

# Revolution

Novel 4 in the Gulliver Station Series



# Connie Cockrell

Author of *A New Start*

# Gulliver Station: Revolution

By Connie Cockrell

Published by 2nd Wind Press at Smashwords

Copyright © 2014 by Connie Cockrell

Cover Art by Connie Cockrell

BSF Light Speed Frigate Class original art by: Dingo57 via SketchUp  
3D Warehouse

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 10:1500717118

## Dedication

To all of the family, friends, and acquaintances who encouraged and supported me in this long journey.

## Acknowledgements

To Diane Nash, Audrey Wilson, and Tim and Ruth Fleming for editing and beta reading this manuscript. To Randy Cockrell for doing the final line edits. To my friends at Forward Motion (<http://www.fmwriters.com>) and to Power Writing Hour for their support.

## Smashwords Edition, License Notes

This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then please return to [Smashwords.com](http://Smashwords.com) and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

## Chapter One

Jolene Harris, Jo to her friends, flipped the final toggles on the ship's

board in front of her. "Adirondack confirms station umbilicals attached."

"Welcome to Gulliver Station, Adirondack. Station Control out."

She scrubbed her fingertips through her short, grey hair as she leaned back into the command chair. She opened the comm link to the Captain, Talisa Vien. "Captain, we're docked."

"I'll be there in half an hour," Talisa yawned. "Go ahead and post our cargo and our shopping list. I'll grab a shower then be out to relieve you."

"Take your time, Captain. Everything is under control." Jo signed off then punched comms for the rest of the crew. "Ship's docked, people. Cargo is being posted to the station boards. Let's look lively."

Josh Woodhill was to her left. Josh was lead comms tech for the Adirondack, a position he earned when Jo first signed onto the ship and Talisa was promoted to First Officer. His hair, what was left of it, was grey. "Josh, go ahead and get something to eat. The rest of the crew will be in the galley soon and there won't be room enough in there to get a cup of coffee."

"Excellent idea, Jo." He transferred the boards to her and headed to the rear of the bridge where the galley was located. The ceiling lights made the ring of fuzzy white hair look like a halo. "Can I bring you something?"

"Cup of tea, please. Thanks." The Adirondack, a now-aging space freighter, had come out of hyperspace three days ago but she still felt the lingering effects of the jump and the trunk they all took to get through faster-than-light jumps. She grimaced. Comes of being over sixty, she thought.

He waved acknowledgement and left the bridge. Alone now, Jo punched in the code for the Space Force's office on Gulliver. The Space Force maintained a presence on Level 9, including ports, offices, and barracks as part of their mission in this sector of space. Her handler was Lieutenant Berger Atwood. She met him three years ago when the Adirondack docked at Gulliver Station. The Space Force officers didn't stay in one place long. Atwood was her..., she counted on her fingers, tenth, no eleventh, contact within the office.

"Lieutenant Atwood, please," she asked the young woman who answered. "First Officer Harris from The Adirondack."

Jolene waited for the call to transfer to the lieutenant. Has it been forty years already? She gave her head a tiny shake. That first encounter with Gulliver Station was a doozy. An experience she hoped never to repeat. The result of that first meeting made her a contact for the Space Force and for both Gulliver Station's Underground revolution and one of its two criminal factions. A spy really.

"Lt. Atwood, here."

"Bergen, nice to hear you again." Jo tried to get comfortable in her chair. "I've got your reports."

"Good to hear from you, Jo. No problems on the run in?"

"No, the jump points were all clear. I picked up packages for the Underground and for The Family. Usual drop? They're going to want those packages yesterday."

"I know, Jo. Drop them at the usual spot and I'll get the team to open them, make copies, reseal them and get them back to you ASAP."

"Thanks, Bergen. I'll get off the ship soonest."

"Take care, Jo," he said.

"Will do, LT. Out." Jo cut the link. She moved up onto the edge of her chair and stretched. Joints popped and cracked. Josh picked that moment to bring her tea.

"Here you go, Jo. I'll be back in a few. The crew is filtering into the galley now."

She inhaled the fragrance of the tea. "I'm glad we're here. This tea is getting boring. I'm ready for something new."

He laughed. "Yeah, everything in the galley is getting boring. I'm ready to hit the restaurants and try something other than frozen pre-packs. I'll get my sandwich and get back right away."

"Take your time. I've got the boards covered."

#

Sean Morrow was sitting in The Family's clubhouse, playing cards with the other lieutenants. "You have got to be kidding," he threw his cards down. "You won with a pair of three's?"

Flynn Irwin roared, "You fall for it every time, Sean. You've only yerself to blame." He pulled the pot to his side of the table while the rest of the players laughed.

A young man, hardly out of his teens hurried up to the table. Sean waved him over. The boy whispered in his ear. Sean nodded and the boy hurried off.

"That's it for me, boyo's." He bowed to Dacey Garr. She was the lieutenant over The Family's prostitution racket on Gulliver Station. "Fair, Dacey. I'm sorry but duty calls." He picked up her hand and kissed the back of it.

"Stop it, you rogue." She pulled her hand away. "You just want to leave because you're losing."

"True," he stood up. "But also true I have some business to take care of."

He left the table to the laughter of the players.

Once outside of the clubhouse, a space The Family had held on Level 2 since the station was founded, he hurried to the nearest Maglev and got on. It was a short ride to the elevators and up to Level 8 where his boss, Kenna Gillespie, had her office.

Kenna's secretary, Kate Jamison, buzzed him through the locked office door. The Firm, their rival criminal syndicate, had a hit out on Kenna. The Firm had had permanent death threats out on all of The Family's leaders for generations. As soon as a new person took the reins of the operation, The Firm made sure word got out that a large reward awaited the man, woman or child who killed them.

Sean opened the door and went in. He was an attractive man though his black hair was now more salt than pepper. Despite his age, he still moved with the effortless grace decades of martial arts training had given him. The office was decorated in woodland motif: pastel green walls, wooden decorations, and lots of plants. It seemed like too many plants to Sean but it wasn't his office. "Kenna," he said as soon as he was through the door. "The Adirondack has docked."

She looked up from the pad on her desktop. "Have a seat, Sean." She waved him to the chairs in front of her glass-topped desk. Kenna was younger than Sean by about fifteen years but she was still attractive even in her mid-fifty's. She had her grandmother Erin's blonde hair which she kept dyed, but unlike her grandmother, Kenna kept her hair cut short.

Eyes the color of sapphires watched him take a seat. "Need a cup of coffee?"

"No, thanks," he said as he settled into the chair. Those eyes scared the daylights out of him when he first met her. It felt like lasers staring him down. She was a formidable woman, as tough as her father and grandmother combined. He was surprised she even knew about him. He was just the guy the Level 4 hawkers reported to.

