

# SHATTERED SKY

By

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## Prologue

May 2035

“Don’t ever forget this moment, Sky. We need to do better, for your future.”

Sky held her dad’s hand, the large crowd gathering on Pink Sand Beach, forcing her to cling to him even more. Her eyes were wide with fear and wonder at the two dead dolphins—a mother and her calf, laying side by side very close to each other, as if the mother had tried to shield her calf with her last breath. Dead fish washing up on the once-pristine beach had become a normal occurrence over the past few months, but the dolphins were shocking for the residents of Comoros Island.

And they’d come to pay their respects.

The mood was somber. They’d lit torches around the dolphins, an ancient Comoros Island tradition at funerals. They had come to mourn the poor creatures in their most sacred way. One by one, people walked to the shoreline, sprinkling flowers and seashells into the calm ocean

in remembrance. Sky's father walked with her when it was her turn, and she tossed a handful of forget-me-nots into the gentle waves. The worried look on his face scared her, but she smiled when he looked down at her. He picked her up.

"The world is changing, Sky, and you are the future of Comoros Island." He pointed to the dolphins. "We need to be better than this. We still aren't doing enough to protect our sea life."

"Marcus," Sky's mother, Faith, said as she joined them, holding Sky's little sister's hand. "I almost didn't bring Leila. The dead dolphins scare her."

"They scare me, too," Marcus said. "More than you'll ever know."

"Do you think this will be our normal, like the fish?" Faith asked.

"I sincerely hope not," Marcus replied, "but it's been my fear for a while now. That's why I work so hard to change this reality." He glanced at Sky, then back at his wife. "Come on, let's get these two back to the house."

Sky looked over her father's shoulder and back at the dolphins. Surely this couldn't happen again. Not on Comoros Island.

## CHAPTER 1

Comoros Island

June, 2048

Five more minutes was all she needed. Five more minutes and her painting would be perfect. Sky buried her toes in the sand and stuck out her tongue as she leaned in to make another smooth brushstroke. There was much to do in the house. People would be arriving in a couple of hours, but she couldn't abandon her morning ritual. Painting was like breathing. It created color when her world was dark, movement when her life became stagnant, and hope when the devastation of war threatened the beauty of the Earth. It had been almost two years since the war officially ended, but Sky still couldn't believe that the Third World War actually happened. For as long as she could remember in her seventeen years of life, there had been threats of the Third World War, but she'd never imagined it would break out. Sky couldn't understand how people could deploy nuclear weapons on each other. She had heard that millions of people were killed, and many of the injured were suffering from horrible diseases. She thanked God that Comoros Island was a financially and politically insignificant place on Earth, sparing it from being targeted by other nations. Even though her dad and his UN Peace Committee couldn't prevent the war, she was glad that she still had her family and that her dad was working hard to save the

world—or what was left of it.

Painting was freedom.

Sky dipped her brush and set to work again. She glanced at the stone monument she was recreating on her canvas. It was a simple, cement slab with colorful pebbles and the silhouettes of the dolphins.

Sky swore that the dolphin was her dad’s spirit animal. She giggled at the thought. She stepped back to view her creation when the last dip of the brush completed its task. She wiped her hands on the butt of her ragged, gray paint pants, adding more color to their dull existence. She glanced at her phone.

“Shoot, I’m late,” she blurted. The painting was stellar. Her dad would be home from his trip in a few days, and she couldn’t wait to surprise him with it.

He would love it.

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Beep. Beep. A whiff of gooey sweetness tingled Sky’s nose before the timer went off in the kitchen. She grabbed her phone and bolted down the stairs, two at a time, nearly plowing over her little sister, Leila.

“Yummy. The whole house smells like a bakery.” Sky stifled a giggle when Leila noticeably inhaled. “Don’t worry. I’m going to put in another batch so we can munch on some before everyone else gets here.”

Leila flaunted a toothy grin. “Great idea. I can’t believe how much food she’s cooked already—homemade bread, fresh pasta, paellas—and she told me that she’s just getting started. She’s so proud of you, Sis. I need to curl my hair and put on some cute clothes for your party.

What do you think, a sundress or shorts?”

“It’s up to you. You look pretty in both. I’ll help Mom. Go ahead and get ready.” Sky lightly clasped her sister’s arm before making her way downstairs.

Tangles of blue-and-white balloons floated in the living room, weighed down by her childhood memories—seashells and conks from the beach. A banner almost too big for the dining room hailed the words, “Congratulations, Graduate! Class of 2048.” It was gaudy, over the top, and fantastic, just like her mother’s ever-ready enthusiasm. Her mom had truly outdone herself.

