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Legacy

The Forgotten Story

(Book Five)

“To dominate is power. Power fueled by more power, will ultimately burn out and lead to downfall.”

— Élie Fey

Chapter One

The Visions

The Hawaiian Islands
Summer, 1850

The rain from the night before had washed up loads of kelp and seaweed. The waves had also brought up a dead and mangled sea turtle. Evidence of a shark attack. Despite the storm, the lobster traps had stayed in place, and two of them had even caught a few.

Pierce Landcross swam deep into the clear water and unhooked the trap doors. He grabbed one lobster at a time and shoved them into the sack he held. He had become accustomed to holding his breath for extended periods of time. Once he had the lobsters secure, he reset the wooden traps and headed up. He took the warm tropical air into his lungs as he broke through the surface of the water. He swam for shore until his feet found the seafloor.

Pierce rather enjoyed the ocean, whether it was diving for lobsters or only going in for a swim. He'd become a true fish since arriving on the island of Maui.

Seven years ago, Chief Sea Wind, captain of the *Ekta* and her crew of Sea Warriors, brought him, his new bride, Taisia, his parents, Nona and Jasper, and his grandmother, Élie Fey, over from England and to the islands. When they'd arrived, Taisia was nearly five months pregnant.

The long time at sea was due largely because the Apaches had dropped anchor in Sonora, Mexico. The detour was an adventure all on its own. The scar on Pierce's upper back, where an arrowhead had penetrated his shoulder blade, was as a testament to that. Nevertheless, they'd made it to the islands and now lived a perfect life together under the sun.

Pierce headed up the white sandy beach toward the area close to a surfing village where the indigenous people of Maui resided. In order to be able to live in such a secluded area—virtually untouched by the outside world—Pierce and his family had needed permission from the village leader, a man named Ailani. His name meant *high chief*. It turned out Chief Sea Wind was mates with the Hawaiian chief who'd granted the Landcross family permission to stay.

As Pierce drew closer to home, he spied his daughter, Galina, digging in the sand. When she noticed him, she abandoned her work to greet him.

"Daddy!" she called with arms outstretched.

She always greeted him with such affection whenever he returned. He smiled as he watched her run toward him, her wavy golden-brown hair bouncing with her movements. Her pigment was a cross between his fair and Taisia's dark skin tone. She had beautiful cognac eyes the same as her mother's, and a smile inherited from her father. The same went for her twin brother, Joaquin, named after Pierce's late older brother.

Pierce lifted his daughter and carried her as he walked. She was growing heavier.

"Oi! What have we been feeding you, child?" he asked.

"Lobster!" she hollered, hurting his ears.

For being so small, she had a very loud voice.

"Lobster, eh? We might have to limit your intake, then. Don't want you getting too big."

"Yes, we do, Daddy. I'm going to grow to be as big as a giant!"

“A giant? Why would you want to be that big?”

“To stop Joaquin and Lydia from taking my toys. And whenever they do, I can say . . .” She dropped her voice. “. . . *fee-fi-fo-fum, I smell the blood of a quarter of an English-man!*”

Pierce cocked his head back, laughing. How he adored his children’s wit.

“Aye,” he said, putting her down. “I’m sure that’ll keep ’em both from playing with your toys without asking.”

Galina skipped ahead of him. She, like her siblings, had lived her entire life on the sand, and she was therefore well equipped to the trek. Although Pierce had been used to it for a while, he preferred stepping on solid ground more often.

Galina reached the hole she was digging before and resumed her work.

“Where are you digging to, my love?” he asked, walking by her.

She scooped a large handful of sand and tossed it out. “To China!”

“Fantastic.”

