



THE IMPORTANCE OF RHEANNON

By

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At 6:00 A.M. on the 28th of June, President Escobar shot himself in the Lincoln bedroom. The Vice-President had vanished. It was now noon in the occupied city of Washington DC. The invasion had been nearly bloodless. Mind control devices, or “brain scramblers,” were the preferred weapons of choice for the United Asian Empire, whose forces were now moving swiftly towards the Atlantic Ocean – following in the wake of their airborne probes.

Dr. Liberty June Taylor had just received word of these latest events an hour before. She deleted all her computer files and burned her holographic backup CDs in a trash bin, while “God Bless America” played over and over again on the radio.

It seemed to her that God had stopped caring about the Land of the Free at the beginning of the 21st century. Biological terrorist attacks, the Great Middle Eastern War, global warming and natural disasters had weakened the United States in a myriad of devastating ways. The catastrophic earthquake of 2012 had obliterated California. Mt. Rainier had erupted six years later, destroying Seattle and the surrounding environs. Most of Florida and Louisiana had sunk as water levels rose around the world.

And now America the vulnerable was falling prey to invaders herself.

In 2001, Liberty's middle-aged parents had conceived her right after the nation's most memorable tragedy, hoping to "make the world a better place." It was an extremely tall order, even for a thoughtful child with quiet intelligence. When she turned sixteen, they proudly presented her with a sterling silver necklace – a miniature of the Statue of Liberty.

She was wearing it now – on her fortieth birthday.

Liberty sighed as she poured the violet, cyanide laced liquid into a clear glass bottle.

"Rheannon will die today?"

Dr. Liberty June Taylor swallowed the lump in her throat and projected a smile. "No. Not today."

She had answered Rheannon out loud, even though there was no need – the two of them were telepathically linked – without the aid of any drug. She had wanted to hear the reassuring words echo around the empty, sterile lab – her home for the last ten years – and bounce off the deep blue waters of the holding tank, not just for her young friend, but also for herself.

Liberty had prepared the sweet poison that morning under the watchful eye of her superior and colleagues – right before they had all fled south, away from the Virginia coast.

She had known she would never be able to go through with it. No matter what the risks were, she couldn't destroy her "project," or leave her at the mercy of the foreign invaders who were fast approaching.

But neither could she let herself, or Rheannon, fall into enemy hands. If such a capture became imminent, they would both have to die. The quick acting poison would be useful then.

Her plan was to free the innocent creature in her care before trying to escape herself. They would head for the sea, five miles away. It wouldn't be easy. In fact, it might be impossible.

The United States Armed Forces and their old-fashioned weaponry had been soundly defeated. The remaining troops were on the run now, right along with the civilians. Most Americans were fleeing to the Georgia shores, where cruise ships and freighters waited to carry them to Cuba, or any other Caribbean isle that would give them safe harbor.

Time was running out.

"Rheannon can go home?"

“Yes.”

“Where will Doctor be?”

“Doctor will take Rheannon home, and then go away.”

“Rheannon will see Doctor again?”

“I don’t know. Doctor doesn’t know yet.”

It would take nearly an hour to get Rheannon in the flatbed and covered with the protective Aerogel foam. But at least the vehicle’s harness lift had not been dismantled.

Liberty didn’t own much, and there were only a few things she opted to pack in her overnight satchel besides a change of clothes and a box of nutrition bars: An award she received five years ago from the Marine Biologist Community, and some photos of her parents, now deceased.

She shed her white lab coat, but didn’t change out of her short-sleeved white shirt and slacks. Her long, curly black hair was always twisted into a knot at the back of her head. She looked like a prim and proper scientist – minus the spectacles.

Time to go. She tried to bury her emotions so Rheannon would not sense her nervousness and fear. She had named the creature after her favorite aunt – a nervous, flighty woman. Luckily, her friend was normally calm and always trusting.

The sun was blisteringly hot. After spraying her milky white skin with a protective lotion, she drove the lumbering ’27 Moonstar Camion around to the rear of the laboratory and backed it through the wide entranceway, parking it next to the massive holding tank.

The flatbed was twelve feet long. She covered it with a thick, sponge-like mattress and drenched it with a tank of Aerogel foam. Thirty minutes later, Rheannon’s eight-foot long, 200-pound frame was lying on the mattress, covered with the grayish-white substance.

The bottlenose dolphin remained quiet and still. She knew she was not supposed to move around.

Liberty jumped into the low cab of the electric powered truck and followed the research center’s long driveway out of the wooded area onto Route 13. She would try to make it to Aramina Bay.

