

Voyage of the Defiance

By S.E. Smith

Excerpt

Makayla stood for a moment in the bright hallway, trying to ignore the surreptitious looks of the other staff and visitors as they walked by. Turning left, she started down the hallway toward the elevators. She didn't know where she was going, and personally, didn't really care anymore. She just knew she needed to get away.

She breathed a sigh of relief when the doors to the elevator finally opened. She stepped aside as two people exited it before slipping through the doors and pressing the button for the lobby. Turning, she leaned back against the mirrored surface of the wall and stared blindly out the doors, willing them to close. A dark scowl crossed her face when she saw the old man from her mom's room step in just as the doors started to slide together.

He didn't say anything, just glanced at the buttons on the elevator. The ride only took a minute or two, but it felt much longer. She pushed off the wall when the elevator came to a stop and the doors opened. Turning toward the entrance, she picked up her pace as she headed toward the set of double doors.

The feelings of claustrophobia built as she pushed through the throngs of visitors at the front desk checking in. She twisted around an elderly man using a walker and burst through the doors out into the

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warm, muggy air. Thick clouds hung low in the sky and promised an early morning thunder shower.

Makayla looked around as she drew in a deep breath. In the back of her mind, she registered the traffic and people walking past her. Turning to the right, she walked over to an empty bench set along the curved sidewalk.

She shrugged her backpack off and set it on the bench before sitting down next to it. Bending forward, she rested her elbows on her knees and covered her face with her hands. Her hair fell forward, creating a silk curtain around her bowed head.

Her mind felt like it was short-circuiting. Random thoughts and images flashed through it until she was dizzy with them. Small flickers of her life, conversations between her friends, her and her mom, and things going on at school all merged and collided together in an avalanche of confusion. She was vaguely aware that someone had sat down on the other end of the bench, but she just wasn't up to moving or dealing with anyone at the moment.

Maybe my mom has it right, she thought in despair before she pushed the thought away.

"Did you mean it?" A husky, male voice asked.

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Makayla slightly turned her head to peer through her hair at the voice, wondering if they were talking to her or someone else. A flash of irritation swept through her when she saw it was the old man. Pushing her hair back, she sat back and glared at him.

“Are you following me?” She demanded, tucking her hair behind her ear. “You know stalking is against the law. I’ll scream bloody murder if you try anything.”

“Did you mean it?” The man repeated, turning his head so he could study her rebellious face. “That this isn’t what you want for your life?”