Pierce headed up to his and Taisia’s hut. It was shaded by tall palm trees, the same as his parents’ and grandmother’s houses, only yards away. The huts, resembling small cabins, were constructed from black wood found deep in the forest. The one-story place had started out as a two bedroom, living room, and kitchen area before it grew into three bedrooms when Taisia was expecting Lydia. With the help of the Sea Warriors, the family managed to build the original three huts in only a matter of days. Since then, the Landcross family had decorated the area with homemade chimes and glass lamps dangling from the trees. Jasper had fixed up the old birdhouse he’d brought with him from the Netherlands and now had it hanging from his porch. There always seemed to be a bird living in it. Near Pierce’s home was a fire pit carved out from the ground with a hammock strung up nearby.

As he approached the steps leading up to the front porch, his son called to him. “Hi, Daddy!”

Pierce stopped and searched around until he found the young boy way up in their only heliotrope tree. The boy laughed when his father found him.

“Ello, Joaquin,” called Pierce, hiding his fear of just how high the boy had climbed this time. He’d started to hate that these trees had been introduced to the Hawaiian Islands. “Can you spot Jupiter from there?”

“Maybe,” Joaquin quipped, lifting himself up onto an-other branch.

Joaquin loved climbing trees, much like Pierce had when he was a tyke. As a child, Pierce had also gotten into loads of trouble, which his son also mimicked successfully. Pierce reckoned karma had finally arrived to bite him on the arse with this one.

“I caught some lobster,” he announced, trying to coax the boy down. “Wanna look?”

“I want to see how high I can go,” the lad stated, grabbing hold of the next branch up.

That wasn’t what Pierce wanted to hear from his six-year-old. Joaquin again hoisted himself up onto another windy limb, causing Pierce’s heart rate to quicken.

“Er, son,” he began saying as he took hold of the tree trunk to climb up after him, “maybe you should try climbing higher a few years from now, eh?”

“Joaquin!” Taisia yelled so loudly it frightened Marco Polo the cockatoo sitting on his perch on the front porch. “Get down right now!”

The fact she was shouting at him in Russian only amplified the boy’s fear. It always scared Pierce.

Joaquin’s eyes grew very wide and he began clambering down. Pierce waited anxiously for the lad to come close enough to grab him. When he came to within reaching distance, Pierce pulled

him away from the tree.

“Stop being such a nervous Nellie, Pierce,” Taisia quipped in English. “You know he climbs that tree nearly every day now.”

Pierce did, indeed, yet it did nothing to curb his worry. He had a very visual mind, and he could clearly envision the lad falling and cracking his head open on the way down.

Goddammit, he had turned into his mother!

After setting his son down, Pierce held up the sack. “Got us some lobster for tonight.”

Taisia smiled at him. That dazzling smile he could never grow tired of. They had experienced so much together, more than most couples had in fifty years of marriage. And they’d made it through all right. Better than all right. They were healthy and living in one of the most beautiful places in the world. They had their safety, and most importantly, they had each other. So many bountiful gifts that Pierce never believed he would ever have.

“We’ll have them with papaya and red pineapples,” Taisia suggested. “I’ll go pick the papaya with the children in a little while.”

“Grand,” Pierce said, stepping up the stairs toward her. “I’m going to the falls to wash up.” He wrapped his arm around her and pulled her close. “Maybe you ought to leave the demons with Mum and Dad and come join me instead, eh?”

He kissed her. A long, loving kiss he only wanted to share with her.

“Ah, gross!” Joaquin shrieked, breaking the mood. “Kissing is disgusting!”

Sometimes, Pierce wished it were still only the two of them.

He grunted with frustration and roared loudly at his son. The boy ran off, screaming, pretending to be frightened. With him gone, Pierce again pulled his wife close.

“As we were,” he said, about to go in for another kiss when someone latched onto his leg.

“Daddy!” came the voice of none other than Lydia.

He looked down at the little toddler who had hugged him like a koala hugging a tree.

“Ello, Angelfish,” he greeted her.

