

Seeds of Change
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Chapter One (partial)

Once again, Jey had crawled into bed with a guy she didn't like much. She slipped out of his apartment while night passed softly into morning and he was just a dark lump in the bed. As she walked the silent streets of the townhouse development, the moon floated, pearly white, in the early morning sky. It looked cool, like a frosty ice cube, while she felt puffy from the heat, sweat collecting under her breasts, soaking her tank top. At least she could sweat. It was when the sweat wouldn't come, that you were done for. She had seen it happen in Arizona and she didn't ever want to see it again. People suffocated by the heat of their own bodies. *Don't think about it.*

As she walked the ten blocks home, she tried not to keep a tally of the families in each townhouse who had lost someone. And she especially tried not to think about the emptiness in her own house, where her mother should have been.

Jey stepped into the coolness of the townhouse at 15 Primrose and started to tiptoe up the stairs to her childhood bedroom before she remembered. Her mind still couldn't reach all the way around the gaping absence of her mother from the world. She didn't need to tiptoe. Her mother wasn't lying in her bedroom fast asleep. Her mother was gone—three months gone. Her mother who had made this community into the sustainable island that it was. Her mother who had pestered everyone in the community until they chipped in for solar panels and a windmill just to shut her up. But it was all for nothing. Solar panels and a windmill couldn't stop the manmade virus that killed her mother and her Gram and half the community and it couldn't stop the heat index from rising.

Jey climbed into her childhood bed and pulled the covers over her head. She had two hours before she had to get it together to be the gifted healer everyone expected her to be.

When she got up after two hours of restless half sleep, she stopped at her dresser, as she had every morning for two weeks, and picked up the ad torn out of the *Merchandiser*. The *Merchandiser* had survived, like a cockroach, even though the town newspaper had shut down two years before. She held the ad up to the morning light and read it one more time.

Can you brew beer? We want you.

Can you make cheese? We want you.

*Can you farm, sew, nurse, doctor, raise children,
raise livestock, cook, create? We want you.*

Are you fit, strong and healthy? We want you.

Join Two by Two.

We ship out April 24th, 2071.

A row of tiny spaceship icons bordered the ad. The paper was starting to fray and the words were faded from handling. Jey thought it had to be a scam. But there must have been a reason that she'd scanned the *Merchandise* and torn out the ad, instead of dumping the flyer in the compost bin like she always did.

It wasn't the first time that she'd done something without her conscious mind's participation. It happened a lot. Ever since she was a kid, something had nudged her and led her that had nothing to do with logic.

As she read and reread the ad, her mind looped. *There must be a reason I keep coming back to this—throw the damn ad away—but, there must be a reason—it's a ridiculous idea—Jesus, make a decision already.*

She put the ad away and slumped down the stairs. She skipped breakfast and a fresh opportunity to listen to the silence of the house, locked up and walked to her office in the community center.

"Jey, about time you showed up." Her business partner, Celie, was in the office kitchen, dunking a teabag in her "World's Greatest Mom" mug. "Are you OK?"

Celie's presence filled up a room. She had a mix of Caribbean black and Native American ancestry that gave her a regal bearing, high cheekbones and a curvy shape. She was the extrovert in their business partnership and a single mama to her seven year old daughter, Talleh. She had been in the States when her island home of Trinidad had been washed away a tsunami, in a few short, violent minutes, along with her whole extended family.

Jey looked at Celie and just shook her head. "I'm fine. What do we have today?"

"Two sore throats, anxiety with asthma, anxiety with allergies, anxiety with insomnia. The usual. One cash client, the rest paying in trade—a dozen eggs, jam, tomatoes, an offer of a puppy."

"No puppies. And no kittens. We should put a disclaimer on our flyer. The tomatoes sound good though."

Jey closed the door to her office and set out her pendulum, charts and laptop. The shelves of her office were lined with homeopathic remedies, books and plants. It was going to be a long day. For the hundredth time, she wondered why she was gifted at healing if she felt drained by working with sick people. Was it wrong to quit practicing something you were skilled at, something that helped a lot of people, just because you discovered, after you started doing it, that you kind of hated doing it? Was it wrong to quit because you couldn't save your own mother—and your grandmother?

