

## One Small Step

Written by Kristine Kathryn Rusch

“It’s just a footprint,” Liz Borra said, crossing her arms over her ample bosom. “I don’t understand all of the fuss.”

Nyalou Templeton suppressed a sigh.

She sat on the opposite side of the wide conference table from Liz, but still felt as if she were being crushed by Liz’s presence—and Liz’s voice, which seemed somehow amplified in the acoustics of the old Government Meeting Hall.

Liz intimidated everyone. No one contradicted her, or if they did, they did so carefully. Liz had campaigned to join the council; everyone else had been drafted as part of their community service.

Because Liz had actually gone through an election, the other council members seemed to think Liz’s position was more legitimate than theirs. Even though she hadn’t had an opponent, she had been elected. She was a “legitimate” member of the council, instead of someone forced to choose between jury duty or a two-year council term.

Even Council President Miguel Juarez seemed to think Liz’s position had more validity than his because of her election. He rarely argued with Liz any more.

After Liz made her pronouncement about the footprint, Nyalou wanted Miguel to shut her down—or at least contradict her.

Instead, he stood and shoved his hands in the back pockets of his pants. He had to hunch because his 6’5” frame was too tall for the ancient room with its colonial-style ceilings. He paced close to the walls (as far from the table as he could get), pausing each time he passed the single plastic window.

Nyalou knew the view outside the window by heart: the hardpacked street, smoothed by decades of use, and the prefab buildings brought from Earth mingling with the new construction made of a mixture of Moon rocks and recycled nanomaterials. Tranquility Base was getting crowded, and the air was getting thinner. Sooner or later, the colony would have to expand the dome, whether the council liked it or not.

Nyalou hated the idea of expansion. And most of all, she hated Liz Borra, whose perfume made each meeting a burden, and whose opinions were hard to take whether delivered in person or in private.

Now Liz was dominating the discussion about the Arrival Monument. The Arrival Monument had been a part of Moon lore since the first colonists. The actual footprint itself was on a square patch of Moon dust that was protected by a case. Succeeding generations had built a stone floor around the case, and a building on top of it, with holographic recreations of the landing, ancient photographs lining the walls, and souvenirs from the early Earth missions. Nyalou didn’t think she’d been to the Monument since she was in grade school, and even then she hadn’t liked it. In fact, her comment during her first visit had been the same as Liz’s not a few moments before.

It’s just a footprint.

She could still feel the disappointment. Somehow she had thought the footprint was going to be much more. And much bigger. Earth astronauts had tiny feet.

But now that Liz was making the argument to get rid of the footprint, Nyalou wanted someone to contradict her—or at least shut her up.

Nyalou turned to Caleb Washburn, hoping he would speak, but he looked down at his slender, callused hands. He was a laborer in the greenhouses outside the dome. He didn't like to talk even on the best days, but sometimes he blurted exactly what Nyalou had been thinking.

Only so far tonight, he hadn't blurted anything.

Nyalou folded her hands. She was the newest council member. She'd tried to speak up at her first meeting and Liz had told her that people her age weren't allowed to have opinions.

Miguel had shushed Liz, but the damage had been done. Liz had hit Nyalou's insecurities and hit them hard.

Nyalou had vowed not to say anything unless she could back her opinion with fact. And she knew very little about the Arrival Monument.

She knew very little about most things.

Finally old Anastazia Denver-Kyoto shook her elegantly coifed head at Liz. Anastazia had been on the council off and on since before Nyalou was born.

Anastazia could stand up to Liz, but usually felt it wasn't worth the effort.

This time, Anastazia grimaced and said, "It's more than a footprint, Liz, and you know it."

"Yes," Liz said. "It's a damned eyesore, and I think it's got to go."

"It abuts your property," Caleb said in his slow deep voice.

"It abuts a lot of property," Liz said, "not just mine."

Miguel returned to his chair. It squeaked under his weight. His knees hit the table, shaking it. Most residents of Tranquility Base were small—their ancestors had to meet a height requirement to fit well into the ships designed for the long journey from Earth—so Miguel was an anomaly. And the way he constantly banged against things, he was always reminding people how he didn't fit.

Nyalou found Miguel's size fascinating. She found most things about Miguel fascinating, from his dark eyes to his coal-black hair.

