

BACIA

SAMPLE CHAPTER

RELICTOWN
BOOK FOUR

CHRISTOPHER P. MENKHAUS



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BACIA

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PROLOGUE

Bacia and Taj sat outside together, staring at the full moon. The night was chilly, and they could see their breath as wispy clouds, quickly caught up by the breeze. Bacia was full of such a mixture of joy and sadness that she could barely think. So much had happened over the last few months, the last few weeks, even the last few days.

“What is it?” Taj asked. “You really shouldn’t be out here in this weather.”

“We have to do this now, Taj,” she said. “Usually, it’s something a mother does alone, but I want you here with me.”

Taj looked alarmed.

“If it’s something only mothers do, why do you want me here?” he asked.

“Because I do,” she said. “As simple as that.”

“Nothing is that simple,” Taj chided.

“Because I don’t believe in things being only for toms or mollies,” she said. “And because I love you and want to share this with you.”

“Is it food?” Taj asked.

"No," Bacia said.

"What is it then?" he asked.

"Have you ever heard of a vision poem?" Bacia asked.

"No."

"My mother told me about them shortly before we had our kits," she said. "One day, all your kits will leave you, she said. And you'll feel you've lost a lot of little pieces of yourself. She said it helps to write a vision poem about your kits. You add a few lines after each kit goes off on their own, and after the last kit leaves, you recite your vision poem to the first full moon."

"Why the full moon?" Taj asked.

"Because all cats will look at a full moon. It's a way to feel connected to them as you recite the poem."

"And the purpose is...?" Taj asked.

"To make me feel better," Bacia said. "And you too, hopefully."

Taj hesitated.

"Are you sure it's time?" he asked.

Bacia smiled. It was weaker than she intended, but it conveyed the complex message to her mate.

"Yes," she whispered.

Taj nodded. He understood.

"How do we do this?" Taj asked.

"First, move closer to me," Bacia said. "I want some of your warmth."

They sat together. Taj licked her on her head. After everything they went through, they were still together. Bacia was proud of Taj. He was a good father.

"I love you," he said.

"I love you, too," she said.

"Now what?"

"Now, we think about each of our wonderful, unique, little kits. We think of the good times and the trying times. We think about meeting them for the first time and letting go of them. Then, I'll recite the lines for each of our kits."

BACIA

"That's it?" Taj asked.

"Then we keep them in our hearts for the rest of our lives,"
Bacia said.

She looked up at the moon, took a deep breath, and began.

**THE VISION POEM FOR HATISHA, PAVEL, CHARLY, BRIN,
TALLIS, AND AISLING**

Recited under a full moon by their mother, Bacia

Witnessed by their father, Taj

HATISHA

The second time Bacia performed with the Chorus was a disappointment. It was the first full moon after they had won the territory. The line-up of the Chorus was different. Brownie, of course, was gone. Pavel was still too young to be a full member. Fido had given up on both looking for Brownie and the Chorus and had returned to C.L.A.W.

In an emergency try-out session, Fido's position had been given to Hattie's mate, Frisco. Bacia had to admit, the tabby was good enough. But he didn't spend the time in C.L.A.W. with Bacia, practicing endlessly. He didn't fight to win the territory.

Then, in what felt like a personal insult, Pavel's position had been given to Hunter, one of Candida's sons. The mollies did this in a move toward reconciliation with the group of mollies who had supported Candida until the end. Relic had cleared her sons of any blame for Candida's crimes. Bacia understood the gesture, but she still felt insulted.

Now that she had her kits back, Chorus practice seemed like a waste of time. As she sang her songs, she considered if she even wanted to do this anymore. It was more fun when it was forbidden. As a job, it was filled with responsibilities that took time away from

raising her kits. She had already missed over half their kittenhood trying to protect Pavel, and she knew the other kits all felt different ways about her decision. She needed the time to get to know them and be a mother to them.

Her gaze fell on Taj and the kits as she continued singing. Taj was getting better, little by little. His fur was growing back, closer to black than they thought would be the case after being bleached for so long. His voice was still raspy, his eyesight was still cloudy, and he still moved slower than a young tom like him should, but at least he wasn't killing himself in that toxic water anymore. They were a family again.

When she scanned the line of kits, Bacia realized one was missing. She wasn't surprised. Hatisha, her beautiful calico baby, her first-born, wasn't a fan of her mother breaking convention and performing with the Chorus. Bacia added a future conversation with Hatisha to her list of things she had to do soon.

Bacia was the closer for the show. She finished up and called the others up for their bow. Angelo and Heritage came up on her right, Frisco and Hunter on her left. They bowed. The audience applauded. Bacia was surprised at how little that adoration meant to her anymore.

Angelo made the traditional call for a challenge. As expected, there were no takers. The show was over. Bacia jumped off the stage and got head rubs from her mate and her kits. She wanted so much to quit the Chorus and go live with Taj and the kits like a normal molly. She felt the pressure of all the young mollies who now looked up to her and were using her life as a template for their own futures.

She saw a group of them, off to the side of the audience, too shy to approach her, but not too shy to want to be her. Could she really quit the Chorus? It would crush the spirit of these mollies, and no other molly might ever try to get on an all tom chorus again.

