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Stolen Skies

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Introduction

The pale skies above Luna One are never truly empty. They shimmer with electromagnetic haze, the soft hum of life-sustaining systems, and—sometimes—the whispers of what might come next. For Dr. Lila Rowan, those skies represent both the ultimate promise and the ever-present risk of humanity's most audacious venture: building a home on the Moon. As chief aerospace engineer and one of the original architects of the colony, Lila moves through its modular domes as both maker and caretaker. Her work is never done; every section of Luna One is a mosaic of welded steel and spun composites, soldered by human grit and raw necessity.

Life here is a relentless juggling act—routine maintenance one minute, high-stakes crisis management the next. Among the colonists, Lila's reputation is one of quiet competence and ironclad dedication. She's earned trust in a place where even the oxygen you breathe is borrowed from a ticking machine. Yet beneath Luna One's dazzling vision of unity, old Earth rivalries have stowed away: directives from remote Earth command bristle against the ambitions of private contractors with deep pockets, while whispers ripple through lunar-born factions dreaming of independence.

For Lila, each day is complicated by invisible threads—friendships and loyalties she's carried from Earth, and the vulnerabilities she's shouldered since the loss of her partner years ago. The colony's culture is a tapestry woven from all walks: brilliant engineers, ceaseless miners, hopeful families, each with their own stories and stakes. The corridors buzz with laughter, debate, the whir of drones. But just out of sight, there's a sense of fragility—a shared understanding that catastrophe is never more than a heartbeat away in the vacuum beyond their thin walls.

It's in this world, straining beneath the weight of its own ambition, that the first tremors of crisis strike. A solar storm—one strong enough to batter even hardened lunar infrastructure—will soon darken the open corridors, swallowing up the safety Lila and her team have fought to secure. In the chaos that follows, a trusted pilot disappears, leaving behind a trail of cryptic clues and a single warning: Luna One is under siege from within.

As power flickers and long-simmering tensions boil to the surface, Lila finds herself thrust into a desperate race—not just to save her friends and colleagues, but to unravel who among them is willing to betray humanity's boldest dream. The answers lie buried in secret alliances and ancient lava tubes, and in the fractures running through Luna One's foundations. But as darkness spreads, one truth remains: in a place where every breath is precious, trust can be the rarest element of all.

Welcome to Luna One. The skies above have been stolen, and survival will demand everything Lila Rowan knows—and everything she’s willing to risk.

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CHAPTER ONE: Shadows on the Horizon

The comms chime was a familiar, unwelcome sound, particularly when it was synced to a deep-space weather alert. Lila adjusted her Holo-Lens, the feed from the primary solar observation array flickering into her periphery. "Solar flare activity escalating," the automated voice announced, a crisp, almost bored tone that belied the massive energy event it described. "Estimated arrival of coronal mass ejection: T-minus four hours."

She sighed, pushing a stray strand of dark hair from her face. Four hours. Enough time to batten down the hatches, secure non-essential systems, and brace for impact. Not enough time to feel comfortable about it. Solar events were a fact of life on Luna One, but this one, classified as a "Class X, anomalous intensity," was making even the most seasoned engineers chew their nutrient bars with extra vigor.

"Status report, Delta Quadrant," Lila's voice, calm and steady, cut through the low hum of the propulsion lab. Her team, a mix of young, eager recruits and grizzled lunar veterans, moved with a practiced fluidity, checking diagnostic panels and rerouting power conduits. Lila watched them, a fierce pride stirring in her chest. These were her people, the ones who kept Luna One a vibrant, breathing entity rather than a cold, airless tomb.

Across the lab, Rhys Kaelen, the colony's top pilot, was leaning against a console, a data slate clutched in his hand. He was a familiar, reassuring presence, his dark eyes usually alight with a mischievous glint. Today, though, his brow was furrowed, a grim line where his usual easy smile should be. He caught her eye and pushed off the console, walking towards her with an almost imperceptible urgency.

"Lila, you got a minute?" His voice was lower than usual, almost a murmur against the general hum of the lab. He glanced over his shoulder, a quick, almost paranoid sweep of the room. It was unlike Rhys to be anything but direct.