And she did her best to hide her fascination. It wouldn't do for the newest council member to have a crush on the council president.

"Miguel," Liz said, as sweetly as she could manage. "Would you share with us why you are acting so tortured?"

"The footprint is part of our history, Liz," Miguel said, his deep voice sending shivers through Nyalou.

"Such history as we have here," Liz said. "I say if people want real history, let them stay on Earth."

"We should safeguard our roots," Caleb said.

"Roots?" Liz somehow managed to sniff the word. "We can put a plaque on the site, saying 'One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind,' which is better than a footprint, and takes up less room than that damned Monument. We've already removed the flag. I don't understand why we can't dispose of the print."

Nyalou couldn't keep quiet any longer. "The first settlers made a resolution—"

"The first settlers!" Liz stood and Nyalou winced. She should have known better. She had heard this speech before.

They all had.

"The first settlers picked a footprint. They had several to choose from, and they didn't know which was which. Then they cover it in permaplastic and we all have to bow to it, because of their decision. They could have stopped those kids from stealing the flag—"

"Liz," Caleb said.

"—but no. The flag is gone, and we're stuck with a footprint that could have belonged to the second lunar mission, for that matter."

"The second mission landed at the Ocean of Storms," Caleb said.

"Yes," Miguel said in his dry voice. "It could be worse. Someone could have found the sacred golf ball."

"You're making fun of me," Liz said.

"We wouldn't dare," Anastazia said.

Liz shot her a look. Anastazia raised her silver eyebrows—an affectation that on her looked good—and smiled with such warmth that Liz turned away. As she did, Anastazia rolled her eyes. Nyalou suppressed a giggle.

"I don't think a plaque will do it," Caleb said, ignoring the interchange. "Imagine if someone had placed a plaque on the spot where Columbus landed—"

"Then we'd know where it was," Miguel murmured.

"—or where the Romans first set foot in Britain."

"Or," Liz said, "where Homo Sapiens first emerged from the muck. That is what we're talking about, isn't it? Celebrating humankind's first appearance on the Moon."

"Homo Sapiens didn't emerge from the muck," Miguel muttered.

"Oh, they did too," Liz said.

"If you boil down evolution into a single instant," Anastazia said.

Liz whirled so fast that Nyalou thought she was going to fall over. "You are making fun."

"Whyever would we do that?" Anastazia asked, those lovely eyebrows raised again.

Because it's easy, Nyalou thought, but she said, "The first settlers thought we should keep track of our history. Earth started way too late."

"And because Earth keeps track of its history, no one can buy land any more. Do you know how much space is taken up on Earth by historically protected sites?" Liz waved an arm. Bracelets rattled together, making her sound like a small drum. "At least—"

"It doesn't matter," Miguel said softly, but with that firmness that always managed to shut the group up.

“We’re not talking about Earth. We’re talking about Tranquility Base.”

“We have the same problems,” Liz said, apparently not as responsive to the subtleties of Miguel’s tones as the rest of the group. “We have limited space—”

“Three quarters of the Moon is undeveloped,” Caleb said. “That’s not exactly limited.”

“Developing domes is expensive,” Liz said. “Not to mention the cost of maintaining them. Within the existing domes, space is at a premium, and we shouldn’t waste it on things that no one really cares about.”

The group was silent. Liz had a point. Who cared about the Monument? Nyalou hadn’t gone in years, and she would venture the others hadn’t either. But it was the principle of the thing. She, for one, understood the first settlers’ determination to carve out a history on their new land. And she liked to uphold traditions. Despite what Liz said, too many old Earth historical sites were plowed under, or demolished, or built over.

Nyalou didn’t want that to happen on the Moon.

“How do we know no one cares?” Nyalou asked, softly, a bit astonished that the words were coming out of her own mouth. “I mean, has anyone done a study?”

“Of course not,” Liz said. “And if they did, it would take forever. We don’t have forever.”

Miguel had turned. He was staring at Nyalou. Her cheeks grew warm. In her term on the council, she had argued points, but she doubted she had ever made a useful suggestion before.

“Why don’t we have forever, Liz?” Miguel asked. “What’s the great hurry?”

“Space,” she said, as if he were feeble. “It’s at a premium.”

“And it will be at a premium next week and the week after,” he said.