Lydia was truly a daddy’s girl. She was his shadow, who usually followed him everywhere. It was only because she’d been asleep when he’d left to fetch the lobster that he’d even gone alone. He enjoyed her company, chatting his ear off about the dreams she’d had or asking him questions such as where do belches come from and why did the moon follow her? His little Angelfish was the light in his soul.

She noted the sack in his hand. “You went without me?”

Pierce dropped it to lift her up into his arms and hug her tightly.

“Sorry, love. Accompany me next time?”

“All right,” she said, pulling away. “Daddy, I have a question. If a cat is standing on a pillar, does that make it a caterpillar?”

Both he and Taisia laughed.

“I reckon it does,” he answered.

Pierce fed the sheep inside their pens, fed the free-range chickens, and then Marco Polo, the back-talking cockatoo.

“It’s about time. About time!” the bird squawked at him.

Taisia had taught the bird to say that during feedings in order to mess with him.

“Shut it,” Pierce grumbled at the bird.

With the family occupied, Pierce followed the narrow, worn trail. The falls weren’t nearly the tallest on the island. In fact, the cliffs made for safe jumping, which Pierce had done many times.

But it was breathtaking, all the same. After he cleaned up with the soap bartered from the marketplace, he dressed and headed for home. He admired his surroundings as he normally did when cutting through the thick forest. He loved it here. The plants and animals—even the insects. He loved every bit of it. He made a point of always appreciating what he had and where he lived, for it was only by sheer luck, and through a lot of help, that he was alive to have any of it.

As he lost himself to the scenery, his bare feet no longer treaded on the rugged trail. He felt hardwood instead. The tropical landscape began blending into another atmosphere until it had vanished completely. The forest had become a pier with the smell of dead fish and grease oil in the cold air. Buildings consumed the trees and black smog smeared over the crystal-clear sky.

Pierce stopped dead in his tracks. What surrounded him couldn't be real, though it looked and felt very much so. The air was muggy and as sticky as syrup. The day was late. The sun was tucked behind the buildings of a city he'd never seen before. A tall white structure with three towers stood out amongst the buildings. At the pier, there were many ships and boats of all sorts—sailboats, tall mast ships, and many fishing boats. A large riverboat drifted down a wide river. There were people onboard, and a band played music on the deck.

Pierce went from being alone to being surrounded by sailors, fishermen, whores, and thugs. No one noticed him. He stood like a phantom amongst these strangers who were carrying on with their business, completely unaware of him.

“Bloody hell,” he gasped.

He saw a sign that read *Sieur de LaSalle Wharf*. The sign appeared aged, with a jagged crack halfway down the middle. He heard every sound—the seagulls chattering on the rocky shore, the conversations between sailors. He could even smell the tobacco from their corn cob pipes. A man was reading a *Times-Picayune* newspaper with a headline about a house fire in New Orleans.

New Orleans?

There was a commotion coming from a throng down the dock. Curious, Pierce went over to see. It wasn't long before he spied something familiar in this unfamiliar place. Apache symbols were painted on the sails and the vessel itself, but it was the large fans that helped him identify the old Spanish galleon.

The *Ekta* was anchored near the pier.

What was she doing in New Orleans? Then he spotted the crew.

The Sea Warriors were being led down the ramp in shackles. A pair of long, thick chains linked all the prisoners' manacles together, keeping the whole lot locked with each other. The crowd of bystanders were screaming at them, calling them horrible names and throwing rotten food and anything else they could find at them. Chief Sea Wind and his wife, Waves of Strength, walked ahead of the imprisoned crew. They were being guarded by men wearing red bands around their arms.

Vigilantes.

The Sea Warriors were marched through the aggressive crowd and toward the city. Pierce moved in closer. He bumped into people who, although he physically touched them, acted as if nothing had happened.

“Chief!” Pierce called as he approached. “Chief Sea Wind!”

He came to the edge of the crowd and rushed to catch up to the line of prisoners. He was able to get alongside them. Some were bruised and bleeding from a struggle.

“Chief!” Pierce hollered again, rushing toward the front.