"You're the man I need as a lieutenant, Sean," she told him at their first meeting after she took over the reins of the crime syndicate from her father. "I don't like bullies and too many of the men my father promoted have more brawn than brain."

He was flattered and flustered at the same time. She meant it. Men he'd grown up under were quietly replaced. The Family became both a politer world and more profitable. Kenna had a plan and worked it. He was glad. The rough stuff never appealed to him though he'd had to do some rough stuff to protect himself and The Family.

She got right to business. "When do you think Harris will deliver the package?"

"It always takes at least a day. She's the First Officer, so it's not always easy for her to get away," Sean told her.

"Fine. Do we know what's in the package?"

Sean shrugged. "Like the message said, it's supposed to be plans for a new weapon. It's supposed to be usable within the Station but better than the stunners in use now. But who knows?"

Kenna nodded. "It would be nice to be a step ahead of The Firm. Patrick McMahon takes too much after his grandfather James. Ruthless is another word for cruel and bully. Otherwise why keep up the charade of a hit on me all these years."

Sean nodded. "Rumor is that his son Colin is worse. And he's chomping at the bit to take over for his father."

"Hmmm," Kenna responded. "How old is Colin now? Thirty?"

"Thirty-three. He's ready, or he thinks he is, to take over his old man's job."

Kenna sighed. "That organization has become worse and worse. I had to have StaSec break up more illegal prostitution houses last week. He kidnaps young women and makes them work for nothing, then steals little kids from the Dispossessed and sells them to the highest bidder. Damn!" She slapped her hand on the table, forehead furrowed with aggravation.

Sean nodded again. That was one of the things he liked about The Family. There were boundaries. He stood up. "I'll let you know when I get the package."

"Good. Make sure it's the plans and take it directly to the labs. I don't need to see it."

"What if it isn't the plans?"

"We'll figure that out when you open it up."

He nodded and left.

#

Colin answered his apartment doorbell. A moderate 1.82 meters tall, Colin was slim with a face some called aristocratic. His nose was straight between grey-blue eyes but his mouth was thin, as though it hurt to smile. He wore his jet-black hair short but slicked back, looking as if he moved so fast it plastered against his head. He moved with confidence but without the grace years of training would have offered him.

"Ariel, how good of you to come." He slipped his arm around the waist of the woman at the door and pulled her in close. They kissed, a deep, breathtaking kiss that demonstrated they'd been together for awhile.

Ariel broke away. "Your father will see."

Colin pulled her back to him. "He's in the kitchen," and kissed her again before he pulled her into the apartment. "Sit. Something to drink?"

"Whisky," she said as she walked into the living area behind him. The apartment, inherited from his father, was four times the size of the original two hundred and seventy-nine square meter luxury apartment the station originally rented to the wealthy. Decorated in all real leather furniture, oriental carpets and some of the station's finest art on the walls, this was a male retreat.

At thirty-seven, Ariel's 1.6 meter frame was slender. She moved like a bird, in fast, sharp jabs. Today her long, nearly orange hair was done up in a French twist, complementing the severely tailored tunic and skirt in tweed that hugged her frame. Pale blue eyes went from flirtatious to icy. "Father was being senile all afternoon."

Colin selected a crystal decanter from the collection on the sideboard and poured two fingers into a squat, matching crystal glass. "This should help take the taste out of your mouth."

Colin was handing it to her when his father, Patrick McMahon, came out of the kitchen carrying a small platter. "Oh, Ariel. I didn't hear the bell. Glad you could make it." He placed the platter, filled with a selection of hor d'oeuvres, on the coffee table.

Ariel picked up a napkin and selected a puff pastry from the tray. She caught Colin's eye and while Patrick was helping himself to the bar, licked the pastry suggestively before biting it in half.

Colin mouthed the word, "Later," just before his father turned around.

"Let's get started, shall we," Patrick said as he moved to the sofa. Patrick was pure Irish descent. Age and fine dining had turned his 1.79 meters blocky. He moved like an aging bull, charging straight at everything. Liver spots dotted his hands and his once black hair was now silver and much thinner on top. Dark blue eyes were red-rimmed with age.

Colin selected the armchair at the end of the coffee table. "Why'd you arrange for us to meet, Dad?"

"I want to talk about where The Firm is headed, Colin, and I don't want half of the organization to know what's going on before I say the words."

"So, we're meeting here?" Ariel asked.

"Exactly," Patrick said. He took one of the appetizers, ate it and wiped his

fingers on his napkin. "We're still evenly matched with The Family. One or the other of us pulls ahead for a little while then the other catches up. It's time we eliminated the competition."

Colin sat up from his relaxed position in the chair. "Why now, Dad?"

Patrick looked at his son. "I'm over seventy, son. Soon the organization will be yours. I mean to have it arranged that you receive the only syndicate on Gulliver Station."

Colin put on a modest demeanor. "Why, Dad, that's..., I don't know what to say!"

Ariel kicked off her shoes and curled her long legs up under her in the leather chair. "And why am I here, Mr. McMahan?"

Patrick sipped from his glass of whisky. "Because I know that you two," he pointed at each of them with his glass as he settled back onto the sofa, "are a couple."

Colin shot a quick glance at Ariel.

"I know," Patrick continued. "You've kept it a secret but I have resources. I've known since you first started seeing each other."

Ariel shrugged, "So why am I here?"

"You make a good team. An alliance between you two will guarantee the success of The Firm."

Ariel sipped at her drink. "Only one problem with that, Mr. McMahan. My father is still the Station Manager."

Patrick waved the comment away. "He won't be for long. The first thing we're going to do is get you appointed Station Manager."

That comment stopped her cold. She frowned. "My father has said repeatedly that he's not ready for retirement."

"Your father is seventy-five years old. He took over as Station Manager after his father, Art, died. Like his father, he's been a Family boot licker from the start. He needs to go."

Ariel smiled. "How shall we get that to happen?"

"All in good time." Patrick said. "The whole point is for The Family to be destroyed. With you as Station Manager and Colin as my heir, we'll control Gulliver Station. That goody two-shoe bitch, Kenna Gillespie, will be eliminated, along with her interference in our business."

Colin watched as his father grew red in the face. Colin knew what his father was referring to. The child brothels and child selling were unsavory to his father but he considered them legitimate business.

Colin considered those child brothels more than just business. He had the best child of every new lot delivered to a second apartment he kept to

himself. Girl or boy didn't matter to him. But it annoyed him to no end that Kenna Gillespie took it upon herself to interfere. With her out of the way, he could do as he pleased.

Patrick took another sip of whisky to clear his throat. "It is my intention to wipe Kenna Gillespie and her entire organization off of the station." He looked at his son and Ariel. "And you two are going to help me do it."