Liz’s eyes narrowed. She aimed the gaze at Nyalou. Nyalou did not flinch. She had practiced not-flinching in front of a mirror since she joined the council. Some day she might get enough character in her face to frown back.

Miguel was still staring at Nyalou. His expression was soft, as if she had saved him somehow. Had he ever really looked at her before? She wasn’t sure. When he had welcomed her to the council six months before, he had shaken her hand, but he hadn’t really looked at her since.

“I think a study is a good idea,” Miguel said to everyone. “But we do have a limited budget. Let’s find out if a study will answer our questions before we authorize one.”

“Here we go again,” Caleb whispered. “A study to authorize a study.”

“It’s a waste of taxpayer funds,” Liz said. “No one goes to the Monument any more.”

“We don’t know that, but we do know that developers have been after the land for years.” Miguel inclined his head toward Liz. While she wasn’t a formal developer, she had made most of her money in real estate, a lot of it by renting overpriced condos to Earth tourists who planned to stay longer than a week.

“Nyalou,” Miguel said, and she jumped. He had never used her name before. He pronounced it wrong, with the accent on “lou” instead of “ny,” but she didn’t care. She found the mispronunciation endearing.

“Would you get the records for the Monument? We need to know who visits and why.”

“You expect a Monument to keep those kinds of detailed records?” Liz asked.

“They’re a government organization,” Anastazia said in her I-can’t-believe-you-didn’t-know-that voice. “They have to have those kind of records or they lose their funding.”

“You mean we could simply cut off their funding and be rid of them?” Liz sounded excited.

“If it were that easy,” Caleb said, “people would cut off our funding just to be rid of us.”

He had his fists clenched as he said it, as if he wanted to somehow cut off all funding to Liz Borra.

“I can do that,” Nyalou said softly, looking at Miguel.

“Cut off funding?” he asked.

She shook her head. “Get a report on the Arrival Monument. I’ll have it by next meeting.”

He smiled at her, a deep rich smile that made her heart pound. Another flush warmed her cheeks, and she hoped he didn’t notice—or, if he did, he would attribute it to the assignment and not the attention.

“Excellent,” he said, and turned away from her. “Other business?”

He didn’t look at her again throughout the entire meeting.

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Nyalou didn’t get angry with herself until she walked home. Her apartment was small—one room on the third story of a second generation stone house with plexi-windows. She kept them shuttered most of the time. When the apartment was built, the view had been of the beautifully barren lunar landscape. Now all she could see out her windows was a new building made of recycled nanomaterials. The black walls absorbed everything and reflected nothing. It was like looking into space without seeing stars.

At least she had a view at her job. She was executive director of Souter Mines, which sounded more glamorous than it was. She was actually a second executive director, and her focus was mostly public relations. She didn’t mind—without the mines, there would be no colonies—but she did wish the job paid better. Occasionally she had to complete a press statement or make a denial, but she spent most of her time alone reading, and she knew that her talents were being wasted.

Still, she wouldn’t have given up the view for anything. She had windows that overlooked the surface, with the Earth, the homeland she never claimed, looming blue and white in the background.

She liked looking at it, liked knowing that her ancestors had come from that cool and beautiful place, liked knowing she could visit it if she could ever save up enough credits. She doubted she would, of course. The dream of Earth would probably be so much better than the reality. But if anyone downloaded her reading history—audio, text only, or visual/full entertainment—they would know that she read mostly romances set on old Earth. And she would be hard-pressed to explain why.

When she entered her apartment, she punched up her table-side reader, and entered her password. The text she had been reading appeared, her place marked by the earlier shut-down. She ignored it, though, feeling butterflies in her stomach—the same butterflies she felt when she had opted for two-year long council service instead of the standard month-long jury sequestration.

Then she had wanted to do something important, and, if she told herself the truth, she also wanted to

have someplace to go during the evenings, someplace she didn't have to pay for, like a class or a performance.

This time, she was afraid she wasn't up for the task. She was afraid Miguel would see how inept she was and ask her to leave the council.

She used the water recycler to make herself a cup of imported herbal tea—chamomile always tasted better when grown on Earth—and sat down beside her reader. The bed had flopped from the wall to the floor at its appointed time, but she wasn't tired. For the first time since she had become a council member, she would have to use her position to open doors. And she wasn't exactly sure how.

