

Abigail

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Abigail

by [SLWalker](#)

Summary

(2246) - Abigail Hanson finds herself in a place she didn't expect to.

South Bristol never really changed.

The same tiny village center. The same bridge. The same roads and hills and docks. Even the same damn buoys out there marking lobsterpots. She'd grown up down in Christmas Cove, but what passed for a social life on this particular peninsula, stretching into Johns Bay, still revolved around South Bristol.

Pity that Abigail didn't really like it there. But her Dad still lived on the island, so whatever she felt about South Bristol, she still came back to check on him. And he was doing good, considering his age, considering his heart condition. A man who was a lot of bluster, like the spring wind, but warm and warming when the wind faded. And even his bluster had no edge -- rare was it when he ranted that he didn't have a twinkle in his eye. He was doing good, and for that, she was glad.

It was still more winter in Maine; even on the edge of April, there was dirty and rotting snow everywhere, though the temperature was up to the point where she was comfortable in a light jacket. And instead of heading back to Augusta right off, she stopped off at the diner; whatever else, no one made coffee better, and it was a long enough drive that she wanted something to sip on.

Dan was at the counter, and gave her his customary grin as a greeting, but other than him and Andy Corrigan sitting down the way a bit, it was quiet in there and would be until the lobstermen came back in or summer kicked in and with it Tourist Season.

"How've you been, Abby?" Dan asked, taking her travel mug when she handed it to him, then turning to go fill it.

"Hangin' in," Abigail replied, pulling her gloves off so that she could get her credit chips out of her jacket pocket. "War means tightened port security, so I'm eating up a lot of overtime."

At the mention of her name, Andy looked down the counter. Once just the annoyingly sunny brother of one of her schoolmates, now he was another of the semi-familiar background faces of South Bristol.

Which-- made the fact that he stole looks at her anytime they crossed paths kind of irritating. He sure hadn't had that staring problem when she was at the house working on a class project with Rachel. Must've developed it since then.

He didn't stare at her this time, though, not even when she hiked an eyebrow in his direction, just gave her a sort of tired and far-less-than-sunshiny half-smile that made her want to frown. Then he went back to his coffee.

Dan brought hers back and she paid for it, then shook her head, turning to head for the door. But then she looked back at Andy, who was staring into his coffee mug. "How're your folks?" she asked.

He looked up again, eyebrows drawing in confusion, wearing some surprise on his face. "Not bad. Dad's retired, Mom's still writing. How's your Dad?"

"Pretty good. Still kickin'."

There was an almost awkward pause, then Andy gave her another of those half-hearted smiles that didn't look quite natural on his face. "Good." A beat. "Stay safe out there, okay?"

For some reason, that statement made her feel kind of uneasy, but not exactly in a bad way. It wasn't so much the words, but the fact that he

meant it sincerely; it wasn't just a casual good-bye, he really did want her to stay safe.

Abby fought off a frown and nodded smartly. "You too." And she was sort of uneasy that she meant it herself. Then she finished her walk to the door and out.

Shore Patrol was her calling. She had the particular ability and talent to notice trouble through a crowded spaceport; homegrown instincts that were cultivated by training. One twitch of a muscle in someone's face could be the difference between a smuggler or just a tired traveller, and she could read the faces and expressions of any number of species.

Under the flag of the Federation, though not a part of Starfleet, the war still impacted most things on Earth -- if in more subtle ways than outside the light of Sol -- and the Shore Patrol was there to make sure that those ways never became less-than-subtle. Originally it was a subdivision of Starfleet Security, made up of people assigned to keep their own people out of trouble, but then as space travel became more common, it became clear that there needed to be a home-based police force to keep guard over routes of transit. And the Shore Patrol became its own organization.

Since war had broken out, she was all over the planet; sometimes her home station in Augusta, more often they put her wherever they needed her at the time. But mostly she dealt with the same things -- smugglers, thieves, occasionally just belligerent assholes. Usually people who had something to hide, and could only be picked out of the crowds by their body language, expressions, the things that most people never looked twice at.

Late April in Maine tended to be where winter truly finally released its grip to spring, and she walked through the musty rain that had a sweet scent in it to the cafe. Small talk with Dan, as usual. Andy was there this time; he hadn't been the last two times. He was sitting down the way, dressed in his pale blue uniform shirt.