Nobody, not even the vigilantes walking beside the line with their rifles, took any notice of him.

As Pierce neared the chief, he spotted Sees Beyond.

“Sees!” Pierce gasped, slowing down. “Christ, can you hear me?”

She didn’t answer. She only kept her steady shuffle along the dock.

“Sees!” he yelled, grabbing her by the arm.

When he did, the world around him blew away like leaves in high wind.

Pierce blinked.

He was back in the forest and holding onto a bamboo tree. He let go of it and darted his eyes about, trying to understand what he’d seen.

“What the fuckin’ hell just happened?”

Legacy

The Payment

(Book Six)

“Moments are but tiny beads in one’s existence, darling. String them together and you get a lifetime.”

—Pierce Landcross

Chapter One

The Creature

Filip Faix was a stranger in a strange land.

Space journeys were odd—and sometimes dangerous—even for a god like him. There were pockets hidden within the vastness waiting to pull unsuspecting travelers into vortexes, turn them around, and send them back to where they came from. Even worse, they could suck someone into an Endless Vertigo, forcing them to re-experience the same events over and over again.

Then there was the cold. Space cold that made everything hurt. Not that Filip Faix needed to breathe, but he did miss taking in the sweet oxygen that space couldn't provide. Traveling so far into space also made him feel ill, but he soldiered on, keeping himself occupied by focusing on the majesty of the sights surrounding him.

For many who were grounded to their planets, space was nothing but a hollow, lifeless void. People once believed Earth was the center of the universe. Time eventually revealed the truth for those willing to accept it. Space, despite its name, was anything but empty. It constantly moved with herds of shooting stars, exploding supernovas, black holes consuming anything in their path, circulating asteroid fields, and even the occasional flying machine.

Then there was the endless amount of stardust clumping together and slowly forming potential moons, worlds, and stars. Life always began and eventually ended in the dark regions of space, scattering living energies around to start anew somewhere else. Filip Faix would one day cease to exist and become someone or something new.

He only hoped it wasn't another tree.

Outer space, as people called it where he was from, was an interconnecting highway, linking every living being to another. Thus, life and death would never end so long as the universes survived.

Truly, space was a graveyard as well as a birthplace.

Filip Faix's destination was drawing near. He hadn't been to this planet before. It had taken him some time to find it.

This place, which once was home to trillions of organisms, was now rebuilding itself after an asteroid hit it a few millennia ago. There was destruction as well as reconstruction. It stood as a testament to how change is inevitable. The planet was rather fortunate. A single world could go through many cycles depending on its lifespan and where it was located in its galaxy. The toxic comet that hit it had killed its inhabitants, but not the planet itself. What didn't die in the initial impact, the deadly fumes of the aftermath had finished off. Even with the species' technologies, every air-breathing individual had succumbed to the impact, either by fumes or by starvation, assuming they had somehow escaped into the underground.

It had taken years after the impact, but plants, small rodents, and reptiles were once again coming to life, springing from the waters where most organisms evolved. The whole globe had become the wild, purely organic place it had started out as. The gas of the comet had subsided, allowing new life to adapt to what remained of its toxicity.

The jungle humidity made him hotter than Filip Faix ever remembered being before. The dense, clawing foliage and skin-eating insects made his journey slow going. Finally, he came to the edge of a pit, wider than St. Peter's dome in the Vatican. The pool inside the pit—it reeked as bad as a billion rotting corpses—was barely visible. The waterline started deep down within the quarry. When he dove in, he discovered the space between the edge of the pit and the water was greater than any building back home. He splashed into it and swam downwards for many leagues, which proved a bit of a challenge, for the liquid was as thick as jelly.

He cut through the clear slime and managed to reach the mouth of a tunnel. He was certain this was the one. There were dozens of tunnels that pocketed the cavern wall, but the clue on the list suggested a burrow shaped like an oval, and none of the other passageways was that shape.