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How turned out to be startlingly easy. She sent a request for the Monument's visitor records from her council account. The records came to her in a secured file within three-point-five seconds, and they seemed complete.

But she felt as if the records weren't all the information she needed. She hadn't looked them over, but she knew she wouldn't be satisfied until she visited the Monument herself.

She had to know what, if anything, she was fighting for.

So she took the following afternoon off and went to the Monument. The trip from the mine to the other end of the colony took longer than she expected. She had planned to walk, but she had finally hired a small rover. Still, when she arrived, she was dust-covered and exhausted, certainly not in the best condition to view the Monument.

The Monument was smaller and shabbier than she remembered. The permaplastic doors looked yellow and sunken into their bed of Moon rocks. The rocks themselves looked worn, as if they'd been scraped by a thousand hands. The building was short and squat, and not all that large, at least not compared to the development rising around it.

The development brushed the edges of the dome. The domeside of the development was made of recycled plexi-glass, so that the condo owners could have an unobstructed view of the surface. The remaining three sides were of recycled nanomaterials in their requisite black. They shone, something Nyalou doubted they would do after all the units had been purchased.

Still, the net affect was to make the Monument look shabby, old, and uncared for. No wonder Liz wanted it out of the neighborhood. It no longer fit.

Nyalou got out of her rover and crossed the hard-packed dirt to the front door. There she let the cycler clean the dirt off her shoes, and then she pushed the door open.

The light inside was artificial, like everything else here, but it had a thin quality to it, as if someone had determined that too much light would cost too much money. The air smelled of dust and was just a bit hot for her comfort.

She ran her council i.d. through the entrance scanner—another first, using the i.d. to get into a building for free—and then walked around the corner.

The main room was smaller than she remembered, and it was full. Children peered at the exhibits, and stood in line for the holo displays. Flats ran constantly, showing Neil Armstrong's jerky movements on the lunar surface, the resolution grainy and indistinct. His reedy voice repeated his famous line softly, as if the designers of the museum wanted everyone to strain to hear it. In a room to the left, the flats played all

the time, showing the full tape of the event, from the moment the Apollo capsule went up to the moment it landed.

A holographic display of the Moon itself—recreated of course—showed Neil Armstrong climbing off the lunar module in his bulky suit, and putting the first footprint in the dust.

A chubby boy who was no more than ten stood beside the hologram, copying its movements, then laughing with his friends at the quaintness of it all.

No one wore bulky suits anymore. To go outside the dome, all a person needed was a skin-tight nano-suit and a small oxygen mask over the nose and mouth. When she had been here before, she remembered wondering how it felt to walk in that bulky equipment, and she had been too small to try on the suit's replica.

She took a step farther in. The ceilings were lower than she remembered, the doors to the displays closer together. The Monument itself was a model of efficiency, cramming as much information into a small space as possible.

She almost headed to the suit, when she remembered her mission: the footprint.

With a small sigh, she went around the holographic display, and stopped at that small hole in the floor. The footprint was there, the rounded boot mark, the lines across it, all preserved in the lunar dirt. It still looked small. In fact, it looked smaller than it had when she was a child.

No one else was looking at it, even though it was the reason the Monument was here. The children were all playing in the displays, and the adult chaperones were watching the flats with practiced disinterest, as if they'd seen them a thousand times before.

And maybe they had. Maybe they brought a different group of children here every year.

The boy who'd been playing by the hologram stopped beside her. He crouched too.

"So that's it?" he said, running his fingers over the plexi-glass case even though the nearby signs asked him not to. "It's not very big."

"It isn't, is it," she said, marveling that he had the same reaction that she did.

He pushed away from it, then ran, whooping, toward the holo rooms, until one of the chaperones caught him by the arm, and slowed him down.

A little girl skipped over to the footprint, frowned at it, and then went on. Most of the other children paraded past without seeing it.

"Ms. Templeton?" an official sounding female voice said from above her.

Nyalou sighed. Somehow she didn't want to stop her contemplation of that bit of disturbed dirt. She put her hands on her thighs and pushed herself up.

The woman standing before her was about Liz's age, only she was thin to the point of gauntness. Her pinched face had the look of too many years of worry, and her dark skin had a grayish cast.

"I'm Danu Welter. I am in charge of this facility." She held out her hand. Nyalou took it gently, afraid she'd break bones. "To what do we owe the pleasure of this visit?"