## Chapter Two

With slim, deft hands, Lemuel Calahan ladled stew into the bowl of a ten-year-old girl. He remembered from his own childhood what it was to live in the station's concourses and go hungry. "There you go, darlin'. Get some bread down at the end of the table."

They were in a Level 2 warehouse. The location of the soup kitchen changed weekly or more often so they could stay out of StaSec's eyes. It hadn't stopped the never-ending parade of Dispossessed from finding it though. For some, this was their only meal of the day.

"Hi, Lemuel," the next person in line said.

Lemuel looked up from the pot of stew. "Mrs. O'Malley, good to see you're up and about today." She reminded him of his own mother, crippled by arthritis from sleeping on cold corridor floors in cold drafts.

She held out her bowl. "I feel better today, thank you, Lemuel. My knees aren't bothering me much so I thought I'd come and visit with a few friends."

Lemuel ladled stew into her bowl; his brown eyes twinkled as he flirted with her. "Glad to hear it, Mrs. O'Malley. We've missed you the last few days. I thought I would have to send someone around to make sure you were all right."

"Not necessary, Lemuel. I'm old, but I'm not out yet."

They laughed and she moved down the line.

He was distracted from his next customer by a boy tugging his tunic. He turned to see who was tugging. He grinned. "Hello there, Sam. How are you today?"

"Good, Lemuel." He turned and pointed at the group behind them. "There's a lady asking for you."

Lemuel turned to look. Behind the table of women peeling potatoes and chopping vegetables, a short, black haired, middle-aged woman waited, watching him. He raised his chin to acknowledge her.

"Thanks for letting me know, Sam."

He waved one of the women at the table over. "Sadie, would you take over for me, please."

The young woman put her knife down and wiped her hands on a towel. "Sure, right away."

He handed her the ladle and tousled Sam's hair. "Did you get some soup, Sam?"

"Yeah," Sam grinned up at him. "I was the first one through the line today."

"Good boy. Now why don't you go over to the table and see if they have a job for you to do?"

"Sure!" Sam ran over to the table.

Lemuel followed, nodded at the women at the table and approached his visitor.

"Cassie, good to see you." He gave her a hug, swallowing her 1.7 meter height in his 1.83 meter grasp. "Is anything wrong?" He looked her over. Shoulder-length black hair had gone mostly silver over the years but her blue eyes still twinkled with mischief.

"No," she said. "I brought you some supplies. Food, blankets and a few books."

His brown eyes lit up. "Wonderful. We seem to have more and more Dispossessed showing up every day."

He walked her to the back of the warehouse where there weren't as many people and it was quieter. The sound of people chatting as they sat at the tables eating echoed through the large space. It would cover any conversation he and Cassie had. "How are you doing on getting us a link into the Station Manager's office?"

Cassandra Boylen looked around the area for anyone who might eavesdrop. Her normally cheerful face fell. "It's not good, Lem. I haven't been able to recruit anyone from the office. We need someone else to approach them. I'm too prominent."

Cassandra Boylen smoothed a strand of her silver-black hair back into place. The Chief Executive Officer of Madison Shipping, and grand-daughter to the station's founder, Fergus Boylen, she was the most powerful shipper on the station. She was also a member of the station's underground revolutionary movement. Recruited at sixteen, after a chance encounter with a member, she funded much of the Underground's relief efforts. The warehouse they were standing in was one of those efforts.

She watched the line of people snaking around the front of the warehouse

and out the door. "I don't know how much longer we can wait, Lemuel. The situation is critical. There are more Dispossessed on the station than there are regular residents."

He nodded. "I know. And it's hard to keep telling them to wait; we're working on a solution. They're angry, and rightfully so."

"I've got some more supplies lined up. I keep trying to convince the other shippers to use my company's model for employees but they think I'm foolish. They tell me I'm free to waste my money any way I want but they're not going to raise their employee wages or benefits." She shook her head. "It doesn't make sense economically for them to do it their way. The turnover and training costs for them are astronomical."

He patted her shoulder. "You've been trying for the last twenty years, Cassie, since your father left you the shipping company. It's not your fault they can't see their hands in front of their faces."

Cassie looked around. "Is this space working for you? I know Level 2 is kind of off the beaten path."

"It's great." He reassured her. "It's better that it's off the beaten path. The people feel better coming here."

"I worry about all the foot traffic drawing attention," Cassie said.

"It'll be fine. They come in small family groups or in ones or twos. And since this space is buried in the center of the warehouse area, it doesn't get many warehouse workers passing by."

"As you wish," she said. "I'll let you get back to work."

He picked up her hand and gave the back of it a light kiss. "Be safe, Cassie."

"Oh, I will," she said. "Same to you."

He nodded. "As much as I can."

#

Cayla shifted the bag of bedding on her shoulder. It was heavy and she didn't sleep well last night. She held six-year-old Bree's hand.

"Mom, I'm hungry." The big, bright, blue eyes gazed up at her mother. Her blonde hair curled in every direction.

Mina, her deceased husband's mother, had shown her pictures of herself at Bree's age. They looked like sisters. Cayla was glad. It was nice to have a blonde little girl. She looked different from the usual black or red-headed kids roaming the concourses. "I know you are, little bird. I am, too." Her shoulders slumped under the weight of the bag and her tiny family's

predicament.

"Me, too," ten-year-old Rory chimed in. Cayla's heart ached. Her son, brown haired and hazel-eyed, looked almost exactly like her husband. She tucked her shoulder length sandy brown hair behind an ear.

"Hush, now," Mina told them. "We'll be getting something as soon as it's our turn."

Cayla smiled at her mother-in-law. *Thank goodness for Mina and Liam*, she thought. After their son and Cayla's husband, Thomas, died in a dock accident, they let her and the kids stay with them. There was only a tiny death benefit and it just wasn't enough to pay for their own apartment.

She couldn't get a job and with three extra mouths to feed, pretty soon Liam's retirement just didn't cover expenses. She shook her head and choked back the tears. It wouldn't do to let the kids see her crying.

Station Management raised the rates for apartment, air and water and Liam didn't have enough credits to pay the fees. Last month they found themselves out in the concourses. Liam pulled in a few favors and found them a spot outside of an old friend's apartment. The Nolan's let them shower and get drinking water, so they weren't as bad off as some of the other Dispossessed, but still, she hated sleeping in the concourse. It wasn't as bad in the 1000 ring, Quadrant D, as it could have been. The Nolan's place faced the inner hull of the station. There wasn't a lot of foot traffic. But last night a gang of teen boys raced up and down the hallway all night, shouting and tugging at blankets.

Bree pulled Cayla forward when the line moved. The Nolan's lived in a one room apartment so there wasn't room to store her things. She ended up carrying everything they owned all day long. She couldn't ask Mina to carry anything. The woman was too frail. Liam carried the other half of their possessions.

