



Book Three
Lyceum Diplomacy
J. Z. Colby



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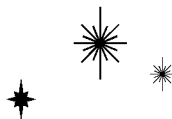
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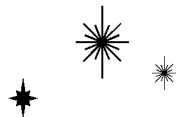
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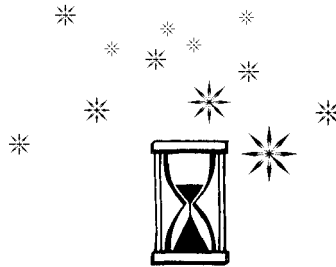


Lyceum Diplomacy

Book Three of J. Z. Colby's original Lyceum story

**by
J. Z. Colby**





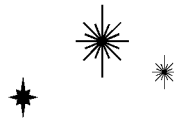
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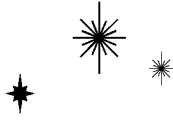
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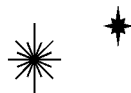


**For “Liberty”
who loved horses almost as much as boys.**

**For “Ashley”
whose landings were as light as a feather,
but who never found the training she wanted.**

**For “Shawn”
who was born in the wrong century,
and whose love for Sarah was never known.**

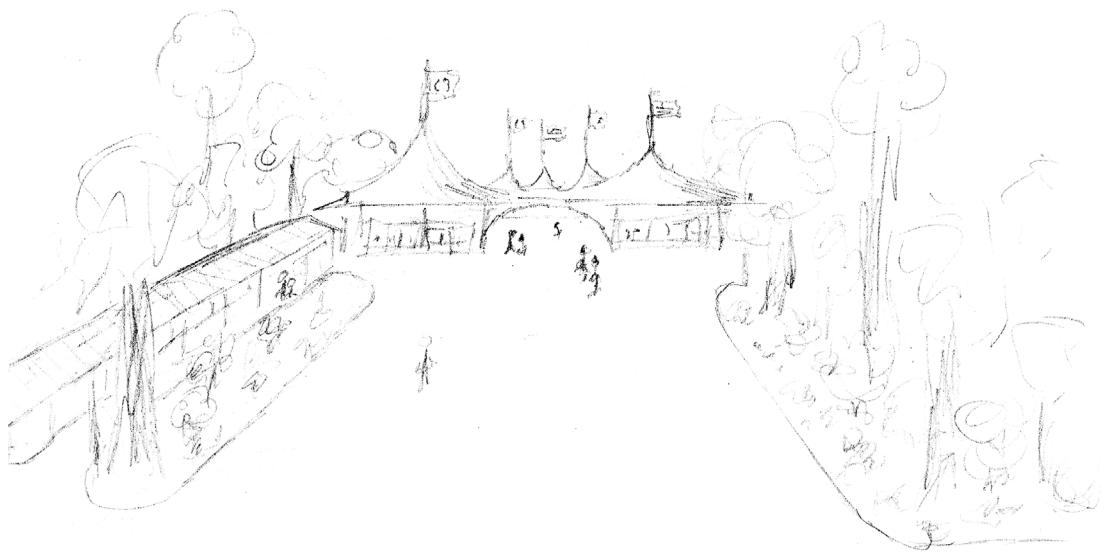
**For “Sarah”
who took refuge in her music
for as long as she could.**

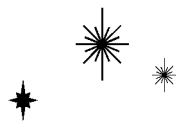




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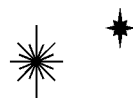
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“Sometimes, in international diplomacy, you gain a lot more by giving in than by being rigid . . .”

— Ashley



Chapter 1: One Final Performance

On New Year's Eve and the early hours of New Year's Day, the entire Lyceum campus (save for certain refuges such as the hermitage cabins and the Mortuary) was host to one huge party for all those persons and organizations who wanted to steer themselves and their children away from the mind-deadening drug use that was still so common among the general populace on that day of the year.

In addition to being purely an opportunity to serve the regional community of which it was a part, Lyceum had an ulterior motive. Many churches who would otherwise never have dreamed of crossing paths with each other were brought together for a few hours of food and drink, music and dancing, games and skits, movies and performances. Catholics discovered that Mormons were human after all, Baptists learned that Jehovah's Witnesses were as joyful as anyone else, and Jews found that Buddhists didn't live as far away as they had assumed.



Jenny and her mother sat together after serving themselves at the dinner buffet in Conference Center One. The ten-year-old was surprised that her mother only piled *one* plate high with food, but figured she was saving room for all the goodies available at the food pavilions in the Dining Hall. Jenny took just a spoonful of most things, as she too wanted to visit the specialty booths later. They ate in silence for a few minutes at a small table off to one side.