He swam into it, letting the darkness swallow him whole. It mattered little to him since his eyesight adapted quickly to the dark. After clawing through the gooey liquid, an opening broke above him. Filip Faix raised his head out of the water and to his surprise, found he had swum into an open chamber. It was completely airless, but a dry area nonetheless. The Trickster climbed out, wiping the goo from his eyes. He scouted out the grotto. It appeared similar to every other cave he'd ever been in—rocky, with twisted formations hanging from the ceiling or rising up from the ground.

The only difference was the thousands of skeletons. Hardly a space on the floor was free of the bones and belongings that the departed once treasured enough to bring down to the caves with them while they escaped the comet gas. Filip Faix stepped through the endless piles of remains, kicking skulls and other things about. These lifeforms stood taller than Earth people by a few feet, their bones were wider and denser, and they were shaped differently than the humans. The sound of the clanking bones echoed eerily in the hollow cavity. Gooey liquid dripped off speleothems, which ranged about three-quarters of a mile high. Regardless of all these strange and foreign wonders surrounding him, he had only come for one item.

Most of the skulls were still encased in the gas masks that were meant to protect them. Filip Faix snorted as he thought about the next civilized populace finding the remains of these past planet dwellers and believing them to be some primitive colony or alien lifeforms—or, perhaps, even ancient gods. Filip Faix had witnessed it happen before.

The gas mask helmets were mostly generic models, mass-produced during some war that may have taken place at some point. What he needed to find was a helmet belonging to a high-ranking officer. After moving deeper into the cave tunnel, he found just what he was searching for. At his feet was the skeleton of an unknown soldier, perhaps a general or lieutenant, wearing the gas mask engraved with an army insignia. The symbol was

written on the list the Erinye had created.

A so-called admirer of Filip Faix's—a small forest imp who had challenged him to a treasure hunt—had recently visited him. Filip Faix had accepted, mainly because of the prize that awaited the winner. The Sudarshana Chakra! The golden disk was a powerful weapon crafted by Vishnu himself. Filip Faix had tried stealing the weapon ages ago, but the Hindu god had caught him. As punishment for his crime, Vishnu turned the Trickster into a tree. After his tree form died, Vishnu offered to return Filip Faix to his normal self on the condition that he never again try to obtain the Chakra. Filip Faix agreed—and he had kept his word until the imp appeared with it. The Trickster didn't consider this challenge as breaking his promise. After all, it wasn't he who'd stolen the Chakra, right?

Lying beside the dead soldier was another skeleton without a gas mask. Tiny footprints surrounded the bones.

The imp, he thought grimly.

The little bitch had beat him here. He'd have to hurry if he was going to win this race.

Filip Faix grabbed hold of the helmet and cracked the skull off its vertebrae. He lifted both mask and skull, shaking it a few times before the cranium dropped out. Drawing his knife, Filip Faix was ready to cut the part he needed from it when a rustle sounded nearby. He turned his sights to a pile of skeletons rising up before tumbling off the body of a large beast.

"Shit," he cursed as the creature cocked its head from side to side.

The thing had no eyes and no nose. Filip Faix suspected the creature could neither see nor breathe. The fact that it breathed no air was likely the reason its ancestors had survived the asteroid. Or, perhaps it was a new kind of animal evolving on the planet.

The creature was twice the size of a horse, with the muscle mass of a gorilla. Its jaws were little more than bone with many hooked, shaped teeth lining it, some of which were broken. It had no hair anywhere on its pale, veiny body, only whiskers sticking out of its misshapen cranium. What Filip Faix first believed were hollowed-out horns curving like those of a ram all the way down past its callused knees were actually ears. It was how the monster had discovered him. The curious manner in which it swiveled its head indicated it didn't know exactly where Filip Faix was, only that he was somewhere in the cave. The Trickster suspected it had heightened sensitivity that enabled it to feel the vibrations of a bird hopping along the ground ten miles off. As long as Filip Faix stayed perfectly still, the beast wouldn't be able to home in on his location. However, time was not on his side. He couldn't afford to wait for the creature to lose interest. Besides, it already had a good idea of his whereabouts, thanks to the ruckus he had created.

