



# Maia, Mother of Worlds

David B. Reynolds

# ***Maia, Mother of Worlds***

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## ***Dedication:***

*Maia, Mother of Worlds* is dedicated to my great-grandmother, Katherine Bryant McVay. Her profile adorns the cover. It is also dedicated to my late father, Dr. John Greenwood Reynolds.

# **Chapter One**

“Are you OK?” were the second words John ever said to Maia. The first was either a muttered “rats,” or a four-letter, more profane, version.

A group of commuters had just started boarding a downtown San Francisco bus on a busy Friday morning when someone inside suddenly stopped. Maia halted to avoid hitting them. Juggling a laptop case, smartphone and cup of java while thinking about his first appointment of the day, John was paying more attention to what was in his hands than the people around him. He completely missed that the woman in front of him was no longer moving. Unable to stop himself in time, John’s hand slammed into Maia’s back. The impact was just hard enough to pop the top off his coffee and spill it all over his dress shirt, tie and slacks.

Asked about the incident later, all John could say was, “if you want to make a great first impression, I didn’t. But somehow, she did.” The brief contact between them—it lasted less than a second—was electric, like John had just touched a live fifty-thousand watt power line.

“What attracted me to Maia?” John replied thoughtfully, pondering his response to a child’s question years later. “It surely wasn’t her looks. Some women have physical attributes—long legs, slim waists, big chests, long hair, cute faces—that make them attractive from miles away. Maia? Honestly, you would have had hard time picking her out of a crowd.”

In John’s eyes Maia wasn’t especially tall, thin or well endowed. Her hair was thick, dark brown with golden highlights and flowing midway down her back. Her face and skin had that mix of ethnic types that some people might call “universal” because she didn’t look like any one racial type. She might have been described as Mediterranean, but even that was in doubt. John told a good friend many years later that Maia looked more like a cook had taken bits and pieces from every ethnicity, stirred them in a pot and baked it. She popped out.

“If it isn’t her body, which is nice enough but nothing to go wonky over, maybe it is her eyes,” he wondered. Maia’s eyes were the most intense mixture of blue and green

John had ever seen. They reminded him of the ocean off the California coast where the sea bottom drops off. The water goes from shallow and green to very deep blue in just a few feet. They were that muddled mixture of green and blue: Deep blue one instant, bright green the next.

Maia paused for a second, looked over the shoulder of her green and tan dress and boarded the bus. John was a soggy step behind her.

Maia found the last empty seat and he stood in the aisle next to her where John apologized again.

“Did I spill any coffee on you? Are you hurt?” he asked, honestly concerned because his coffee was fresh and hot enough where if it hit bare skin, a burn was a distinct possibility.

“I’m fine, but are you hurt?” she responded.

“My chest feels like it’s on fire from the coffee, but truthfully I’m more embarrassed than hurt,” he replied.

People slammed into him on many occasions while getting on or off a bus, or waiting in a queue somewhere else. Not once had they expressed the slightest concern for his welfare or that of anyone except themselves. “That may be their attitude but it surely isn’t mine,” he told her.

Instead of being mad or upset with having been bumped—it happens all the time in cities and John knew most people ignore it—Maia took a good look at him. A smile slowly took over her face, rising like the morning sun from the corners of her mouth to overwhelm her eyes. Tears started to form in the corners of her eyes.

Unable to hold her emotions in any longer, Maia lost it. Her control vanished and her laugh was the most genuine John had ever heard. He said as much.

“Your laugh sounds the kind of noise a child makes when it sees a parent, knowing he or she is going to get picked up. It’s the kind of joy, of pure, unadulterated glee a parent sees when a child opens a present. It’s a sound of happiness, a sound of wonder, a sound of raw love,” he told her.

She sat there, staring at him.

“You poor man. Your shirt is ruined and you look miserable,” she said from inches away.

John took a good look at himself and his formerly white cotton shirt and red and black striped tie.

“Don’t you know it’s the new spring look in men’s fashion? I call it triple mocha with whip,” he quipped in return. Looking at his now coffee dotted striped tie, he added, “with sprinkles. I’m John Greenwood by the way.” He thrust out his hand in greeting.

“Maia, Maia Solomon,” she said, grasping his and giving it a firm shake.

Just as they finished shaking hands, the bus lurched to a halt at John’s stop, which turned out to be Maia’s, too. John moved back, letting Maia get out first. After all, it’s the gentlemanly thing to do, he knew.

Once on the sidewalk, she stopped, reached into her purse and took out a business card. It had her name on it but no phone number or email address. John gave her one of his freelance business cards, which had his cell phone number and personal email address on it.

Her eyebrows rose at the words “grant writing” on the card. “I would love to have a cup of coffee with you some time, only one you can drink, not wear,” Maia said as she began walking away.

“When can I see you?” John asked, rooted to the sidewalk.

“We’ll meet again, soon,” Maia replied as she quickly walked away.

“How do I reach you?” John asked.

“I may call you, and then again, I may not,” she said over her shoulder waving his card.