“So... they tell me... you’re doing some kind of... music,” Mrs. Clark said while masticating a mouthful of scalloped potatoes.

“Yeah — it has seven voices, and we’ve got almost four minutes of it synchronized!” Jenny said with excitement, responding to the first interest her only known parent had ever shown in her music.

“Hmm. Some kind of nursery rhyme, I suppose.”

“No, Brother Chad says it’s neo...” Jenny stopped, suddenly realizing that her mother wouldn’t believe or understand if Jenny told her its genre, and probably didn’t really want to be talking about her music at all. And so it was, the large lady was gazing toward the dessert table, and hadn’t even noticed that her daughter had stopped in mid-sentence.

Jenny had never wanted to be an embarrassment to her mother. She genuinely wished she could do something her mother would like. But she had no idea what that could be, unless it was to eat like her mother did, which Jenny knew she was completely incapable of doing. She twisted her face for a moment in a mental shrug and went back to picking at her plate.

A few minutes later Brian walked near, and he and Jenny smiled at each other. Mrs. Clark gave him a dirty look, and couldn’t imagine any good that could come of his association with her daughter.

Jenny summoned her courage and looked up at her mother. “Brian and I want to go to the Arena and see what kind of dance music they’re playing. Do you want to come with us?”

“You can’t dance!” her mother said in a hushed, indignant voice.

“Sure I can,” Jenny said with the confidence that came of knowing she didn’t have the time to put *anything* off. Whatever she was going to do, she was either going to do now, or never. “I did at the Halloween party and at Thanksgiving!”

Mrs. Clark was speechless for a moment. She tried to imagine her terminally-ill daughter dancing, but couldn’t. Eventually she gave up trying, and her shifty eyes began to wander back to the serving tables. “Um... you go ahead, I suppose. I think I’ll get another piece of cake and see if there’s a good movie playing somewhere.”

As her mother waddled toward the desserts, Jenny smiled at Brian, and he came over and kissed her on the cheek.

“My mom wants to eat cake and look for a funny movie,” Jenny said with a bit of a scowl, obviously not sharing her mother’s taste in films.

“I think there’s a comedy scheduled in Conference Center Two.”

“Want to go dancing?”

“Sure! After I get one of those mango smoothies Liberty is making.”

“If you share it with me, I’ll share a piece of Brenda’s grasshopper pie with you!”

“Okay!”

Brian pushed Jenny toward the Dining Hall, aware that this was her last New Year’s party, just as Christmas had been her last Christmas, and so on all the way back to her last birthday. He knew she had little chance of turning eleven, and knowing that made him want to cry, not just at that moment but each and every time he realized it. But crying would only make shorter and sadder the time he could spend with Jenny, and so he had not often given himself that luxury. He could cry, if he still needed to, when she was gone.



Shawn and Sarah were both on the information and assistance crew for the first part of that evening, helping visitors to find whatever food and drink, entertainment, or services they needed. Shawn had managed to stay in good spirits ever since Christmas morning, and had reassured all his friends that his depression had stemmed mostly from his relationship with his parents.

The Main Lobby had lively music playing, an arts and crafts show, and signs pointing to everything from Brother Wilhelm’s Bratwurst and Wiener Schnitzel Stand in the Dining Hall to Sister Joan’s lively Teenage Lounge in the Educational Center. When people came in, Sarah took special pains to make sure all the children knew there were things happening for them too. She steered them toward cartoons, skits, playrooms, craft projects, movies, games, or the Infant and Toddler room, depending on their ages and interests.

Shawn and Sarah kept in close touch all that evening with smiles and shared words when they were close together, short conversations or questions by pager when they had to be in different buildings. They were both very happy that they could help to bring so much New Year’s joy to so many people.



Liberty's blenders whirled almost constantly, turning out tasty drinks of a variety of different flavors, but she recommended the mango most highly when people were undecided. Jason's salad bar featured just about everything that anyone had ever put in a salad, from marinated artichoke hearts to fresh ocean shrimp, baby corn cobs to teriyaki chicken strips. Brenda's dessert table abounded with fruit turnovers and rich pies and cakes, and all around the Dining Hall other goodies were available for the asking: sushi by Brother Li, Mexican fare by Sister Tomasa and Brother Carlos, and gyros and baklava by Brother Demitri.

Jenny and Brian wandered through on their way to the Arena, and somewhat later Mrs. Clark shuffled in, determined to try one, possible two or three, of everything.



Tim followed Ashley from shift to shift that evening, helping her when he could, but much of his mind was on the very special love making he had planned once she was finally free at two in the morning. He had already purchased six fancy candles, a package of incense, three massage oils that promised sensuous delights, a disk of romantic music, a box of fancy chocolates, and a dozen red roses. He knew it would be their last night together on that trip, as he had to fly home the following day.

