

Dan Churach

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Miri looked up from her desk when she heard the front door open. “Wailani! Just who I wanted to see this beautiful spring morning.” Miri forced a smile.

“Morning.” Wailani’s voice was flat, and her expression was despondent.

Miri couldn’t ignore her newfound friend’s glum mood any more than she could escape her feelings of grief. At least she could try to mention the good news first. “I assume you saw the note that your boss sent overnight. Isn’t that fantastic news?”

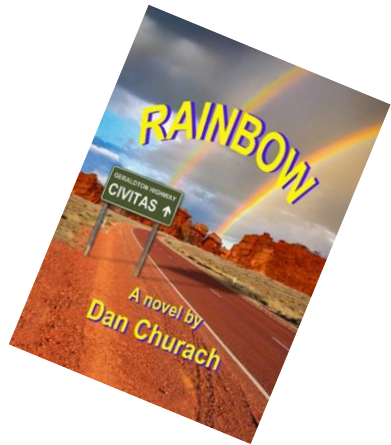
Wailani walked over to the desk and sat in the chair opposite Miri. “You must mean the memorandum of understanding, no doubt. Yeah, I saw it.”

Miri let out a sigh. “I know, Wailani. It seems as though we should be jumping for joy, but now everything is so different.”

Wailani’s red eyes and flushed face made it clear she had been crying earlier. “Different? That’s kind of an understatement, don’t you think?”

Miri’s head hung down. “Sorry...”

“Miri, what am I going to do about meeting my responsibility



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to report events?”

Miri reached across her desk and placed her hand over that of her new friend. “Wailani, you have to know that I’ve been thinking the same thing. What *are* WE going to do? Bloody hell... I know we have BOTH looked forward to this *GNN-Civitas Crier* business agreement for so long and now...” Now Miri’s eyes welled up with tears. “I have been SO looking forward to working together with you and *GNN*.”



The Civitas Town Hall

Wailani’s head still hung low, and she seemed unable to look Miri directly in the eye. “Yes, yes... what you say is all true. I have been so overwhelmed with your kindness... with Skylar and Damo’s kindness this week. Everyone here has been so nice and so open... I am so

enamoured with the friendliness and excitement levels of the entire Civitas community. And you are correct in thinking that I so much wanted *GNN* to enter into an arrangement with you guys and that I was hoping to be appointed to the very first *GNN* staff position here.”

Wailani finally managed to lift her head enough to look right at her new friend. She let out a long stream of air. “All that is true, Miri. But then Tuesday night happened, and Dimitri died. Yesterday’s meeting happened, and I felt awful. I don’t think I slept for more than ten minutes all night long. I finally gave up around 4:00 AM and saw Brad Cleary’s message on my computer. I know, I know... I should have been happy about Brad sending us the MOU. I mean, I should have been ecstatic... That didn’t happen, and I just started to cry. Pretty much, I haven’t stopped crying ever since.”

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Miri stood and came around to Wailani's side of the desk. She pushed another chair next to her and sat, putting her arm around her shoulder. "It's going to be okay, Wailani. We're all crushed at losing Dimitri. It's a terrible thing to go through. For starters, let's be thankful that Jake and Cheri were at least able to shut the computers down when they did. And we can't forget Nick Simmons and Jayde Patterson, since they must have been victims in all this, too. At least we can be grateful that no more deaths have occurred the past



Mythical Civitas, WA

several days now. Are we to think that the Triumvirate was responsible for that? At least we believe Rainbow could have been the culprit and Rainbow is dead now. So, when you consider all that happened, we have one hell of a lot to be happy about this morning, don't you think?"

Wailani slowly nodded yes. "I guess so."

Miri knew she was missing something big. She leaned into Wailani and used both arms to give her a reassuring hug. "Do you want to tell me about it?"

The silence was nearly deafening. Wailani sat there accepting Miri's comforting hug for a full minute until she finally pulled back enough to look her in the eye. "What are we going to do, Miri?"

"What are we going to do?"

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“We’re both journalists, Miri... You can’t be any different from me in that sense. Journalist... journos... It doesn’t matter what your country of birth might be. For that matter, it doesn’t matter what country you resided in during your education... or where you lived during your professional experience. None of that matters! Once a journo, always a journo.”