She felt like Heritage must have felt his whole life, torn between what he wanted and what was expected of him. Bacia made a

mental note to get Heritage's advice on her situation. She remembered the day she first met Heritage. She was so mad at him over his stance that mollies should not be in choruses, that she orchestrated his embarrassment on stage in front of the whole territory. Not her best moment. They were past all that though, and with Brownie gone, she wanted to keep as many cats from her little group of friends as close as possible.

"Great performance, hon," Taj said as they touched heads.

"Thanks," she said, giving him a quick lick on the cheek. "Where's Hatisha? I thought she was with us before the show."

"She's here," Taj said.

He looked around with his cloudy eyes. Bacia wondered how much sight he actually had left.

"Dad," Pavel said. "Tishi left before the show started. I think she ran off with Millicent again."

"Oh," Taj said. He looked embarrassed.

"Don't worry about it," Bacia said. "She'll come home, eventually."



Eventually turned out to be a longer time than Bacia's patience. A few hours after sunrise, Hatisha slunk quietly into the den. The other kits and Taj were asleep, but Bacia was no where near tired. She was frustrated at the choice she had ahead of her. She wanted to raise her kits away from the distractions of the chorus. On the other hand, she didn't want to let down the Molly-Bees. That was the name the group of aspiring chorus mollies had given themselves. She was unsure why her desire to be in a chorus was fading, but was scared to give up the dream completely.

And there was Hatisha, the disobedient kit. Bacia stood up from where she was lying next to Taj. Hatisha froze. Bacia signaled with her head and they both moved outside.

It was an overcast day. Cold and billowy. Fall had drained the

color out of the town. Mother and daughter moved around the porch until they reached a side that was blocked by the wind. They sat on the cold ground, Bacia facing Hatisha. Hatisha looking at the ground.

"You missed the show," Bacia started.

"I saw most of it," Hatisha said, looking down at her paws.

"You left when I performed," Bacia said.

"So what?" Hatisha countered. "It doesn't matter."

Bacia considered this. This was the point in the conversation where what she said next would either drive Hatisha away, or alternatively, mitigate her rebelliousness.

Not easy.

Bacia took a deep breath.

"You're right. It doesn't matter," Bacia said. "What matters is *why* you left. Can you tell me what's wrong? I'd like to help you."

Bacia tried to touch heads with Hatisha, who flinched at the movement.

"Why do you care?" she asked.

"Because I'm your mother," Bacia said. "I'm here to help you..."

"But you weren't, *Mother*," Hatisha cried. "You abandoned us, for *Pavel*. You abandoned all of us."

"I'm sorry," Bacia said. She realized she was the one looking down now. She looked Hatisha in the eyes and repeated herself. "I'm sorry."

"I had no idea *when* you were coming back, or *if* you were coming back," she sobbed. "Dad was getting really sick, and Candida was the only one who was kind to me, and now she's gone, and I don't know if she's ever coming back, and..."

Tears were streaming down Hatisha's face. Bacia moved closer so that Hatisha could lean against her.

"Honey, I don't think Candida's ever coming back," Bacia said. "You're too young to understand, but she did some terrible things..."

"But she did some really *good* things for me," Hatisha sobbed.

"For all of us. She took us into her warren when we got too much for Grandpa and Grandma to handle. She took care of us."

"She was *not* your mother," Bacia said. She was getting frustrated now.

"Yes! She! Was!" Hatisha screamed. "*You* were gone! *She* was my mother! Millicent and Marita were my sisters. Then *you* had to come back and ruin everything."

That hurt. It stunned Bacia into silence.

"I know you want to come back and be the perfect mother and have the perfect family, but it's too late," Hatisha cried. "While *you* were gone, *I* grew up. *I* looked after the others. *I* was learning how to be a good molly. *I* just want a normal life, not to be the daughter of the first molly on a chorus."

Bacia knew in her heart what was going to happen. If she fought it, she would lose Hatisha forever, which she couldn't bear. If she let this happen, there would be a chance Hatisha would find her way back to Bacia, someday, when she had matured some more.

"What do you want from this life?" Bacia asked.

"I'm going to move in with Millicent and Marita," Hatisha declared. "Their lives are in shambles without their mother. They're trying to run Candida's warren by themselves, and they asked me for help."

Bacia held her tongue and let Hatisha finish.

"You'll have your hands full with the others, and I can be out of your fur a little early."

Bacia took a minute and looked at her first-born daughter. While Bacia was gone, she had grown into a beautiful calico molly. Bacia knew that all of her kits weren't ready to go off on their own yet, but Hatisha was.

"I think you're a good friend," Bacia said. "I'll miss you dearly, little one. But you've got to do what you feel is right. And helping friends is always the right thing to do. You'll keep in touch, won't you?"

Hatisha was silent for a minute. She looked shocked that she didn't have to fight harder to get what she wanted.

"Yes, Mom," Hatisha said.

"I love you, Hatisha," Bacia said. They touched heads.

"You too, Mom," Hatisha said.

"Now, let's go explain your decision to your father. I think he'll be as proud of you as I am," Bacia said.

Hatisha nodded and shivered. Bacia shivered too. Without the heat of the argument, they were both feeling the chill of the weather. They stood up and made their way inside.

HATISHA

My first born baby kit, I love you, my calico-girl
It doesn't matter that we disagree on many things
I will love you past the end of eternity
I'm sorry our time together so far has been short
But I look forward to hearing all of your stories
When you are ready to share them with me