The question was courteous enough, but it had an edge, a bite, that seemed purposeful.

“There has been some interest in the Arrival Monument lately,” Nyalou said. “I was sent to see how it’s faring.”

“Interest.” Danu smirked as she said the word. “Interest in replacing us with one of those ugly shiny condos, you mean.”

Nyalou didn’t answer. Instead she looked around. “I haven’t been here for years. It’s smaller than I remember.”

“You were a child, then?” Danu said.

Nyalou nodded, a bit embarrassed that she hadn’t come back.

“It’s a required visit for the ten-year-olds, you know. Only a handful ever return.”

“Until I walked through the door a few minutes ago,” Nyalou said, “I had forgotten how disappointed I was that I was too small to try on the suit.”

And, for the first time since they’d met, Danu smiled. “Come then,” she said. “You’re big enough now.”

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The equipment room wasn’t much larger than the locker room at work. Most of the children stopped outside it, stood against the computer barrier, heard the automated voice denying them entry, and turned away. Nyalou remembered how that felt; the suits were the only thing she hadn’t been able to touch.

Danu hit the button that slid one of the suits out. Robotic arms held the suit in place when Nyalou climbed in. It was bulky and awkward. As Danu put the helmet on Nyalou’s head, her shoulders felt the weight. The tinted visor made the entire room dark.

“Do you want to feel the full effect of the suit?” Danu asked.

It sounded like a trick question, but Nyalou nodded anyway. The robot arms receded, and as they did, Nyalou staggered forward.

The thing was so heavy she could barely support it.

Danu caught her, laughing, and pushed another button. The robotic arms returned, taking all the weight. Nyalou’s breath was coming rapidly. How had the astronauts managed in these bulky things?

It was hard to see through the tinted visor. She frowned at shapes moving near the door. The children. The children were watching her in the suit. Even without being able to see their faces, she knew that they were longing to join her. She remembered the feeling so well.

The sense of adventure had been bred into all of them. Their ancestors were all adventurers, daring folk willing to take a chance to create a community on dead ground. All of the Moon had been explored. Much of it was populated now. In many ways, it was no different from Earth.

The chances for adventure were receding, but still they all longed for it. Even she did, although she didn’t have the courage or the funds.

The bulky suit was just one reminder of that. One they all wanted to touch. One they all wanted to hold.

The bulky suit, with its thick boots.



Boots.

She felt a shiver run down her back despite the warmth of the suit. She braced herself with one hand, and brought up a foot. Her leg didn't bend the way it normally did. She stared at the boot, at the ridges along the bottom.

They matched the ones on the dirt.

"You don't believe that's the footprint, do you?" Danu asked.

Nyalou put her foot down. "The sign says it might not be."

"But it is a footprint from one of the Apollo missions. And most likely, it's the first one."

"The first mission didn't land on the Moon," Nyalou said.

Danu rolled her eyes as if that were the sort of comment she would expect from a government official. "The first mission that landed on the Moon."

The helmet was suffocating. What these people had put up with in the name of exploration. Nyalou used her gloved hands to pull it off. She tossed her head, freeing her hair. Something was bothering her, something she couldn't quite pinpoint.

"There's no way to authenticate a footprint?" she asked.

Danu shook her head ever so slightly. "Not one that old."

"But how do we know how old it is? There's no air, there's no real decay—"

"There are techniques," Danu said, "but they don't matter. The first colonists preserved the print."

That was it. Nyalou felt a shiver run down her back. "You people have never authenticated it, have you?"

"It would be quite easy to destroy—"

"You've just taken the first colonists' word, as if people who came here more than a hundred years ago had a way of determining which footprint of the many was the one that they were looking for. You just established this site, and don't even know if you're perpetrating a hoax."

"Please," Danu said. "This is an important place. Even if the footprint isn't the real one, this is the landing site. We know that. We've authenticated that."

"And put a building on it, changing it." Nyalou's heart hurt. She hated the fact that Liz was right.

"The museum is important," Danu said. "Every child born on the Moon comes here eventually. We are one of the main attractions for Earth tourists. It's like a pilgrimage, a shrine—"

"Because of the footprint?"

"We wouldn't be here without it," Danu said.

"That's why this place was established," Nyalou said. "But no one actually comes to see the footprint, do they?"