Tears threatened again and she wiped her eyes before anyone could see. Mina and Liam had treated her like a queen when she and Thomas married. Her own parents were long gone. Cayla had been an orphan and grew up in the Station's creche. She loved being part of a family. *Now*, she thought. *It's not fair. Thomas worked hard and Liam had worked hard too, on the docks. She didn't understand how the shipping company could just write her off.*

Rory was three families ahead of them making friends with a boy up there. The line inched along. She kept an eye on the kids. Rumors raced through the Dispossessed about people stealing children. She asked what happened to them. Tales abounded about slaves and prostitution. Another reason she slept poorly. She always put Bree between her and Rory with Rory

against the wall. Still, she woke at every little sound.

She peered ahead - they were almost to the serving table. "Rory," she called. "Let that family get their food. You come back here with us."

The mother of Rory's new friend waved. Cayla waved back. Rory raced back to them. "That's David's mom," he blurted out. "David's my new friend."

"I'm glad, Rory." Cayla smoothed his brown hair out of his eyes. "I'm going to have to cut your hair again. It's falling into your eyes."

"I like it long," he said as he whipped his head around to get the hair out of his eyes.

"Look," she told them. "We're almost to the serving table. Rory, take this bag and the one your grandfather is carrying and find us a table to sit at. Mina," she turned to look at her mother-in-law. "Would you sit at the table with our things? We'll get you your food."

"Good idea," Mina replied. "My feet are getting tired."

"Rory, come back once Grandma is seated. You can help carry her food."

Rory raced off with the bags with Mina hobbling behind.

*Another thing to worry about, Cayla thought. Mina's arthritis is getting worse. Sleeping on the floor isn't helping. Thank goodness Liam's retirement credits still come in. We'll get her more medicine.*

Rory raced back as they reached the serving table. She was pleased to see a hearty stew, chunks of bread and even a cookie for each of them. They sat down and ate, the first time since supper last night. As she wiped her bowl with the last of her bread she thought, *I wonder if we can sit here all afternoon?*

## Chapter Three

The next day Cassandra Boylan met her best friend, Thea Wilde, in a Level 2 Warehouse in Quadrant A.

Thea arrived, brown hair swirling around her head from the speed she was walking.

"Thea," Cassie laughed. "You look like you've been in a hurricane."

Thea's green eyes twinkled. "Remember that hurricane on Rodinia? I thought that house was going to blow away with us in it."

Cassie grinned, "Not funny, Thea, I was scared to death."

Thea slapped her friend's arm. "Admit it. It was the most fun we'd had all that last year in school."

"True." She looked around. "Why are we here?"

Thea pulled a plastic key card from her tunic pocket. She grinned. "I have something for you."

Cassie loved Thea's enthusiasm. They met here on the station when they were eighteen, just before they graduated high school. They went to University together on Rodinia. A petite, 1.5 meters, Thea's enthusiasm got them into trouble on more than one occasion. Her father was a plastics manufacturer and was even wealthier than Cassie's parents.

They made a good match, Cassie's level-headed thoughtfulness balanced Thea's wild abandon. While they were at University, Cassie recruited Thea for the Underground. They graduated, came back to Gulliver and raised families. They never forgot what they called their 'real work' though.

Thea opened the door. "My son thinks I'm spending money on an art studio," she told Cassie as her brown eyes twinkled. "As long as he doesn't come down here to check, we should be safe."

Cassie nodded and they went in. In front of her in four rows, piled nearly to the ceiling of the space, were shipping crates. "You've got a lot of it, whatever it is."

"It's a lot of several things." Thea shut the door and locked it. She led Cassie over to the farthest right-hand row. "This row is food. I bought it from Rodinia. Some of it is freeze-dried, some is vacuum sealed, some is dehydrated. It should last us quite a while."

She walked Cassie to the next row. "Crates of blankets, clothing, pillows, everything the Dispossessed need.

She pointed at the next row. "This row is electronics. Everything the Underground needs to communicate with each other, hack into the Station's systems, and communicate off station, a computer genius' dream.

They arrived at the last row. Her smile faded. "Weapons."

Cassie's eyebrows shot up. "Weapons?" She looked down the long row to the back of the warehouse. "So many?"

Thea nodded. "I know you and Lemuel want this to be bloodless but there's no way we can have a revolution without weapons." She looked at her friend. "Cassie, people are going to get hurt, killed even. I don't want it to be us just because we are unarmed."

Cassie drew in a deep breath. "I know. I've been with the Underground for forty years now. It's as bad now as I think it can get. If it wasn't for us and our fund-raising efforts and donations to the soup kitchen, most of the Dispossessed wouldn't eat."

Thea put her hand on Cassie's arm. "It wasn't like this on Rodinia, Cassie.

We know it can be better."

Cassie nodded. "I know it can." She looked around the warehouse. "Let's get this stuff distributed to the cells. It won't do anyone any good sitting here."

"Good idea, Cass." Thea turned and walked back to the door. "I'll get some people together and we'll get it handed out." She paused as they went out into the hallway. "It's time, isn't it?" She pulled the door shut and locked it.

"Yes." Cassie told her friend. "It's time."

#

Jo entered the Eastender's Bar. She noticed the wood trim had been replaced but, otherwise, it remained the same as the first time she came forty years ago.

Back then, before she left Gulliver Station as a new comms tech on the cargo freighter The Adirondack, she and then-Captain Young met with the Space Force Commander, Lt. Campbell. They agreed that Jo would carry the Underground's messages and report to him upon her return.

The next year, when the Adirondack returned, she had messages for the Underground and those were reported to the Lieutenant. Then, she was contacted by Sean Morrow. Sean had rescued her from her first disastrous visit on the station. But it was The Family who wanted her. On her first visit she had obtained a new technology data crystal that The Family wanted delivered somewhere off station. At the time, she and Captain Young turned the new data crystal over to Lt. Campbell. The next year, on their return, Sean contacted her to ask about the crystal. As far as the Family knew, she still had it and had no idea what it was. Apparently, Sean never told them that he and Jo knew it was more than a pretty rock.

The Family wanted the crystal delivered to their off-station contacts. She told him she still had it but didn't know what to do with it. After her meeting with Sean, she went to Lt. Campbell. He had delivered the crystal to Space Force labs and in the year they had it, discovered all of its secrets. Lt. Campbell returned the reconstructed crystal to her with instructions to play courier for The Family.

So she found herself a triple agent. Most of the time it meant nothing. She worked on the Adirondack as a Communications Tech and the stretches between visits to Gulliver station were long. When Capt. Young retired, Talisa became Captain and she chose Jo to be Exec. Talisa knew about Jo's extracurricular activities, but no one else on The Adirondack knew.

Jo sighed. That was decades ago. Now she was getting too old for all of this cloak and dagger. She spotted Sean at the back of the bar and wound her way between tables to greet him.

