lights is another transmitter: Newfoundland, Tierra Del Fuego, Kamchatka, Tasmania – we have beacons in all of these places. They form a chain, right around the Earth. They weren't all ready until today, but now they are. Your spaceships will have no way through. All we need is the key."

Montvill glanced at the slot on top of the console, and then at the object Parvaneh was cradling in her hands. His eyes narrowed. "Give me the book. This ends tonight."

Montvill stretched out his hand, his pen-like weapon pointed in Parvaneh's direction.

Suddenly, a sharp cry pierced the night air, right behind Montvill's shoulder.

"NO!"

A blinding white light sliced through the gloom. Montvill roared in pain and stumbled to his knees, shielding his eyes. His pen weapon clattered to the ground. Mr Cochrane stepped inside, wielding the sergeant's high-powered spotlight in front of him. The power, and all the lights in the place suddenly switched back on.

Cochrane smiled, nodding at Doctor Phillips and Alice, and they nodded back.

"Time to activate our defence shield," said Doctor Phillips. She took the book from Parvaneh and lifted it over the slot. Then she hesitated. "Parvaneh, I think it should be one of you who does it, who activates the Earth's brand-new defence shield."

"One of who?" asked Parvaneh.

"A human."

Parvaneh shook her head. It had taken her some time, but now she realised the truth. "There

is no you and us, there is no them, and there are no others.” For there was only one difference here, as far as she could see. The difference between those who wanted to make a life for themselves on Eronsay, and those who wanted to take it from them.

“I see that now too,” chipped in Mr Cochrane.

“In that case,” said Doctor Phillips with a smile. “We’ll all do it – together.”

And so, Parvaneh, Alice, Doctor Phillips, Nasim and Mr Cochrane each placed a hand on the book and guided it into the slot.

The glowing buttons joined up with a long beep. The metallic cover glimmered even brighter. Parvaneh wasn’t sure what to expect, maybe a loud noise or a WHOOMP to suggest the key had worked, but instead all she heard was silence.

“That’s it,” said Doctor Phillips, smiling as she gazed up at the ceiling. “The lighthouse is

transmitting, the shield is up. Eronsay – the whole world, in fact – is protected.”

A loud, animal growl came from behind them as Montvill crawled through the doorway into the dark night outside. Scattered around the jetty were his fallen foot soldiers and the two drones, now lifeless. Montvill touched the button on his wrist. Before stepping into the shaft of dull light, he turned to Alice and Parvaneh. “You really think this will stop me?” he hissed. “I’ll be back.”

“And we will be ready,” said Parvaneh, unafraid.

Montvill sneered at her, and then he was gone.

“Yes, we will be ready,” added Alice, clasping Parvaneh’s hand in her own. “Together.”

* * *

At breakfast the next morning, Alice flopped

a pair of eggs onto Parvaneh's plate "I'm expecting a phone call later, from the Home Office."

"What about?" asked Parvaneh.

Alice shrugged. "They just said it was important, that's all."

"Oh, Parvie, could it be about Father?" Nasim's eyes were wide with anticipation. It had been a while since his sister had seen such a spark of hope there.

Parvaneh didn't speak, just shrugged, because she didn't want to get his hopes up, or indeed her own.

"Who knows?" said Alice. "There are people crossing the border all the time. Just like you did."

Outside, Nasim charged off to join his friends Conor and Danny on the way to school. The old postman wobbled by on his bike, his bag slung over his shoulder, and tipped his hat. "Morning, Parvaneh!"

"Morning, Mr McTavish," she answered.

A lace curtain twitched at one of the windows, and a wizened woman's face peered out. She smiled and waved, and Parvaneh waved back.

"Morning, dear!" It was deerstalker lady, rushing past with some shopping. It struck Parvaneh that she still looked a bit odd, a patch eccentric maybe.

"Morning, Julia," Parvaneh replied, but she would always be deerstalker lady in her mind.

Doctor Phillips cycled up the street, ringing her bell. She paused for a moment, resting her foot on the kerb.

"I see your leg is getting better," said Parvaneh.

"Oh yes," she replied, slapping her thigh heartily. "Now don't forget to pop by the lighthouse later. I have a new book to lend you."

Parvaneh paused on the harbourside and

breathed in some fresh, salty sea air. She gazed out at the rugged sea-cliffs, the white-caps on the sound, and the grey, rain-laden clouds racing across the sky. She caught her own reflection, staring back at herself from the glass panels of the red phone box. And she saw something in there. Something she'd been seeking. Something she needed. Something she'd lost, and then found again.

A home.

THE END

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