Danu continued to stare at her.

“Do they?”

Danu swallowed. “They’re all disappointed by it,” she whispered.

Nyalou let out a breath of air. She used the robotic arms’ assistance to get out of the suit. It felt as if she had shrunk to less than one-half her body weight. She was covered in sweat.

“Are you going to shut us down?” Danu asked.

“Why?” Nyalou said. “The exhibits are important. It’s good for the children to get in touch with their history.”

Danu frowned. “But something changed. Something’s different.”

“I won’t lie to you,” Nyalou said. “I came here searching for a way to keep the museum alive. I’ve found that. But what I haven’t found is any compelling reason for it to stay at this location.”

“Where would we go?” Danu asked. “This is our logical place. Human beings first touched the Moon right here.”

“And in our normal way, we built right over the spot.”

“But not the footprint.”

“If it is the footprint,” Nyalou said.

“It is a footprint.”

“Yes,” Nyalou said. “And footprints aren’t so hard to fake, are they?”

Danu’s face went completely gray. “How can you say that? It’s in the right place. The first colonists saw it there.”

Nyalou shrugged. “The first colonists wore boots, didn’t they? They could have drawn the ridges. They could have mimicked it. Weren’t they dragging equipment from their landing?”

“Mare Tranquilitatis was not the first colony site,” Danu said. “The colonists had to hike here. It was a mission they went on long after they’d settled on the Moon. They wanted to see it. They treated this like a holy place.”

“And somehow preserved a footprint.” Nyalou wasn’t sure where this skeptical self was coming from, or why it was appearing now. Was it because she wanted to do the best she could in the role Miguel had assigned her? Or was it because she felt she had to fulfill her part in the bureaucracy?

“Yes,” Danu said. “They preserved a footprint, whether you believe it or not.”

And that was the problem. Nyalou didn’t believe it. That small print, perfectly formed, didn’t seem real. The disappointment she had felt as a child had returned, only this time, it was fuller, and came with an anger, a feeling of betrayal, of being duped.

But by whom?

She didn’t know.

She glanced at the door. The children were gone. She was nothing to them once she was out of the suit.

Her silence seemed to make Danu uncomfortable.

“What are you going to do now?” Danu asked.

Nyalou frowned at her. “I’m not going to do anything. I was just supposed to see if there should be a study.”

“Of what? The footprint?”

“Of the value of this place.”

“It’s valuable.”

“I think there’s no arguing that,” Nyalou said. “The question is whether it is as valuable here as it would be somewhere else.”

Danu shook her head. “You people are all alike. You have no sense of history.”

“I have a sense of history,” Nyalou said. “I’m just not sure if it applies to this particular location.”

“This building has been here a long time,” Danu said.

“I know,” Nyalou said. “But are you telling me the building is important or the footprint?”

“I’m telling you the memory is important, and it would be lessened by moving this museum.”

“How do you know that?” Nyalou didn’t feel Danu’s certainty. She wasn’t at all sure Danu was right.

“I just know,” Danu said.

“Not good enough,” Nyalou answered.

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Her new-found toughness fell away as she walked out the door of the Monument, and looked at the ugly black buildings rising around it. Someday, someone might want to preserve those as examples of Moon architecture in the expansion period, and some poor hapless bureaucrat, like herself, would have to determine whether or not the buildings were worth saving.

She had signed up for this job. She had volunteered for it to impress Miguel. All she had discovered was enough of an argument to give Liz exactly what she wanted.

And that made Nyalou feel even more depressed than when she had started.

She went home to examine the statistics she had asked for, and to think about what she would recommend to the council.

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The statistics confirmed everything Danu had told her. Adults did visit the Monument in large numbers—adults from other colonies, which, Nyalou figured, Danu might have counted among the tourists. The Monument was the number one destination of Earth tourists as well.

But it was the children that made Nyalou frown slightly. Danu was right: Every child on the colony had visited the Monument, many more than once. They were mostly interested in the holo displays, although several did come back when they were tall enough to try on the suits.

The first Moon landing had held the public imagination since the first settlers arrived. And why shouldn't it? She remembered being raised on the heroic stories: the burned capsules, the many tries, the flights across space in equipment so primitive it was the equivalent of walking outside the dome with your hand over your mouth. Armstrong Day was more important than Founders' Day in many schools. Teachers used it to create a history lesson that most children participated in.