As she walked away, John could hear the memory of her laughter ringing in his ears like the peal of a mission bell calling Catholic parishioners to mass.

The direction she was going was the same as John’s, so he took off after her. His eyes were glued to her shapely backside but his mind was already asking a ton of questions starting with, “Was she married, seeing someone or available?”

He hadn’t seen a wedding ring on her finger but these days that meant absolutely nothing. “Does she have any kids? If so, how many, how old were they and what were their names? What did she do for a living? What did she do for fun?” A thousand other questions poured through his mind as he kept walking.

John and Maia were both shocked when they entered the same building a moment later, her for her own reasons and John's because he worked there: Hyperion Unlimited.

John got a few stares from Tom at the Security desk before swiping his pass and riding the employee elevator to the thirteenth floor. He asked the department receptionist—she was also having a difficult time keeping a straight face at John's new fashion statement—to hold his calls for a few minutes while he headed to his desk.

Responding to her stare, he told her, "I learned the hard way: it never hurts to keep a new shirt and clean tie in a bottom desk drawer for emergencies. This qualifies as one though a wet paper towel will have to work for my slacks."

Just after changing in his cubicle, John's phone rang with Sue, the receptionist, telling him his 9 a.m. appointment was here. John asked Sue—who was young, bright, good looking and an up-and-comer, all of which John knew he wasn't—to direct the client to Conference Room 3.

Running a quick comb through his razor cut salt and pepper hair, John grabbed the files he prepared in advance and headed over to the conference room. He was placing his faith in the files and the information they contained, firmly believing they would shield him from the attacks of the Gentle Ocean Living Center and its lawyer.

While John raced to the conference room, he braced himself for conflict. His favorite method was thinking about how his ex-wife had ripped his heart out, sliced, it diced it, poured acid on it and threw it to a shark in a three-piece suit in the divorce. She supported them while he went through law school but was royally pissed off when he said he wanted to help people, not make a boatload of money, after graduating in the bottom third of his class.

Only after she destroyed him emotionally did John's ex clean out his bank account, he recalled.

That bit of badness worked perfectly to get his head ready for the upcoming legal battle. "Thinking of the bad times with my ex, not the good, always gets me ready to take on the toughest opponents. Like General Santa Ana in the Battle of the Alamo, I am ready to give no quarter," he once told Sue.

By the time John made it to the conference room, he had his battle face on, his muscles were tense and he was ready to chew on someone's hide.

A floor to ceiling interior window in the room showed him the top of the client's head—a woman—sitting in a chair looking outside. The view from the 13<sup>th</sup> floor was nice since you could see San Francisco Bay through a narrow gap between other high rises.

John was surprised: There was this woman but no one else. He was expecting at least two people, possibly four or five. Either she was one tough cookie or no lawyer would take her case, since Hyperion had it locked up tight, John said.

The sound of his footsteps as he entered the room, caused the person John was supposed to meet spin around. They both spoke out of shock and surprise: “You!”

The person he was battling—his adversary—was none other than the woman he had literally run into on the bus: Maia.

Now it was no longer a bad day on top of a bad month and horrendous year. It had just gotten much worse. The century was looking like warmed-over puke right now, John knew.

“What are you doing here?” he asked.

“I founded the Gentle Ocean Living Center, which Hyperion wants to kick out,” she said.

This was a problem for John's now completely trashed love interest: his division of Hyperion dealt with evicting people who occupied property it owned or wanted. In this case, Gentle Ocean and its related businesses occupied all of a building Hyperion was buying. The goal was to tear down a relic occupying a very valuable piece land on the edge of the financial district. Standing in its stead soon would be a towering—and very profitable—40-story high-rise, once Gentle Ocean Living Center was booted out.

John knew that Gentle Ocean still had 25 years left on a 99-year lease, but since Hyperion now owned the building, his company had the upper hand.

Maia stared at John with a frown. He returned her look with a confident smile.

She took a gold pin out of her wrapped hair and shook her head, letting her locks fall where they wanted to go and framing her gentle face perfectly.

“We have a problem,” she said, dispensing with the pleasantries and getting right down to business. “Gentle Ocean has been in this spot for 75 years, since nearly the start of the Women's Rights Movement. Our charter is to take care of women, period.”

“Correct me if I’m wrong,” John fired back, starting his opening remarks and getting into his lawyer groove while taking on the shark persona he’d learned from his ex-wife’s barrister.

“As I understand it, Gentle Ocean is simply a clinic of which this city has hundreds,” John continued. He checked his file, found what he was looking for and continued, “The nearest of which is only about a dozen blocks away.”

“Clinic my ass,” Maia said, her salty language causing John to raise an eyebrow. “We take care of women from birth through the end of their time on this plane of existence.”

Maia explained that Gentle Ocean helped women give birth naturally, like they had for millennia before the advent of anesthetics, hospitals and expensive health care plans. The facility helped its patients live long, productive lives and at the end, helped them ease their suffering and die with peace and dignity.