Jey shook two minuscule white pellets of Nux Vomica into the lid of the remedy bottle and tipped them onto her tongue. It would help with the dull headache that was gathering at the base of her skull.

As she tilted her head to drop the pellets in her mouth, she saw a flash of green-gold light out of the corner of her eye. She shook her head. This had been happening since her mother died. When she tried to focus on it, there was nothing there. She was definitely losing it.

She took a sip of tea, fresh mint from her windowsill. Deep breath. Ready to work.

Her first client was familiar. Katharine Glass. Single mom, widowed by the same epidemic that took her mother. Anxiety and chronic insomnia. Mentally and emotionally fragile. The outer door opened, letting in a gust of heat and humidity, and the day began.

Katharine sank into the overstuffed armchair in the corner. Jey didn't have to say much. A how are you and how did the remedy work and what are your current symptoms and a torrent of words rushed towards her.

She listened. And wrote. And looked—at Katharine's pale face with spots of red on her cheeks, her hands clenched and shoved under her thighs, her shoulders up around her ears, her words punctuated by sighs. As she listened, Katharine's hands unclenched and her shoulders relaxed. Sunlight heated the plants lining the window sill, a faint odor of basil and mint filled the air.

"I don't feel as panicky as before. The dreams are a little less, but I'm still having them. I'm still searching—running through empty houses, endless corridors, opening door after door. I can't find him. I know if I can find him, I can save him." Katharine's eyes fill with tears.

Jey handed her the tissue box and pulled out her pendulum and charts. Smiled at Katharine. "Let's clear that energy and find you a remedy." Katharine nodded through the tears.

Jey hardly had to allow the pendulum to swing. She could feel the answer before she saw the pendulum swinging forward and back to signal yes. Right to left for no. How many energies, four. Down and across the rows of energies listed on her chart in narrow columns. The ones that garnered a yes—*clingy, insecurity, powerless, superstitious, depression*. What else is important, grab other charts—*adrenal glands imbalanced/feeling defeated, stomach imbalanced/indigestible issue*. That was the picture of the problem. She called on powers greater than herself to clear the negative energy. The pendulum circled and circled and came to rest.

Jey chose a remedy. Ignatia for grief, grief, grief. The world was inundated with an ocean of grief.

The rest of the day was much like the beginning. Finally, Celie ushered out the last client of the day as Jey packed up her portion of the jam, eggs and tomatoes in her backpack. The puppies had not put in an appearance, thank God.

“Celie, before you go. I need to show you something.”

“What’s up?”

Jey wordlessly handed Celie the dog eared ad. She watched Celie’s face as she read it.

Celie looked up. She studied Jey for a moment. “You’re seriously considering this, aren’t you?”

“I think I am. I’ve tried to forget it, but it keeps nagging me. What do we have here? My mother, my Gram, your island, your family—gone. The Earth is rejecting us. And I don’t blame it. There’s no future I can see. I wouldn’t want to go without you. And Talleh.”

Jey felt a familiar nudge in her gut when she said that. She hadn’t even thought about Talleh before, but when she said it, she knew. Talleh with her wood sprite, lithe little body and bronzy skin, her hair sprouting out in all directions no matter how tightly braided it was in the beginning of the day. Talleh was important.

“Let’s just go to the address listed, and check it out. We can see what it’s all about.”

“I don’t know, Jey. I’m so busy.”

Jey felt tears starting to gather behind her eyes and sat with a thump on the faded loveseat.

Celie sat beside her. “It sounds crazy as hell. But—”

Jey just nodded, wiping tears with the back of her hand. It was hard to live without hope. She was sure it was doubly hard for Celie to raise a child without hope.

Celie gave Jey a one armed hug. “What the hell. Let’s go check it out.”

It had happened slowly, then in a tumbling rush. People expected the coastal devastation but not the insidious breakdown of the whole web of life as they knew it. Storms, floods, fires, drought, hurricanes, epidemics; cities, islands, businesses, lives, all lost. As one thread of the system broke, it took two more down with it, until it became impossible to weave the jumbled snarl of broken threads back together. And the heat index rising—and rising.

For Jey, natural disaster and tragedy were as routine as oatmeal for breakfast. After the umpteenth tragedy, it was hard to feel it. It was one more reason to focus on the small. The big was too sad.