"For you, always, Rhys," she replied, stepping away from the bustling activity, a knot of unease beginning to tighten in her stomach. "What's up? Is the *Prometheus* having issues with the solar radiation hardening?" The *Prometheus* was Rhys's beloved long-range scout ship, currently docked in the primary hangar, awaiting its next deep-space mission.

Rhys shook his head, running a hand through his closely cropped hair. "It's not the ship, Lila. It's... bigger than that." He lowered his voice further. "I found something. Something that doesn't sit right." He held out the data slate, but pulled it back before

she could take it. "Not here. Can we meet after my shift? Hangar Bay 3, the old comms annex? Half an hour before the storm hits, say... 23:30 standard?"

The old comms annex was a rarely used, almost forgotten corner of Hangar Bay 3, tucked away behind stacks of decommissioned equipment. It was a place for secrets, not routine debriefs. Lila felt a prickle of alarm. "Rhys, what is it? You're scaring me."

His gaze locked onto hers, intensity burning in his dark eyes. "Good. You *should* be scared, Lila. Someone's been messing with the colony's core systems. Not just little glitches, I'm talking fundamental structural parameters. Power distribution, atmospheric scrubbers... even the navigation arrays." He paused, his voice dropping to a whisper. "This isn't an accident. This is sabotage."

Lila felt a cold dread creep through her. Sabotage? On Luna One? It was an unthinkable concept, a direct threat to everything they had built, everything they were. "Who, Rhys? Why?"

He shook his head again, a frustrated gesture. "I don't know. Not yet. But I've got some data, some irregularities I found embedded deep in the system logs. It looks like... an inside job. Someone with high-level access. I just need to cross-reference a few more points, and then we'll know."

The urgency in his voice was palpable, a stark contrast to his usual laid-back demeanor. Lila knew Rhys; he wasn't prone to hyperbole or conspiracy theories. If he said it was sabotage, he had strong evidence. But the timing... with a Class X solar storm bearing down on them, such an accusation felt like a cruel joke.

"Okay, Rhys," she said, her voice strained. "23:30. Don't do anything alone. And be careful."

He gave her a tight nod, a shadow of his usual confidence. "Always am, Lila. See you then." He turned, melting back into the bustle of the lab, his form disappearing amongst the engineers and the pulsing indicator lights. Lila watched him go, a shiver running down her spine. The casual warning about sabotage, delivered with such quiet conviction, echoed in her mind.

The next few hours were a blur of frenzied activity as Luna One braced for the solar storm. Lila oversaw the full deployment of the electromagnetic shielding, a massive undertaking that involved intricate rerouting of the colony's power grid. She moved through the main control center, a sprawling hub of flickering screens and hushed commands, feeling the distant rumble of the automated systems locking down.

As the clock ticked closer to 23:30, the atmosphere in Luna One shifted. The vibrant hum of daily life began to quiet, replaced by an underlying tension. The usual chatter

in the corridors faded, replaced by the hushed tones of personnel preparing for the inevitable power fluctuations and communications blackouts. Lila felt the low thrum of the emergency generators kick in, a deep, reassuring pulse that nonetheless reminded them of their vulnerability.

She made her way towards Hangar Bay 3, the metallic clang of her boots echoing in the increasingly deserted passages. The colony was settling in for the storm, turning inward, preparing to ride out the cosmic tempest. The comms annex was exactly as Rhys had described it - a dusty, forgotten corner, smelling faintly of ozone and disused machinery. She checked her chrono: 23:25. Five minutes early.

Lila stepped inside, her Holo-Lens illuminating the small, cramped space. It was empty. She waited, listening to the distant whir of life-support systems and the faint, almost imperceptible tremor of the impending solar storm. 23:30 came and went. Then 23:35. A cold dread, far more chilling than the vacuum outside, began to settle over her.

Rhys was never late. Especially not when he had something this important to tell her. A surge of adrenaline, sharp and cold, shot through her veins. She pulled out her comm unit, but the screen remained dark. The solar storm. It must have hit early, or a precursor pulse had knocked out local comms.

A distant, metallic groan echoed through the hangar, followed by a series of sharp, crackling sounds. Then, with an abruptness that stole the breath from her lungs, the emergency lights flickered, dimmed, and died.

Total darkness. The faint hum of the colony's systems vanished, replaced by an oppressive silence. The solar storm had arrived. And Rhys was gone.

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