The World Beneath Ours

Debi Bonardi | Free First Chapter

Chapter One: Behind the Glass

Geneseeia liked the pool before the house awakened.

At that hour, pale morning light lay across the water and the great glass wall beyond it reflected only the room: the long blue pool, the limestone floor, and an older woman moving through the water with slow, certain strokes. Anyone looking through the windows would have seen the private retreat of a wealthy Washington family with unusual taste and far too much money.

That was exactly what the house had been designed to show.

Geneseeia reached the shallow end and stood. Water streamed from her silver hair and the sleeves of her dark swimming garment. Somewhere behind the walls, the house changed its morning temperature by less than a degree. She felt the adjustment through her feet before she heard the faint disturbance beyond the glass.

Five men had entered the adjoining room.

They wore ordinary dark clothing rather than uniforms.

Two carried weapons close against their bodies. A third held a flat instrument that flashed as he turned toward

the pool. None of them looked surprised to find themselves inside a locked home.

One man approached the glass and raised his weapon.

Geneseeia did not run. She looked directly at him, then at the instrument in the other man's hands. The screen pulsed blue as it searched the wall between them.

The man holding it lifted his head and looked directly at her. Not toward the pool or the glass, but into her eyes. For a fraction of a moment, something hollow pressed against the edge of Geneseeia's mind. Then it disappeared.

They had not come to steal silver or paintings.

The armed man struck the glass with the butt of his weapon. The sound was dull and disappointingly small. He tried again. The transparent barrier did not tremble.

Geneseeia could have crossed the house without taking a single step. Every Angelican possessed that ability, although few used it casually. Their leader had commanded the Earth mission to move as Earthbound people moved whenever possible. An unexplained crossing left a disturbance in space, and the instrument beyond the glass appeared designed to find disturbances.

Geneseeia stepped out of the pool, took her robe from the waiting chair, and walked toward the narrow door marked POOL EQUIPMENT. The men moved with her

on the other side of the glass. One shouted something she could not hear. Another aimed at the door through which they expected her to leave.

She opened the equipment closet, slipped between two shelves of harmless Earth chemicals, and placed her wet palm against the back wall.

The wall recognized her.

A seam appeared, no wider than a thread. Stone folded silently away, and Geneseeia stepped into the hidden chamber beyond. The door closed behind her before the men reached the poolroom.

She opened the Kinweave.

Her thought moved through the family with the force of a struck bell. The house is compromised. Lower passage. Vessel now.

Fear answered from several directions. Questions followed. Geneseeia pushed calm beneath them, not an order but something steadier: the familiar touch of home.

Then Mariottis entered the weave.

His presence was immediate and controlled. Geneseeia, lead them below. Papacia, remain with her. Hannia and Pannia, take the eastern descent. Cleah, confirm every room. Kayious, find Lucjuis. Bocarian and Utariazee, report.

Boc answered first. I am here.

His thought carried something concealed beneath it. Geneseeia knew that particular silence. She had known it since Bocarian was small enough to hide forbidden instruments beneath his sleeping mat.

Mariottis knew it too. Where is here?

The garden wing, Boc replied.

Tazee's thought arrived smooth and innocent. I am near the lower stair.

Geneseeia almost smiled. Utariazee sounded most innocent when innocence had already become impossible.

Then a new voice broke into the family's thoughts—not words, only the bright confusion of a frightened child.

Kayious stopped breathing somewhere above them.

Lucjuis, she called. Little light, answer me.

No answer came.

Mariottis did not allow fear to take command. Cleah, find his image. Everyone else continue to the vessel.

Geneseeia hurried down the hidden corridor. She was not the leader of their retreat. That burden belonged to her son, and Mariottis carried it well. Her work was older and just as necessary. She held the Kinweave open so no member of the family would feel alone while their home closed around them.

Continue the adventure

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