It was perfect.

A dessert table fit for a palace caught Sky’s line of vision, but it was the digital photo screen hanging behind it that gave her pause. The collage of photos made her throat tighten and tears threaten to fall—pictures from when she was a baby until now. There was one of her and Leila a few days after her baby sister was born, and a picture of her and her mother in her mother’s art gallery.

“Dad took that picture. He was so proud of you that day.” Her mom greeted her with a warm smile.

“Really? I remember thinking that I had embarrassed you by arguing with a customer.”

Faith laughed. “He was a little surprised at how sassy you got when you told my customer that it wasn’t your mother’s fault that the beaches had changed since I’d painted those scenes. You insisted that the beaches had changed a lot even since you were born, and you were only seven years old. I must say, I was proud of you, too.”

Sky placed a hand inside her mother’s. “Well, I guess I didn’t like people criticizing your work, even back then. I know Dad hates it when people say stupid things like that.”

“If I remember correctly,” Faith said, “he did ground you for a few hours, but between you and me, he was so proud of his little girl.”

Sky’s eyes traveled from photo to photo until they landed on a picture of herself with her dad. She was in a bright-yellow dress, her hair in pigtails, holding her father’s hand.

Her mother leaned in. “I remember taking that picture. He shed a few tears that day, your first day of kindergarten. He realized that his baby girl wasn’t a baby anymore. Sky, I know there’s no place that he’d rather be than right here, with you, celebrating your graduation. It’s a big milestone. I could tell it bothered him a lot. He didn’t want to miss this. He didn’t say much and looked miserable when I drove him to the airport.”

Sky buried her face in her mother’s chest. “I know I’ve been so blessed that he’s been by my side for all the important moments in my life, but I still wish he was here right now.”

Leila rushed into the room. “Mom, there’s three guys in military uniforms asking for you. I told them to wait in the living room. What’s going on?”

Worry creased her mother’s forehead. “I don’t know. Dad wasn’t expecting anyone.”

Faith took off her apron and wiped her hands with a towel, taking a little longer than needed. She inhaled a shaky breath and greeted the visitors.

“I’m Mrs. Heydin. If you’re looking for my husband, he’s not here right now. May I help you?”

The tall officer closest to her said, “I’m Officer Martin. These are Officers Rodgers and Shay. Will you please have a seat, ma’am?”

Faith’s eyes widened. “I’m perfectly fine standing. Please tell me what’s going on.”

“The commandant of the army has entrusted me to express his deep regret that your husband, Marcus Heydin, has died in the city of Tallyn. The commandant—”

Faith began to sob, and she fell to her knees. Her face paled, and her body started shaking uncontrollably. Officer Rodgers gently raised her up and guided her to the sofa. Leila let out a harrowing scream. “Nooooo! My dad’s alive! He’s not dead!” She punched Officer Shay’s chest with her tiny fists until she reached the point of exhaustion, but the man never budged. He embraced her when she fell into his chest.

Sky was motionless for several seconds, shock stalling her movements, her breathing, her soul. It wasn’t real, couldn’t be. How could her father be dead? It wasn’t possible. Tears stung her cheeks, but she didn’t care. She felt a dampness in her palms and realized her fingernails were digging into her skin.

Sky pried Leila away from Officer Shay, hugging her close. She could hear her own heart pounding against Leila’s, her stomach an ocean of knots and boulders. Nothing would ever be the same again.

Officer Martin’s words were sincere. “I’m deeply sorry for your loss. Officer Shay is a chaplain, and Officer Rodgers is a medic. We’re here to assist you through this difficult time.”

Sky could taste her salty tears before shouting, “My father survived the Third World War that killed millions of people. How could he die two years later in Tallyn? It makes no sense. What kind of accident? What happened? I don’t understand. Why?”

The three officers looked sympathetic but stood erect, not saying much.

Officer Shay responded, “We are not at liberty to say—”

“Not at liberty to say?” Sky shouted. “Well, are you at liberty to tell me this, then? Did he suffer? Oh God, I hope he didn’t suffer.” The thought of her dad being tortured or afraid paralyzed her motions. She had to know how her father spent his last moments on Earth.

Officer Martin stood tall, but his eyes were staring down at the floor. “I am sorry. His file



is classified, and I do not have any specific information.”

Sky’s gut told her that his death was no accident. She knew that words like “classified” were used to bury the truth.

And it terrified her.