He stood up as she approached.

"Sean", Jo smiled.

"Jo," Sean grinned.

They hugged briefly in greeting and Sean took her hand and gave the back of it a light kiss. They took seats at the table.

"You get more beautiful every year," he said across the table.

"You're eyesight is going," Jo laughed. "My hair is nearly all white."

"It looks good on you," he replied. He waved the waitress over. "Two whiskys and two bowls of stew."

She nodded and hurried off.

"How're Astrid and the boys," Jo asked.

"They're fine. Dan got married six months ago. Astrid was quite pleased that he finally made the girl an honest woman." Sean relaxed back in the chair, an arm thrown over the back of it.

"How nice. Congratulations." Jo said. "And your grandkids?"

"All good." Sean grinned. "Astrid and I took them to the BioDome last week. The youngest, Brittany, spent half the day chasing butterflies. She'd hardly sit down long enough to eat."

The two of them laughed. The waitress brought their drinks. "The food will be out shortly," she told them.

Sean picked up his glass. "To grandchildren."

"To grandchildren," Jo replied and they both sipped their drinks.

"How is your daughter, Rose? Any grandchildren yet?"

Jo shook her head. "No grandchildren. Rose is working with my Mom and Aunt, though. She has a knack for bioengineering. She's only thirty, she has time."

The waitress came again with a tray full of bowls of stew and chunks of fresh bread. After she left, Jo sniffed the stew.

"That is just one of the best smells in the system," she said as she picked up her spoon. "There's nothing like this stew anywhere I've been."

Sean grinned. "Something to come back for then, eh?"

They ate companionably, saying little except about the food. After the waitress cleared away the dishes, Sean broached the reason for the meeting. The noise of the other diners covered his soft words.

"Were you able to make contact?"

She knew what he meant. They rarely used names of people or planets in

their conversations. "Yes." She dug into her ship suit pocket and pulled out a data device. She slid it across the table. "There were no problems."

Sean reached out and deftly picked the device up and dropped it into his pocket. "Good."

The business completed, the conversation died and Jo felt awkward. "Sean," she began. "I'm over sixty, I've been thinking about retiring."

She was surprised to see a look of dismay cross his face.

"When?" He leaned forward, elbows on the table.

She sighed. "Soon. Hauling freight is for people younger than I am."

"Where will you go?"

"Back to Rodinia. That's where my family is."

Sean reached across the table and took her right hand. "I'll miss our once-a-year visits."

Her heart broke at the sadness in his voice. She knew the first time she was here that he was more than a little in love with her. She used her left hand to pat his hand as it rested over her right. "I will too, Sean."

She realized as she said it that it was true. She didn't like being a courier for a crime syndicate but she did enjoy her visits with Sean. Over the years they'd shared stories of their families and friends.

They sat for a moment more, holding hands across the table. Sean broke away first. "Enough of the maudlin goodbyes," he said as he put on a happy face. "It's been a pleasure to know you, Jolene Harris."

Jo broke into a grin. "And to know you, Sean Morrow."

## Chapter Four

Ariel Cavanaugh strode into the Shipper's conference room. A small woman, only 1.6 meters, she exuded confidence and power. She'd been handling most of her father, Boyd's, Station Manager duties for the last two years.

Her perfectly coiffed, nearly orange hair and her severely tailored tunic suit perfectly reflected her no nonsense approach to business. *James and Colin are right*, she thought as she nodded to the shippers around the table. *Boyd is past his usefulness. The sooner he appoints me the better.*

She'd just come from a shouting match in his office. He wanted to spend money on a festival. She couldn't believe it. What a waste. Who was he trying to impress? She finally convinced him that it was a bad idea. When she'd left

the office to come here, the old man was in tears.

Ariel made an effort to get her temper under control. She couldn't afford to tick off the shippers. She would need their support when she was appointed as Station Manager. She sat down at the end of the table. "Gentlemen and Ms. Boylan. So nice to be back for our weekly meeting."

Cassandra nodded at her compliment. "We appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with us."

"I'm at your disposal," Ariel smiled back politely. "What's on the agenda for today?"

Shiva Sindar spoke up. Shiva was named for his great grandfather, one of the first shippers to call Gulliver Station home. "We need something done about the thievery on the station," he smacked the table top with his hand. "The losses from the warehouses are reaching absurd heights. It's getting so nothing can be left unattended on the dock. It's stolen before it can even be counted."

The other shippers nodded in agreement.

"It's the Dispossessed," Amu Nadar added. "They're everywhere, like rats."

"I agree," said Hiro Fujimoro in a soft voice. "The unfortunates are desperate. Something needs to be done."

Ariel nodded. Sindar, Nadar and Fujimoro along with Boylan were from original families and shippers on the station. If they were upset, she needed to do something right away. "I understand. It's a problem throughout the station."

"Perhaps," Cassie Boylan said. "We should make some effort to employ these people. Give them useful work so they don't have to steal."

Sindar rounded on Cassie. "Your views on this are well known, Ms. Boylan. But because you choose to waste money on outrageous numbers of workers and extravagant wages and benefits doesn't mean we should."

"I just suggest, gentlemen that turning those people from homeless into productive citizens would reduce the crime rate." Cassie looked at each of the other shippers in turn.

The others shook their heads. Their disagreement with her was long standing.

Ariel watched the interplay between them with interest. It was obvious to her that Cassandra Boylan's position as the lead shipper was weak. She mentally filed that information away to think about later. "I understand your frustration. The Dispossessed population on the station has reached epic proportions. I pledge to you that we will do something about it."

The tension in the room remained high but the majority of the shippers

around the table nodded.

"Now, what else can the station do for you?"

#

Lemuel was in an empty warehouse space on Level 8. Thea Wilde had kept her promise to Cassie and with Lemuel's help distributed the weapons and other supplies. She was with him now, along with twenty others, mostly men, learning to shoot those weapons. Ever since he'd taken over as the head of the Underground from Georje LaFitte ten years ago he'd been planning this. He believed, as Georje did, that violence was not the best way to achieve their goals. But now... he felt bad but the signs were clear. It was time to arm themselves.

The group was listening to August Peck. August was from Fullo and a trained fighter. At the moment, he was showing the group of men and women how to shoot a stunner.

Targets were set up two meters away from the line of resistance fighters, about two meters apart. "Good," August called out. "First group of five, step up to the firing line. Four men and a woman stepped forward, stunners in hand. "Just like I showed you, now. Take a breath, raise the stunner, and press the button."

He stood at the end and just behind the line, arms crossed against his chest. All five made their shots, the paper man-shaped targets shredded with the stun blast. The five all turned and grinned at the rest of the group.

"Good job," he called across the line. "Be careful where you point those. Holster them before you leave the line."

The five complied.

"Good, next five!" he yelled out.