No wonder everyone thought the footprint small. It was human-sized. And those first travelers, those people from a politically divided planet who crossed space in glorified metal cans, were larger-than-life.

So that's it? the little boy had asked, his voice incredulous. It's not very big.

It's so small, she remembered thinking when she was his age.

It's so small.

Of course it was small. They were all expecting giants, gods nearly, people who had done the impossible were—historically speaking—more myth than reality.

The footprint made them real.

She caught her lower lip between her teeth.

She finally had something to say at the meeting.

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“Nonsense!” Liz Borra said when Nyalou had finished her presentation. “Unadulterated, premeditated nonsense.”

Liz's voice echoed around the conference table more than usual. Miguel was pacing again. Caleb was studying his hands.

Only Anastazia seemed to be paying attention, and she raised those expressive eyebrows.

“Premeditated?”

“Premeditated,” Liz snapped. “You know the girl has a fondness for the place. You heard her in the last meeting.”

Nyalou flushed. The presentation had been hard enough. She hadn't looked Miguel in the eye once. Her voice had shaken and she had kept her hands tightly clasped so that they wouldn't shake too. But she hadn't expected this direct attack, even though she should have.

Caleb Washburn slid his chair back and rocked it on the back two legs. “I think Nyalou has a point.”

Nyalou gave him a grateful look.

“Of course you do,” Liz said. “You can afford to be sentimental.”

Nyalou's cheeks flamed. Liz seemed to know how to intimidate her. Worse, Liz seemed to know how to make Nyalou doubt her own opinions.

“Afford to be sentimental?” Miguel asked softly. He returned to his seat at the head of the table. Nyalou didn't know how he could sit so close to Liz. The stench of her perfume across the table was severe; up close it had to be overwhelming.

“Afford to.” Liz waved a hand dismissively. “It’s always the poor who fail to realize that progress will benefit them as well.”

Caleb brought his chair forward. “Now wait a minute. I didn’t get filthy rich off people who didn’t know better—”

“Really,” Anastazia said softly, “this petty bickering does us all no good. I think Nyalou’s points are intriguing. I remember being disappointed in that footprint as well.”

“Me, too.” Miguel was watching Nyalou. She met his gaze, then looked away. She couldn’t tell if he was looking at her so intently because he felt sorry for her or because she had made an interesting point.

“I think we all have been disappointed,” Liz said. “I simply don’t see the value in it.”

“Of course you don’t,” Caleb said. “Unless it puts money in your pocket, you don’t see the value of anything.”

Liz slapped a bejeweled hand on the permaplastic table.

“Are you going to let him talk to me that way?” she asked Miguel.

“That’s how you talk to the rest of us,” he said.

Liz blew out a small breath of air, then narrowed her eyes. “You’re all doing this because you dislike me.”

“No.” Nyalou found her voice. “This is about the Monument, not you.”

Liz glared at Nyalou. Nyalou attempted to glare back.

“So you think the footprint is important to the Monument,” Miguel asked Nyalou gently.

She had to meet his gaze again. As she did, she felt a flush warm her from her cheeks, down her neck, and into her chest and arms.

“I think it’s the heart of the Monument,” Nyalou said. “I didn’t realize it until I went home. It’s the little beacon of hope.”

“Nonsense!” Liz said again.

Miguel held up his hand. “Let her finish. Why, Nyalou?”

Nyalou swallowed hard. Her throat was closing up from nerves. But she made herself take a deep breath and continue.

“Because,” she said, “it shows us that no grand being conquered this place. That Armstrong and Aldrin and the other astronauts were people, just like us.”

“People with small feet,” Caleb said.

“Normal-sized feet,” Nyalou said. “I put on those boots.”

“They’re replicas,” Liz said, as if that invalidated Nyalou’s perspective.

“It doesn’t matter,” Nyalou said. “The fact is that the footprint is real. It’s old, and it’s been on this Moon longer than the rest of us. It deserves to stay.”

“The building is an eyesore.”

“It’s popular,” Miguel said. “Even if none of us visit it.”

“The girl still hasn’t given a good enough argument as to why we can’t move the building elsewhere.”

They all looked at her. Nyalou felt the flush deepen. “Because,” she said, “it might ruin the footprint.”