By midnight, when Ashley started her last two-hour shift in the Infant and Toddler room, he had set everything up in her room without her slightest suspicion.

Even though she knew nothing of his special preparations, Ashley was looking forward to their last night together as much as he was. She knew she would cry when he was gone, but she had also decided the delights he brought her were worth the tears. She just hoped that someday they would be together for good.

At midnight there were fireworks over the Main Plaza, and a hundred and fifty bottles of sparkling concord grape juice were broached, glasses were charged, and everyone, including the children who were still awake, toasted and raised cups to the passing of one year and the opening of another.



About an hour into the new year, parents began filtering into the room

where Ashley and two other members were watching over their mostly-sleeping infants and toddlers. The parents thanked the childcare crew profusely, left generous tips, and then headed off toward home or into the Lyceum Lodge.

Tim had enjoyed playing with the children, and seeing that made Ashley very glad, but his collection of playmates was rapidly dwindling as the last few either fell asleep or were picked up.

By 1:30 in the morning, about half their charges had left. Many of the parents had been laughing and talkative as they approached the room, but had switched to hushed voices as they entered out of respect for the sleeping children.

One certain voice was especially loud, and sounded familiar to Ashley as it approached, but somehow it was different than she had ever heard it before. As the voice entered the room, Ashley's suspicions that it belonged to her friend and team captain were confirmed, but the voice was slurred and very silly, verging on incoherent. Karen's two older friends who were visiting from her home town, and who entered directly behind her, didn't sound much different.

"Hi, Ash-esss! Wanna go ta da gymmm annn play? We gonna gooo have some funnn!"

Ashley caught a whiff of alcohol on Karen's breath. "Um... I'm still working for almost another hour, and then Tim and I want to spend some time together."

"Ooooookay. See ya!"

As they left, about a dozen red lights and bells were going off in Ashley's head. She knew that Karen shouldn't be walking around campus in that condition with a public event going on. She knew her fellow gymnast had just startled several of the children. She knelt by one of the cots to comfort one of those children, and the other members and Tim did the same with others.

Then Ashley realized the real danger. Karen was drunk, and was heading toward the gym.

"Sister Lydia, I'm worried about Karen."

"Do you think she'd do anything stupid?" the older lady asked.

"I don't know. I've never seen her like this. I don't know much about

drunk people. I'm really worried about her."

"Do you want to go and keep an eye on her? We can finish up here..."

"Could I please?"

"Go ahead. Remember, folks are in the office and at Security if you need help."

"Thanks. I hope by just tagging along, I can keep her from doing anything dumb."

"I'll come too," Tim said.

"Thank you for all the help with the children, Tim!" Sister Lydia called after them.



Ashley and Tim set a rapid pace for themselves as they headed along the hallways that would bring them to the Recreation Center. Groups of people were still having fun, sipping exotic beverages, savoring tasty desserts, or just laughing and talking. Most of the organized activities were winding down and the entertainers yawning as they packed their instruments or props to head home.

Ashley had hoped they would catch up with Karen and her friends before they reached the gym, but her team captain was already mounting the balance beam when she and Tim entered. Ashley stopped and watched, biting her lip with concern. It only took Karen a few seconds to fall off the beam, which luckily was surrounded by thick landing pads. Ashley ran over.

"Are you okay?"

Karen was laughing while picking herself up. "Suuuure I'm okay, Ash-esss. That was funnnn!"

"Karen, I don't think you should be doing tricks in the gym right now..."

"Nuthin to it! I'm fine, realllly!"

Karen's friends were still laughing about her fall from the beam. "Show us somethin' else, Karennn!"

Ashley was sure Karen hadn't warmed-up or even done a basic limbering. But she wasn't sure what she could do to stop her friend.

"Watch thisss!" Karen said, approaching the bars and swinging onto the low bar and then immediately up to the high bar.

"Karen, please don't!" Ashley said.

But the fourteen-year-old Chunichi Cup medallist seemed determined to put on a show for her friends. Ashley remembered Karen telling Tabitha and her to never show off for anyone. This almost seemed to be a different Karen, a side of her friend that Ashley had never seen before.

Karen began casting giant circles on the high bar. They were loose and sloppy, and she kept hitting the low bar with a foot or knee, but she didn't seem to be feeling it. Then, as her circles got bigger and bigger, even Karen seemed to become aware that she was out of control.

"Whoa... whoa...!"

And suddenly she let go. It wasn't a planned dismount. She was flying backwards over the low bar, arms and legs flopping. Ashley saw it in slow motion. And she heard Karen cry out desperately, realizing something was dangerously wrong, a long, wailing cry for help. And Ashley felt herself running to where Karen was going to land a fraction of a second later, hoping she could somehow get under her to break her fall, but the support poles of the bars were in her way. She saw Karen land on her back on nothing but a thin exercise mat, and she saw her friend's head bounce, then her pelvis, and then her shoulders and head again.

