

EXCERPT FROM 'MILIJUN'

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The road ribbon system took them directly to the front of the Caiguna police station, seaward of the Eyre Highway along dusty, unkempt side streets. Mother and son dismounted as one and strode resolutely up the path and through darkened glass doors. They found themselves in a featureless foyer where a single three-metre plant was placed strategically in the middle of a brown synthetic marble floor. A long black desk stood at the far end but there was no sign of any other exit door or, for that matter, any other person. The walls were sky blue, the ceiling white, and the effect austere.

Laura approached the desk and saw a white button labeled *Press for immediate attention*. She did as requested. A flat screen rose from the desktop and the face of Janice Mepunga stared out at them. An aura of total distrust immediately gripped Laura's mind, reinforced by unwelcome apprehension, but the image on the screen flashed a convivial smile and said, "Oh hello you two. I've been expecting you. Just one moment."

To the right of the desk, a mechanism hummed and a well-disguised door opened within the blue wall to reveal a brightly lit office beyond.

"Come through. Come through," Janice Mepunga called.

Jason seized his mother's hand and looked at her questioningly. There was a strange fear in his ashen face, and his eyes mirrored the foreboding that Laura felt within her own heart.

"It'll be fine," Laura said quietly and gently guided him through into the inner office.

Janice instantly took the wind out of Laura's sails by saying, "Look. I'm sorry about yesterday. An emergency came up. I had to leave. Sorry about leaving you with Robert, too – it was unavoidable. He tried to kill me. I knew Jason was around." Her smile grew broader. "I knew you would find him."

Shaking her head, Laura said sharply, "Maybe you did but in what condition? It was absolutely unforgivable what you did." She threw a challenging look at the policewoman. "And Robert wasn't dead when I found him."

Janice's face hardened and Jason noticed she slowly worked her hand down to her pistol. "It was unavoidable," the policewoman repeated.

"Are there any other officers here?" Laura asked.

Janice shook her head. "My partner went to Perth this morning. It's normally pretty quiet around here, you understand, and there's plenty of air backup from Kalgoorlie." She cast a meaningful glance at her visitors before adding, "Should we require it."

"What about a statement?" Laura asked. "Don't you want one?"

"I certainly do," Janice said, pointing to a terminal in the corner of her office. "Be my guest." She was all sweetness and roses again, in control of the situation.

While his mother typed, Jason waited his turn. He was nervous, upset about Bradley Robert and about the loss of his photographs. His eyes hardly left Janice Mepunga, unsure in his own heart whether the alien creature was harbored inside her or whether it had moved to fresh pastures. On the drive to the station his mother had told him of Robert's dying words, and he had felt sick. He desperately wanted to know the truth but was afraid of another confrontation. And worst of all, there was no proof of anything.

"How did the ranger threaten you?" Jason asked, abruptly causing his mother to pause her statement mid-sentence.

Mepunga glanced up, her face like stone. "He just did, and that's enough these days." She gestured to Jason to sit down on the chair across the desk. "Let's compile your statement together while your mother finishes hers." She initiated a recorder and leaned back in her chair.

Jason shot a fleeting look at his mother and received a warning glance in return, accompanied by a small shake of the head.

"How did you get to Robert's house?" Janice asked.

"I was on the computer in the camp tourist centre," Jason replied. "He knocked me out and I awoke in a bedroom."

Despite the recorder, Janice typed as she said, "And then what

happened?”

“He made me something to eat, just eggs and toast. Then he made me shower and took me into the basement.”

“What about his sister from next door? Did you see her at all?”

“No,” Jason said. “There was nobody else.”

Janice raised her eyebrows. “Did you try to escape?”

With a shake of his head, Jason said, “He was always in my face, and twice my size.”

“Even in the shower?”

Jason averted his eyes. “More or less.”

“He was naked when I found him,” Laura interjected. “In the basement.”

The policewoman looked hard at Jason. “Did he touch you? Molest you in any way?”

Jason bit his lip. “No, he didn’t.”

Laura stood up. “I’ve finished. It’s fairly short but to the point.”

Janice walked over and glanced down at the screen. “Not exactly flattering behaviour on my part,” she said, pursing her lips. “My statement will give my story.”

Laura shrugged. “I’d still like to see—”

Jason interrupted her. “Can we go now, Mum? I need some air.”

Laura saw he looked pale and distressed. “I’m sorry,” she said to Janice. “Is that all for now?”

“Sure. We have your vehicle tag. Stick around the district though.” She printed both statements and laid them on the desk. “Just sign these for now.”

After they had signed Laura turned to leave but paused at the door. “What happened to the body?”

“It’s been taken care of,” Janice replied. “Thanks for coming in.” It was the final dismissal. Laura and Jason left without further discourse. They moved through the stark foyer and once outside paused to breathe the fresh southern air, which was rapidly warming as the sun rose higher in the sky.

“No alien for the lady,” Laura said. “Thank God you didn’t say

anything about that.”

“Not to her,” Jason said, looking at his mother fearfully. “I think it’s still with her.”

In her office, Janice read the statements again and put them through the shredder. She stood, swayed slightly, and pushed a floor panel with her foot to release the door into an adjacent room. Moving through, she closed the door behind her and stared at the uniformed body of her colleague. He was slumped face down on the desk, head resting in a pool of coagulated blood.

Suddenly, the winged alien was outside her, standing two metres away, observing with its head on one side. She sensed an instantaneous chill invade her body as the creature emerged but, once free of it, Janice felt warmer and strangely fearless. No words or other communication passed but Janice felt its mind boring into hers, trying to understand her emotions. At least she thought she did. She didn’t really want to see it anymore, was not interested in it at all, and wished it was light-years away.

“I’m sorry, Daniel,” she said to the motionless body of her partner. “I’m so sorry. I really could not help it.”

A tangle of meaningless images ran through her mind, and she turned to face her symbiotic disciple from another world. Something passed between them, intangible and outside her scope of logical thought. She asked the question anyway.

“What do you want from me? What do you want from us?”