“So?” Liz asked. “We’ll just make a new one.”

“That’s not the same,” Nyalou said. “The footprint would be a reconstruction, and it would no longer matter. It’s the fact that the footprint’s real that makes it so special.”

“So disappointing,” Caleb said.

“So necessary.” Anastazia was grinning. “I do like the way you think,” she said to Nyalou.

“So do I,” Miguel said.

Nyalou’s breath caught in her throat at the compliment.

Miguel went on. “Nyalou’s presentation makes me realize that we’ve underpromoted this treasure of ours. I think it’s time the council did some work making the Arrival Monument the center of our community.”

“Now wait a minute,” Liz said. “This is prime land we’re talking about.”

“That’s right,” Miguel said. “We may as well use it properly.”

Liz waved her hand to silence everyone. “I suggest we vote first. All those in favor of moving the Monument and selling the land at a considerable profit say ‘Aye.’”

Nyalou looked at the other council members. Caleb was cleaning the dirt from his fingernails. Anastazia was smiling and saying nothing. Miguel was watching Liz.

Finally Liz squinted and said loudly, “Aye.”

Miguel grinned. His gaze met Nyalou’s as he asked, “Any nays?”

The rest of the group chorused “Nay” together.

“Sentimental fools,” Liz snapped.

“Impoverished sentimental fools,” Caleb said.

Liz glared at him. He didn’t flinch. No one flinched at her any more. Not even Nyalou.

“Well,” Liz said as she stood. “I certainly can’t serve with the lot of you. I resign, effective immediately. I will send you a letter of confirmation when I get home.”

“All right,” Miguel said.

“All right?” Liz’s voice rose. She leaned toward Miguel until her face was nearly touching his. “All right? I’m resigning.”

“I know.” Amazingly, Miguel didn’t pull away from her. “I know the strength of your convictions. I’m

sure I can't talk you out of your resignation, so I'm not even going to try."

Nyalou suppressed a smile. Anastazia was watching Liz blandly. Caleb didn't even bother repressing his grin.

Liz frowned at Miguel. "You're manipulating me, young man."

His face was all innocence. "I'm letting you do what you want."

Her lips tightened, and she looked as if she'd swallowed something sour. Then she harrumphed and swept out of the room.

The remaining council members sat in stunned silence for a moment—at least, Nyalou thought it was stunned silence. It might simply have been a reaction to the wave of perfume that hit them as Liz left.

Caleb's grin faded. "She was only here to get rid of the Monument."

"Well, that worked, didn't it," Anastazia said.

"She might try again," Nyalou whispered.

"Let her," Miguel said. "With all the promotion and work we're going to do on that Monument, she won't stand a chance."

"And she knows it, too," Caleb said.

"That's it," Anastazia said. "No more campaigners for the Council. Only folks who are forced to come like the rest of us."

"A good rule, I think," Miguel said solemnly. "Otherwise you never know what a person's motives are."

"We'll need to fill her seat," Caleb said.

"Figuratively speaking," Anastazia said. "We can now go back to e-conferences. Liz was the one who insisted on in-person meetings."

Nyalou hadn't known that. Her stomach tightened. She'd joined so that she would have some place to go, not so that she could sit in her apartment and talk to a screen.

"No e-conferences," Miguel said. His gaze met Nyalou's. "I like the physical meetings. You can see things about your other council members that you wouldn't see in e-conference."

"Oh, I don't know," Anastazia said. "We would have caught on to Liz's greed and we wouldn't have had to suffer her perfume."

"I was talking about Nyalou's enthusiasm," Miguel said.

Nyalou straightened. Her heart was pounding. "Enthusiasm?"

Miguel nodded. "You've reminded me why we're here in the first place."

"I have?" she asked.

He smiled at her. The smile was warm. "We're here because someone else worked to achieve a dream. The least we can do is uphold that dream."

“Liz would call that nonsense,” Anastazia said.

Miguel looked at her. “Do you?”

“I think it’s a mite idealistic.”

“And what’s wrong with that?” Caleb asked.

Anastazia looked at the three of them. Then she smiled. “Why, nothing’s wrong with idealism,” she said. “It is after all the first step of any journey.”

“You mean that’s one small step,” Miguel said.

“One disappointingly small step,” Nyalou said, and they all grinned widely at each other, before getting back to work.

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