Most of the county’s inhabitants had fled south hours ago. The road was deserted.

Three miles were behind them now. The air was heavy and still, and the heat pouring in through the open windows was making her head hurt.

She slowly rounded a sharp bend, and her green eyes narrowed. Straight ahead, she saw a soccer ball sized metallic object hovering above the trees, glinting in the merciless sun.

A probe. That meant there had to be several more scouting the coastline already. The enemy wouldn't be far away.

Her heart began to pound more furiously.

“Doctor is afraid?”

“Don't worry. We'll be all right.”

Liberty wanted to believe in miracles.

On her left, a dirt road meandered off into the woods. She turned onto it, hoping it would lead to the ocean or circle back to Route 13 farther down the coast. She had to slow down to move across the dips and ruts in her path.

Had the probe spotted them? She glanced at the hazy sky, but saw nothing.

The flying objects, if close by, could emit electrical waves strong enough to paralyze a human or animal. The effects would last long enough to ensure a capture via mind control – or a kill.

The invaders would keep Liberty alive until she refused to help them learn the language of the sea. They would soon realize that the childlike Rheannon was a receptacle for all that knowledge. The trusting creature would answer their questions and comply with their demands. The telepathic code would be easy to study and develop in a variety of harmful ways. It would take time, but it would happen.

“The red men are coming, Doctor.”

No. The red men were here.

Liberty slammed on the brakes, stopping at the edge of a windswept bluff. The dirt road did lead to the ocean. She could see Asian troops swarming all over the rock-strewn beach, looking like an army of red ants in their bright uniforms and dark helmets.

The enemy hadn't seen them yet. She immediately put the truck in reverse and turned around. They would have to go back the way they had come.

Stinging sweat dripped into her face and ran in rivulets down her chest and back.

She had only driven a quarter of a mile before she saw a shiny cluster of probes drop out of the sky, heading straight for them.

God, they were trapped. The probes would send out a tracking signal to the enemy as soon as their electrical waves were emitted.

What now? She thought about the poison in her leather satchel, and fought off the urge to cry.

No. She wasn't ready to give up.

Liberty maneuvered the truck off the road and headed for a low bluff overlooking the ocean. She stopped at the edge. It looked like a ten foot drop to the dark, churning water below. It didn't seem like a shallow area, and she couldn't see any boulders.

They had nothing to lose at this point.

She felt sure Rheannon would survive. Rheannon could swim away to freedom.

She fastened her seatbelt and backed the truck up to the tree line.

“Doctor is taking Rheannon home now, into the sea. We have to fall first, so don't be afraid.”

“After we fall, where will Doctor be?”

“Doctor will swim home and hide from the red men.”

Liberty took a deep breath and pressed the accelerator to the floor. The truck lurched forward.

She hadn't uttered a prayer since childhood, but as the old vehicle traveled towards the edge of the bluff, she didn't ask for forgiveness – she asked for mercy.

They hurtled out over the water a good twenty feet, and then dropped straight down into the ocean with a teeth rattling impact. The truck began to sink fast.

Liberty had the wind knocked out of her, but she recovered quickly. She sensed that Rheannon was uninjured. Shockingly cold seawater began pouring in through the windows as she hit the harness release button.

The harness belt would slip away on its own once the dolphin began to swim.

“Go, Rheannon. You're home.”

The water was up to her chin now. She tried to unfasten the seatbelt, but it was jammed.

A choking panic threatened to paralyze her. She struggled with the fastener, but the belt latch wouldn't budge.

As the water rose over her head and the truck slipped beneath the murky surface of the sea, she smiled through her tears.

No mercy, then, and no forgiveness. But perhaps she didn't deserve either one.

Her long, black hair came undone and floated around her face, along with the little Statue of Liberty on its delicate silver chain.

God bless America.

Her lungs burned. She closed her aching eyes – and gave in to the sea.

Dying was easier when you accepted it, when you didn't fight.

Peacefulness descended over her – unconsciousness? She became aware of a tugging sensation on her left arm. It almost hurt. A feeling of weightlessness came over her as a rushing noise filled her popping ears.

And then – salty wind instead of salty sea, and bright, warm sunlight hitting her face. She coughed up water, and then sucked the cool air deep into her lungs.

Rheannon was pulling her to shore.

The waves took them close to a rocky ledge and Liberty grabbed hold of it, pulling herself up.

She lay on her side, shaking, and stared out over the ocean. No sign of any probes. No sign of the enemy.

“Doctor will die today?”

Dr. Liberty June Taylor projected a smile. “No. Not today.”

THE END