“Spot on, Wailani – we are both true blue journos... and we’re in this together.” Miri wanted to support Wailani in any way that she could. “I couldn’t agree with you more, hon. We both operate from the same place. As journos, we always aim to be truthful, always aim to corroborate facts, to be a watchdog for the people. What am I missing here, Wailani? It couldn’t be any other way, could it?”

Wailani took a deep breath and leaned back, unconsciously tugging on a strand of hair. She hesitated long enough to collect her wits and push herself past her grief. When she finally started to speak, her tone of voice now returned to her more self-assured, confident persona. “We can’t do what they are asking us to do.”

Her friend arched her eyebrows. “What do you mean... What are ‘they’ asking us to do?”

“Skylar pretty much asked us – maybe told us – to be quiet. The notion of waiting until ‘we figure this out’ is somewhat nebulous. Suppose they don’t find out what happened for a week... or a month... or a year... Suppose they never find out for sure... Do we just stay quiet and collect our salaries by reporting on the work at the medical centre? Do we only cover news of the new technology used over at the solar farm? For that matter, how in the world can I make a documentary here in Civitas without ever mentioning THIS.”

“Well, it won’t be a year or even a month, Wailani.”

“But you don’t KNOW that! Seriously... Just think for one

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minute that we DO produce an in-depth documentary and broadcast it in November or December. For the sake of argument, let's say we wind up with a two-part doco the gist of which portrays what a fantastic place Civitas is. We stress just how it is state-of-the-art everything and what a shame it was that its fastest-computer-in-the-world system had a little technical glitch for a few days in October and needed rebooting." Her expression was a picture of concern. "We'd produce a fantastic documentary and likely even be in the running to win an Emmy in the News & Documentary category... So far, so good..."

"Fast forward a few weeks later and suppose we awake one morning in December or January and see the booming headlines in the *DC Post* or the *London Globe* or the *Sydney Morning Advertiser* that read something like 'Civitas Triumvirate Computers Kill 25,000 People.' Tell me, Miri, how do I explain that to Cleary and Makowski? How do we convince those same people at the *DC Post*, the *London Globe* or the *Sydney Morning Advertiser*? For that matter, how do we explain that to our viewers? I trust there will be millions of viewers watching our doco all around the world. And yes, Miri, it will be – IS – OUR doco now, considering that it's a sure bet that this joint agreement between the *Crier* and *GNN* will go through. You and I are joined at the hip now, career-wise, Miri. Can you explain to me how either one of us could ever be trusted again... ever be professional journalists again?"

Now it was Miri's turn to have a mood change. Her face was glum, and her eyes worried. "Of course, you are



The Quantum computer

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right, Wailani. We can't do this. Besides destroying both our careers, we'd also destroy at the very least *GNN* and the *Civitas Crier* as reputable news sources. For that matter, we wouldn't only bring down the *Crier*, but probably all Civitas and Hayden's entire experiment.

"Worse yet, it could have far-reaching consequences and impacts that could risk tainting all global news coverage. It's not as though there aren't enough populist polities hollering 'fake news' and 'enemies of the people' from every corner of the globe right now anyway. Considering all the scandals and coverups the world has faced in the past few decades, none involved a news organisation as reputable and as prominent as *GNN*. For that matter, if we go through with this – with being quiet..." Miri's words trailed off as she felt a tear in the corner of her eye. "I'm terrified! We actually could be right in the middle of the most concerted effort ever conceived to mislead and deceive readers and viewers intentionally. I couldn't agree with you more, Wailani – we can't do this. You have to know I'm on your side here."

"I know that you are." Now she reached out to hug Miri.

It was Miri's turn to feel self-conscious. "Now I apologise. How insensitive I was to you. I let my excitement with the *GNN* offer overcome my most basic ethics as a journo. I'm so sorry, Wailani."

"It's okay, Miri. I know we're on the same wavelength... we're on the same side. We just need to talk this through. I'll tell you though, from my point of view, I don't see how we can delay reporting this much past the weekend."

Miri bobbed her head, yes. "I agree. I don't know how we release what we know and what more we will learn, but let's aim at making that decision this weekend and make Monday our deadline for releasing what happened here to the whole world."