When Ashley, followed closely by Tim, reached Karen a heartbeat later, the team captain was lying still, but beginning to shudder and gasp for air that she seemed unable to find.

"Karen!" Ashley nearly screamed.

The hurt gymnast's eyelids only fluttered without conscious response.

"Tim! The computer terminal! Press F9 three times!"

Tim ran. Ashley looked at her friend. Her color was changing rapidly, becoming pale, and then bluish. She could see that Karen wasn't breathing, but the thought of helping her by the usual methods didn't seem right. So Ashley took her friend's limp hand and began to talk to her and to pray at the same time.

"Please, Karen, stay with me. Help is coming. Please, Father, be with Karen, give her strength. I'm right here, Karen. You're going to be okay. Angels are with us, and help is coming..."

Tim plopped down beside Ashley.

"The screen said the emergency was acknowledged, and asked me what

kind, so I picked *medical*.”

“Tim, hold her other hand. She’s not breathing. We’re right here, Karen. We’re not going to leave you. Please be strong and hold on...”

Karen’s friends, who had been stunned into embarrassed silence by what had happened, now gathered around.

“Karen are you okay?” one said in an almost hysterical tone.

The other one started shaking the injured girl. “Come on, Karen, you’re okay, aren’t you?”

Tim quickly responded. “She doesn’t need that!” he said, pushing Karen’s older friend away.

At that moment several people ran into the room. Ashley looked up and recognized one of the lady doctors.

“Ashley, what happened?”

“She was drunk, and started showing off, and flew off the high bar uncontrolled and landed on her head and back. I tried to stop her, but...”

“Don’t worry about that right now.”

The doctor and her assistants were around Karen now, and Tim and Ashley gave them the space they needed, but Ashley held onto one of Karen’s hands. The two older friends made themselves scarce, looking like they wanted to sneak out of the gym, but not quite finding the courage to do so.

The doctor quickly felt Karen’s neck and her ribs.

“Airway?” one of the assistants inquired, looking nervous.

“Tracheal. Thank you for not attempting artificial respiration, Ashley.”

Then she went to work opening an air passage at the bottom of Karen’s neck and inserted a plastic tube to hold it open. An assistant cleaned up the blood from the incision. The semi-conscious girl greedily sucked air in and out, her chest heaving for the first time in several minutes.

The lady doctor spoke to several others on her pager, but Ashley wasn’t paying attention. She was holding Karen’s hand and looking at her suffering face and praying silently to herself like she had never prayed before.

A minute later, more people started arriving, among them Brother Howard, who let himself be guided to the accident scene by another member to save time. He knelt beside Karen and the other medics gave him plenty of room. He began carefully and slowly examining his patient’s neck, then her

ribs as much as possible without moving her, and finally her pelvis. It seemed that no one else breathed while he worked. Finally he spoke.

“Severe cervical torsion, cracked pelvic ilium, and...” he paused, checking again just to be sure, “... a broken third lumbar vertebra, possibly the fourth also.”

Ashley could sense by the tone of his voice that the first two things weren't that terrible, but the last one was. Tabitha arrived, and Ashley, her own face still covered with both dried and fresh tears, described what had happened with a shaking voice. The doctors listened even as they continued examining Karen, just in case Ashley's story contained anything else they needed to know. More medical people and equipment arrived, and they began preparations for moving Karen.

Several drugs were injected into the injured girl, and she began to relax and breath easier. The medics continued to take great pains preparing to move their patient, making sure everything was just right. The mat was cut with a laser so that it was just large enough, and then a rigid board was carefully slid underneath. Pads were tucked around her so she couldn't roll, blankets layered over, and straps snugged gently to keep her from moving. Ashley was amazed when someone said that it was already 2:30 in the morning.

With complete coordination, a team of six lifted their precious cargo and prepared to exit the gym. Suddenly Ashley had the terrible realization that Karen might never again enter the gym... at least as a gymnast.

Ashley, Tim, Tabitha, Brother Faellan, and Sister Shannon followed the medical team. They were all nearly in a state of shock. About the worst thing that could happen in their sport, had just happened. And it had happened to their friend and team captain.

Ashley especially was feeling terrible. She could have stopped Karen, and she hadn't. As the medical team and the followers approached the Heliport, she vowed to herself that she was never, ever again going to hesitate when her heart told her that something needed to be done, or stopped from being done. And for the rest of her life, she kept that promise that she had made to herself, even though it did not always bring her the greatest possible number of friends.

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