He didn't look quite so forlorn as he had last time, though he still seemed to be a little lost, and certainly looked tired.

"How're your folks?" she asked, as Dan got her coffee.

"Still good. How's your Dad?"

"Tough as ever." Dan was taking his time; apparently the pot wasn't finished. Feeling a little uncomfortable, Abby shifted her weight from her right foot to her left, then leaned her elbow on the counter. "How's Rachel?"

Andy made a face that read as irritation, and some worry. "Not bad, but-- I don't know what's gotten into her. She's just... I dunno."

If reading the subtle cues from people in crowds at port was her calling, then talking to Andy was like having everything printed on an open book in large letters. She didn't know the circumstances, but she could immediately glean that Rachel was probably in some state of trouble or almost trouble, was duly smacking the offered help of her brother away and that his frustration was that he couldn't understand why.

He shook his head, then, and gave her a smile. "How's work been?"

"Up and down. You?"

"Not bad. Taking classes for half the day, getting practical experience the other half."

Dan finally brought her coffee back, and she paid for it. And again, with an earnestness that was as plain as the rain outside, Andy said, "Stay safe, Abby."

"You too--" she paused there, then finished, "Andy."

She had never wasted her time admiring the boys at school, let alone her classmate's brother. She just focused on her school work. She graduated at the top of her class. And she got the hell out of South Bristol, and was planning on getting out of Maine, but then Dad retired and she settled for living in Augusta. Close to work, close enough to her father.

In the warm, bright air of summer, she wondered a little when she had started looking at Andy like that. Slowly their conversations had lengthened, and she had realized with a jolt that she looked forward to them now. After days or weeks looking for all of the subtle indicators of lawbreaking and danger, talking to someone who spoke openly and honestly was a genuine relief.

Andy was tethering the family's ketch to the dock, and in the bright sun looked like something that had come from it; golden and open, no eclipse. His skin had a healthy, tanned cast to it, and offset the sun-bleached hair on the top of his head. And when he looked at her and smiled, it was a bright smile and it was for her.

That much light was just as hard to look at as it was natural to admire. And she felt another jolt.

"How was the sailing?" she asked, as he stepped over.

"Beautiful," he replied, taking a deep breath, and letting it out with a contented sigh. "I'm glad I got a day off today. How was work?"

"Busy. Had a group of dignitaries in the Port of New York, and security levels were through the goddamn roof." She leaned on a dockpost, crossing her arms. "And then the war protesters outside were particularly obnoxious."

A shadow crossed Andy's face, the cloud in front of the sun, and she frowned inwardly at that. He said, "I wish it would--" then stopped, then sighed. "I dunno. I'm not a pacifist or anything, and I know we didn't start it, but..."

She recognized the shadow; he'd been living under it in March, though he'd slowly come out from under it since then. After a moment of internal argument, she gestured randomly at her own face. "Why the shadow?" she asked, and then wondered if he would even understand what she meant; it was vague.

He did, though. "Just worry. My best friend shipped off on the Denevan run in March, and I don't like him being out there alone."

"That black-haired guy you were palling around with."

Andy looked surprised, like he had no idea that she would have noticed him, let alone who he was hanging around with. And Abby felt the corners of her mouth curl up. It was starting to sink into his head that she didn't miss much, but it was amusing and maybe even endearing that he still stole looks at her on the sly and thought he'd gotten away with them. Then he nodded, bobbing his head. "Yeah, that's him. I mean, I know he's okay, it's not like we don't write back and forth, but it's really hard not to worry anyway."

That was endearing, too. She didn't bother saying anything cliché about how no war lasts forever, or that worrying about someone even when you know they're okay is a waste of energy. It would be trite, and she didn't feel like cheapening herself or Andy with it. So, she just nodded.

He gave her a half-smile, the shadow dissipating but not entirely gone. "Guess I better let you go, huh?"

"Take me out for coffee," she said, and on the word 'coffee' felt a shot of fear. But there was no taking the words back now.

Andy's eyebrows went up, and then he laughed his surprise, but it was a happy laugh and scared her even at the same time that it felt good. "Wow. Really?"

Abby cleared her throat, her face feeling warm, her voice rough. "Yeah, really."

(And even as scared as she was inside, of this wide-open man who looked at her so earnestly, she would never look back on that moment and regret it.)

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