As the creature was tuning in on its prey's whereabouts, the Trickster put on the gas mask helmet. It wobbled on him, for it was much larger than his own head. At least he could see just fine through the single bigger glass eyehole. He slowly brought out his knife and bolted through the chamber. The creature laid chase. It ran faster than Filip Faix expected, charging like a rhino, crushing bones into dust under its sheer weight. Before he knew it, the beast was at his heels.

He dropped to the ground and rolled onto his back. Using his razor-sharp blade, the Trickster sliced deeply into it, slitting its belly open as the thing raced over him. It kept going for a little while before stopping. Filip Faix gripped the knife tightly.

“Come on, you bastard,” he dared.

Adrenaline rushed through him, making him blood-thirsty. It had been ages since he fought like this.

The creature seemed about to charge once again. It took a step and then halted, letting out an agonizing wail just before its innards bottomed out from under it. Apparently, the cut across the stomach was deeper than Filip Faix first believed. The creature stumbled around a bit before falling sideways, moaning painfully.

“Damn,” Filip Faix said, approaching it.

The creature was dead before he reached it, yet the excitement was hardly at an end. There was movement within the belly, amidst the pile of intestines and the liver. Something was pushing against the lining of the beast’s stomach and stretching it like raw dough. Something the underground monster had recently eaten was trying to free itself. The thick lining kept the victim from clawing out. If the Trickster weren’t so curious, he’d have ignored it altogether. After all, there could be anything in that belly, such as another creature wanting to eat him. Whatever it was, he was confident he could handle it.

He slit the lining and a screech echoed loudly as the creature leaped from the stomach. When Filip Faix recovered from his shock, he tilted his chin up to the imp hanging from a stalactite. Stomach acid and other nasty stuff dripped off her. More goo was stuck in the moss and twigs of her body.

“You got yourself *eaten*?” he asked.

The imp vomited and wiped stomach acid from her eyes.

“Swallowed me whole, it did!” she said and then spat.

He pulled off the helmet and shook his head, tutting. “I wish I had known it was you. I would have left you in that beast.”

“You’re a real fucking prince,” she spat angrily, scanning the cave a moment.

She eyed something, leaped off the stalactite, and raced toward it.

“Why didn’t you just vanish?” he asked her when she had landed.

“I’m weak from traveling through space.”

He couldn’t argue with that. His own might had dwindled from the deep space journey. Coming to this place soon after passing through The Gate had greatly contributed to the decline of his strength.

She lifted a gas mask and used her long nails to claw a ball out from inside it.

“Got it! See ya!” she said, dropping the helmet and dashing over to the water.

“Hey!” he yelled, chasing after her.

He reached the water’s edge, put the gas mask on, and dove into the jelly liquid after her. He swam toward the surface and when he got there, he saw her scaling the wall of the pit. Filip Faix wished he had enough strength simply to fly up, but he was still very weak. Then it occurred to him that once the imp had climbed up out of the pit, she would need

time to recover before returning to Earth.

After hours of climbing, he pulled himself over the edge and rested a while. Instead of fretting about the imp, who had darted off into the forest somewhere, he took off the gas mask and studied it. It was constructed of black metal. Age had eaten away the long vacuum hoses made from some sort of animal skin, leaving it in tatters. The glass eyepieces were red-tinted, a large one on the bottom and a smaller one directly above it, aligning it with the eyes of these extinct lifeforms. Above the second eyepiece was a marble-sized metal ball with a military symbol engraved on it.

He pulled his knife again and chiseled at the mask until the ball popped out. Filip Faix caught it in midair.

He had it! The last item on the list! And the moment he had regained his strength, he would head home and claim his prize.

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