The first five moved back to the group amidst cheers and high fives and the next five recruits toed the firing line.

When everyone had a chance to fire the stunners several times he called them in around him. "These are weapons." He looked around the circle. "Some of you are excited. Don't be. These are not toys. Don't go around showing them off to friends and family. If word gets out, StaSec will be down on you and your families like rust on steel. Keep the weapon concealed. Don't go shooting people because they're annoying." He looked deliberately at two teen boys.

"Your cell leaders will tell you when it's time to use these. Take care of the weapon and it will take care of you."

He looked at each person in turn. They each nodded agreement.

"Good. That's it for today."

The twenty filed out of the warehouse by ones and twos. Lemuel and Thea approached him after the last of the students left.

"Good class." Lemuel shook August's hand. "We appreciate the lessons."

August nodded. "They're all eager. You might want to watch the teen boys and those twenty-year-old guys. They get a little too eager."

"I'll pass the word to the cell leaders," Lemuel said. "I appreciate you coming to Gulliver to help."

August shrugged. "You know Fullo. It's law and order there. When Thea approached me, I hesitated. Revolution is not something we think about on my planet. But the conditions she described raised my hackles. Now that I'm here," he shot her a glance, "I can see she didn't tell me the half of it."

Thea shrugged. "No one would believe the reality."

He nodded. "You're right. I would not have believed it."

Lemuel asked, "Your accommodations are adequate?"

"Yeah, the hotel I'm in on Level 5 is good though tomorrow I may move, just to change up my schedules and routes."

"Fair enough. Let Thea know what you need, we'll try and get it for you."

Before they left, the students had gathered up the shredded targets and put them on the table. August picked up the pile and walked over to the disintegrator. He shoved the mess into the mouth and closed the door. Lemuel and Thea followed him. In the hallway outside the warehouse, August keyed the door closed. "I think I'll want a new practice space too," he said.

"I'll take care of it," Thea responded. "We'll let you and the next batch of students know where to go."

"Good," August said. "I'll be waiting word."

After August left, one of Lemuel's runners arrived.

"Jason," Lemuel greeting the young man.

"Lemuel," Jason eyed Thea.

"Go on, laddie. She's one of us." Lemuel reassured him.

He nodded and took a breath. "This message comes through several channels. So I'm not sure who sent it."

"Go on," Lemuel encouraged him.

"Word is that Patrick McMahan is backing Ariel Cavanaugh as Station Manager. They plan to get her Da to announce her as the new Station Manager soon." Jason watched Lemuel.

Lemuel took a breath. "Thank you, laddie. No return message."

Jason sprinted away.

Thea stared at Lemuel. "That's not good. Boyd has been a Family man since he took office decades ago."

Lemuel nodded. They began to walk, taking a different direction than Jason had gone. "You're right. At least as a lackey of The Family, there were certain boundaries. I've heard tales of Ariel. She has no such compunctions."

"What can we do?"

"I don't know. You and Cassie could try and pressure the council." Lemuel scratched his head.

Thea checked the cross corridor for passers-by. They were alone in the hallway. "We're a minority on Level 7, Lemuel. I doubt we'd have much sway."

He sighed. "It's going to get worse, fast." He thought for a few meters more. "Send out the first stage warnings."

Thea skipped a step in her surprise. She jogged a few steps to catch up. "You think it will begin soon?"

He looked at his friend. "I do. Ariel aligned with The Firm is going to ignite the Dispossessed. We need to be ahead of it."

They reached the Maglev and got on. Her face was grim. "Cassie told me as much yesterday. She said it was time. I'll get right on it," Thea said as she sank to a seat.

## Chapter 5

"I call this meeting to order," Boyd Cavanaugh announced as he pounded his gavel on the Council Room table.

Through the years the Council Room had become more and more elaborate. When the founder, Fergus Boylan was Station Manager, he used a simple conference room. There were only five Level Representatives and the Station Manager after all.

The first elected Station Manager did the same. The station was too new and the position too raw for fancy accoutrement. The second elected Station Manager established a permanent Council Room but still, it remained a conference room in essence.

By the time Art Cavanaugh, Ariel's grandfather, took office, the Council felt more entitled. Before he retired, he had moved the Council into a bigger room and decorated it elaborately. The table and Representative's chairs were luxurious to an extreme.

Boyd topped his father. He moved the Council into an even bigger room and provided each Representative with their own desk and chair, made with only the finest materials of course. Boyd made his desk higher and more elaborate than the representative's desks and placed it at the front of the room. The best art the station had to offer hung on the Council Room walls.

Ariel sat beside and just behind her father. Her pale blue eyes missed none of the facial expressions or body language of the Level Representatives. If they were silently communicating with each other, she spotted it.

The conversations around the room quieted as the Representatives took their seats. Boyd picked up his electronic pad and announced, "First item on the agenda is a request by Representative Helen Hayes for maintenance of the Maglev line on Level 3, Quadrant C."

The Representatives checked their pads, puzzled looks on their faces. Ariel flashed a quick smile, then made her face somber. "Father," she rose from her chair and stepped to Boyd's side. "You handled that last week." She snatched his pad from his hands and tapped it a few times. She handed it back. "Here's this week's agenda."

He looked up at his daughter, confusion plain on his face. Boyd pasted on a smile. "Thank you, Ariel." He turned back to the Council. "Sorry about that, Ladies and Gentlemen. Just a little confusion."

"Ah, here we are, a proposal by Representative Todd Fitzgivens on Level 5 for work to be done on the water distribution lines." He looked up from his pad. "Discussion, Representative Fitzgivens?"

The group droned on for far too long as far as Ariel was concerned but she put on her serious face and paid attention. You never knew when one of these fools would reveal their real opinions or a juicy secret.

Her father finally smacked his gavel. "Done, we'll approve the funding to repair or replace the water distribution lines on Level 5."

Ariel leaned forward. "Father, you have to take a vote." She made sure her voice was pitched loud enough for the rest of the room to hear.

"Oh," the man began to blush. "Of course." He then went through the process of motions and voting.

The rest of the meeting went in a similar way. Ariel preloaded his agenda with mistakes. She had all she could do not to snicker every time he tripped over one of them and the Representatives looked at him, then each other.

*Good, she thought as he banged the gavel for the end of the meeting. The Representatives are now primed for his resignation and my appointment.*

Boyd and Ariel greeted each of the Representatives on the way out. Ariel

and Helen Hayes spoke briefly. "Is your father all right, Ariel?"

"I suspect he's just tired, Helen. He's seventy-five, after all."

Helen shook her hand. "Oh yes, I suppose he is getting on."

Ariel played the dutiful daughter. "Thank you for asking after him, Helen. That's so thoughtful."

Helen glanced over at Boyd, telling a dirty joke to Mark Hill, the Level 4 Representative. She looked back at Ariel, a pensive expression on her face. "You're a good daughter, Ariel. Have a good day."

"Thank you, Helen, I will." Ariel watched her leave the conference room with a twinkle in her eye. *Another fool brought over to my side*, she thought. *She'll be useful.*

After the last Representative left, Ariel walked with her father to his office. They chatted about the meeting as they went. When they reached his office, she pounced.

"Father, you had more difficulty than usual at today's meeting. Are you well?" She closed the office door behind them.

He walked to his sofa and sat down, running his hand through the little white hair left on his head. "I don't know, Ariel. I couldn't seem to get anything right at the meeting today."

She walked over to the dry bar and poured him a whisky. "Here," she handed him the glass. "This will help."

Boyd took the glass and took a small sip. "It seems as though nothing is going right lately." He looked up at her, standing on the other side of the coffee table. "Didn't we have a fight yesterday?" His blue eyes were red rimmed with age and doubt.

Ariel took a deep breath. She couldn't believe how well this was going. "Yes, Father, we did. You wanted to spend an exorbitant amount of unbudgeted credit on an impromptu festival. You were upset with me when I told you it shouldn't and couldn't be done."

He sipped again, then his glass held in his lap, eyes on the floor. "I remember. I shouldn't have lost my temper with you." His voice was sad and low. "You're right, of course. There is no reason for a festival."

She walked over to him and perched on the coffee table in front of his knees. Ariel took his free hand. "I'm so sorry, Da. You're tired. You need to rest. This job is too much for you. All of this bickering and back biting." She let that sit with him a moment. As though it were a new idea, she said. "Why don't you resign? It's time, don't you think?"

"I don't know, Ariel." He sipped his drink again. "I've been the Station Manager for the last thirty-five years! You were such a little princess then."

She patted his hand. "That's my entire life, Da. Don't you think it's time to retire?"

He nodded, his eyes a little wet. "Perhaps, Princess. Let me think about it."

She stood up. Keeping her voice honey smooth, she said, "Don't think too long, Da. You should be able to enjoy your retirement."

#

Talisa Vien sat in her cabin, cargo printouts from the station littering her desk and the floor around her. They were in odd congruence with the delicate Asian decor Talisa favored.

Jo stuck her head in the door. "I'm going out for customer visits, you need anything?"

"No, oh wait, take Lin with you. She needs to meet the customers and learn to chit chat."

Jo nodded. Lin Okuda was Talisa's daughter and heir apparent to become the next Captain of the Adirondack. "Will do. Anything else?"

Talisa motioned her into the cabin and lowered her voice. "You hear anything back from The Family?"

"No. I told Sean I was getting ready to retire. They may not have anything for me if they take me at my word."

Talisa drew a deep breath. "Good. One less worry to carry around with us from dock to dock."

Jo grinned. "Agreed. It'll be nice not to juggle all these secrets."

"What about the Underground? Have you contacted them yet?" Talisa tapped the stylus against her teeth.

"Nothing. I'll touch base with Georje while I'm out."

"Good. Check with Rim Crystals. They didn't ship with us last time. Let's see if we can get them to ship with us this go around."

"Right. Rim Crystals, got it." Jo left and headed to the bridge. Lin was working comms with Josh.

"Lin, you're with me on customer visits. Josh, you're in charge here. Captain is in her cabin."

"Got it. Have fun," he grinned at Lin.

Lin groaned. "Customer visits, ugh." She rolled her eyes.

Jo laughed. "Oh, come on, Lin. This is the easiest part of running freight. We go to customer offices, shmooze them a little, make friends, and leave with orders."

Lin sent her board over to Josh. "All that talking, talking to people I don't

know. I'd rather run navigation numbers."

Jo laughed. Lin had a hard time with numbers. Her mother, Talisa, worked Lin extra hard on the numbers side of the ship's operation.

Lin got up and clapped Josh on the shoulder. "Wish me luck."

Jo and Lin left the bridge and walked down the access way. One of the cargo crewmen was working on the dock, checking incoming cargo as it was loaded onto the conveyor belt leading into the ship. "Andy," Jo called to him as he checked his tablet against the station transport next to the conveyor belt.

"We're going on customer visits. Josh is on Comms."

Andy waved. "Have fun!"

Lin waved back. They headed for the elevators. "Where are we going first?" Lin asked.

"Captain wants us to stop by Rim Crystals. So that's our first stop."

"Yay!" Lin cheered, the sarcasm dripping.

#

At lunch time Lin asked, "Can we take a break? I'm starving."

"Good idea," Jo answered. "I could use a break myself. Breakfast was on the light side."

They dropped down to Level 4 and went to the Green Hills Cafe. As Lin looked over the menu, Jo looked around. Sean was too high up in the Family to be hanging around here but she knew this was his old stomping grounds. She wanted to make sure he wasn't in the back of the place, for old time's sake.

They ordered and Lin looked around. "Seems nice enough."

Jo nodded. "This cafe has been here since the station opened over a hundred years ago."

"Wow. Do you come here every trip?" Lin asked.

"The first time I was on station, I had tea here. After that, I ate other places. I've only started coming back here the last few years." Jo unwrapped her plasticware and put the paper napkin in her lap.

Their sandwiches and drinks came and they began to eat. "What do you think," Jo asked her table companion. "Do you like the freight business?"

Lin had joined the ship six years ago. Her marriage had blown up and she wanted something new. She'd asked Talisa to take her on when they stopped on their home planet of NuBaDen. In her thirty's Lin had a lot of space freighter training and experience to gain but, Jo admitted, she fit into the

crew like a hand in a glove.

"I like it. So many interesting places to see. Even here on Gulliver. It has its own culture." She stopped to take a bite of her sandwich.

Jo started when a man stopped at their table. He nodded at Jo, dropped a small piece of paper and left.

Lin stared. "What was that?"

Jo's adrenaline kicked in. She glanced at the paper. Need to meet you soonest. Level 3, Glory Hole. She wadded the paper up and stuck it in her pocket. "A message."

Lin put her sandwich down. "What kind of message? Who was that?"

Jo sighed. Lin was going to spread it all over the ship about this note. "I have some business I need to take care of." She waved the waitress over and gave her enough credit chips to cover lunch and a good tip.

"Enjoy your lunch then head back to the ship."

Lin's eyes went wide.

"Tell the Captain I had to take care of something. I'll be back soon." Jo stood up.

"But," Lin struggled for something to say. "What about the customer visits?"

"We'll get the rest of them tomorrow. Go directly back to the ship." She gave Lin a hard look. "Do you understand?"

Lin swallowed. "Yes, go straight back to the ship."

Jo nodded and left. She knew who sent the note. It had to be Georje LaFitte. Why couldn't he have approached her less publicly? Now word would be all over the ship. She rubbed an eye and gave it some thought. There must be a problem if he is in so much hurry to talk.

That didn't make her feel any better. What could be the problem? She got in the elevator. It was crowded this time of day. Most of the passengers got out on Level 3, the lowest residential level. A few stayed on to go to Levels 2 and 1, the warehousing and dock levels. She followed the crowd, several of whom got on the Maglev. She was glad. She looked around her. No one seemed to notice her too much, even with a shipsuit on. Good. She kept her eye on the car's announcement board for her stop as the car traveled around the station. By the time she got to stop for The Glory Hole, she was the last one left on the Maglev. She got out.

There wasn't a lot of traffic in this part of the station. This close to the core, it was mainly residents and station maintenance. When she stepped into the bar it was dimly lit, the same relics of the station's building mounted on the walls and hanging from the ceiling. She saw LaFitte in the back. She

wound through the tables past a few maintenance workers eating lunch and having beers.

Jo slid into the chair opposite the man. "What's so urgent, Georje?"

"Nice to see you too, Jo."

Jo smiled. "I'm sorry. I was with a crew member when your messenger dropped the note."

She noticed he looked older, more frail. He must be in his eighties, she thought suddenly. "How are you?"

Georje wagged his hand. "Better today than some days, chicklet. Things are moving."

Jo gasped. "When?"

He shook his head. "I don't know, but soon. Things are happening on the station that bode no one well. I thought you should know."

Jo didn't know what to say. It'd been forty years since she'd taken on the role of off-station courier for the Underground. Still, it seemed so sudden. "Will you be all right?"

He chuckled. "It will be a great day for Gulliver Station, Jo. It's taken far too long."

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Connie Cockrell began writing in response to a challenge from her daughter in October 2011 and has been hooked ever since. Her books run the gamut from SciFi and Fantasy to Contemporary to Halloween and Christmas stories. She's published Five novels and three collections of short stories and has been included in three different anthologies. Connie continues to write about whatever comes into her head.

Enjoyed Revolution? Sign up to be notified of my next book  
[http://conniesrandomthoughts.us7.list-manage.com/subscribe?  
u=8c24bb15bdf9245512f722298&id=0a097feea0](http://conniesrandomthoughts.us7.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=8c24bb15bdf9245512f722298&id=0a097feea0)

Discover other titles by Connie Cockrell at Smashwords.com:  
A Trio of Animal Tales at  
<https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/287453>  
Recall: <https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/320233>  
Halloween Tales: A Collection of Stories:

<https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/359689>  
Christmas Tales: <https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/379010>  
A New Start: A Gulliver Station Story:  
<http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/403971>  
The Challenge: Book 2 of the Gulliver Station Story:  
<http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/421755>  
Hard Choices: Book 3 of the Gulliver Station Story:  
<http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/439286>

Her books are available in print at most online retailers.

Her first book, a novella, in the new Brown Rain series, The Beginning, will be out near the end of August, 2014. See the excerpt below.

If you'd like to know more, go to  
<https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/conniecockrell>  
<http://www.conniesrandomthoughts.wordpress.com> or  
<https://www.facebook.com/ConniesRandomThoughts> or  
<http://twitter.com/conniecockrell>.

## Excerpt from Brown Rain, The Beginning

Alyssa stood and stared out of the front door of the Catholic school where she'd been born. It was an industrial looking building, built in 1961. It had been a designated Civil Defense shelter since it was finished. In front of her was the old front lawn, now turned into a garden. It was over an acre of green growing things, the first time in just over seventeen years that the earth had clean soil and the ability to grow anything other than stunted, poisoned life.

Kyra saw her friend, Alyssa, standing there, waiting for her but she had one more good-by to make. The community leader, Malcolm Smith, stood next to her. At six foot one, Malcolm stood taller than Kyra by seven inches. The Mother Superior was next to Malcom. The nuns had supplied the school as their shelter all those years ago. Kyra and Alyssa had already said good-by to her. She stood, fingering the beads of her rosary, whispering her prayers for their safe travels.

Kyra gave Malcolm a hug. His eyebrows shot up. Kyra wasn't one for hugging. "Don't be a sissy," she told him when she let him go. "I owe you, more than just a hug."

His close cropped wooly hair was nearly all white. He'd been the leader in

this school building, a refuge from the toxic brown rain that began seventeen years ago and didn't stop for four years, from the beginning. His dark brown skin was wrinkled now, worry creases around his eyes. Kyra did her best to memorize his face. "If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be able to take this journey."

"Don't go, Kyra. Talk Alyssa into staying. She can heal the earth from here, a base camp, circling out all the time."

She adjusted her pack straps. "I tried that, Malcolm. I've been trying to talk her out of this for over a year. She says she has to go. The planet is calling to her."

He arched an eyebrow. "You believe her?"

Kyra stopped fussing with her pack and looked him in the eye. "You know what she can do. None of the rest of us can do that. So, yeah. I believe her." Kyra's grey-blue eyes became determined. "She says she has to go. I have to go with her. Who else will protect her?"

Malcolm shrugged. "Just you. Just as you have since you were four when she was born. We'll miss you both." He clapped her on both shoulders, "We'll miss you."

She took a deep breath. "Take care, Malcolm." She turned away and stopped at the door where she picked up a quiver full of arrows the community had recovered for her from a nearby hunting store and slung it over her shoulder. Then she grabbed her bow, string loosened. "I'm ready, Alyssa."

The sun was shining from a clear blue sky, making the seventeen year-old's nearly blonde white hair glow in the light. She wore it loose and it fell around her shoulders in a smooth flow to the middle of her back. A light breeze caused wisps of hair to float around her face. She smiled. "It's a good day to start, Kyra." She walked out of the door and past the overhang into the garden.

Kyra pulled her waist length braid of medium brown hair over her shoulder, the pack was pulling on it, and followed her friend. People they knew were in the garden, weeding, checking for damage and stood up when the two women passed by. They waved to the women. They'd already talked to them at breakfast.

It didn't take long to walk through the acres around the school that Alyssa had already cleared for their community in Midland, Pennsylvania. There was plenty of space for more gardens, even some livestock if they should find a surviving pig or goat or chickens. The teams had been looking since Alyssa had started to clear the land. So far, they hadn't found any.

They were headed west to the other side of Midland where there would be a stream. Alyssa had chosen the direction. Kyra had wanted to go east, toward the sea. "It's important we go west," Alyssa had told her friend.

"Why," Krya asked as they stood in front of a map of the United States, pulled down in one of the classrooms.

Alyssa stared at the mountains, rivers and valleys in browns and blues and greens drawn on the map. "I'm needed to the west." She looked at her friend. "We're needed to the west."

Kyra shrugged. "Fine," she conceded. "West it is."

The Beginning is due out the end of August, 2014.