“In terms of what we offer, Gentle Ocean is unique, not just to San Francisco, but to the entire country,” Maia continued. “No other facility—no other clinic or hospital—has the exact same concentration of care focused on women’s health. You can’t shut us down in 30 days.”

John held up two fingers. “Not 30 days,” he corrected her. “Two weeks.”

“What?” Maia screamed at the top of her lungs. She put her hands on the table and began uttering a stream of very inventive curses in a wide range of languages. She could have given a Marine drill sergeant cussing lessons, John heard.

Maia’s voice was loud enough where heads outside the conference room, though used to similar outbursts, still turned in shock. John looked and confirmed the door was firmly closed, though windows to the rest of the office were open.

“Hyperion owns the land and the building,” John said, interrupting Maia’s rant after a bit. “The Gentle Ocean Clinic ...” “Gentle Ocean Living Center” Maia corrected by yelling at him, “... Pardon me, the Gentle Ocean Living Center, is simply a tenant in our building. We have deadlines if we want to lock in financing and the services of a particular builder. The longer we wait, the more money it costs Hyperion,” John said.

“Two weeks is more than adequate time to remove your equipment and possessions from the premises,” John continued, his voice and demeanor as hard as granite.

“Hyperion is offering your firm a generous relocation package. Where you go and what you do is none of our concern.”

“Generous?” Maia replied angrily, the shock, awe and frustration obvious in her voice. “You dare to call your offer generous? Maybe it was in the 1700s but not today. There’s no way on this Earth or any other planet that we could afford to keep our doors open for even 30 days with what you’re giving us.”

John smiled again. They were back on his turf. The opening salvos was played out and the two people were on to the next stage: negotiations.

“So what will it take for Gentle Ocean to vacate the premises in two weeks?” John asked, sugar, sweetness and irony dripping from his voice.

“An act of God,” Maia replied, before picking up her purse, standing up and throwing a business card on the table: the one John had given her on the street. It was a direct indication that she no longer wanted to have anything to do with him.

“And you can tell my ex-husband, there’s no way this stubborn broad is going to put up with his act any longer,” Maia said as she stood up. “After all these years, he should know just how obnoxious and stubborn I am.”

“Ex-husband?” John asked, his face showing just how thoroughly confused he now was.

Maia smiled. “I said Hyperion prided itself on knowing everything about everyone, all the time. You goofed. My name is Maia ... Solomon ... Isaacs. My ex-husband, Solomon Isaacs has owned Hyperion ever since they stole it from my ancestors many years ago.”

“Have Solly call me Monday,” she told John as she stood up, smoothing her business suit and getting ready to leave. “I’m sick and tired of dealing with lackeys like you.”

She dropped a different business card on the table that John snagged and stuck in a pants pocket. Maia opened the door into the office. She was outside and slamming it hard enough for the door to bow like it was about to burst before John could reach it.

The force Maia applied was powerful enough to make the glass wall the door was connected to vibrate. It was far more powerful than a woman of her size and build should be able to deliver, John said. Maybe an NFL defensive end could pack that much strength into their body, but a fairly small woman? No way. He was sure everyone else nearby—

probably everyone on the entire floor, including his supervisor—heard Maia slam the door.

Normally John would have held the door for a lady, any lady, and escorted her to the lobby. But in this situation John was too stunned to react. He just stood there, a dumbfounded look on his face.

He gathered his notes and headed back to his cubicle, trying to gather his thoughts, still stunned by what had just taken place. Just as John sat down at his desk, his phone rang. It was the department receptionist calling.

“The Boss wants to see you, right now,” she said.

“Tell George I’ll be there in just a moment,” John replied, about to hang up. George Martinson was his department head and direct supervisor.

“No, not George,” the receptionist said, whispering, “The Boss. Solomon Isaacs himself.”

The first words to come to mind, were, “Oh, hell. I’m in it very deeply if He wants to see me.” Solomon Isaacs wasn’t the left hand of God in this building. Here, he **was** God. He controlled what everyone in it did and, if it was done to his liking, they were rewarded. If they didn’t, they were on the streets fast enough to leave skid marks. Hyperion was known for having a huge employee turnover, though good lawyers could make enough in five years to retire, or so the rumor mill said.

Rumor and random thoughts left John’s mind as rapidly as they entered before reason took over. “How could he know about what happened? Maia left no more than two minutes ago,” he muttered to himself.

John gathered his file and took off running for the elevator bank. There are four elevators: one for employees, two for clients and one for Mr. Isaacs’ exclusive use.

When John got there, slightly out of breath, Mr. Isaacs elevator door was standing open, a uniformed and big—check that, not big, freaking huge—guard was waiting inside.

“Mr. Greenwood,” the guard said sternly to John, “Mr. Isaacs does not like to be kept waiting. Hurry up.”

He entered the elevator and the guard hit a single button, the only button in the elevator. One moment it was still, the next it started going up, fast. How fast? John had

never been in a rocket, but it felt like one. He and the guard went up, and up, and up for what seemed like forever, but couldn't have been more than 20 stories based on the building outside.

The elevator slowed, the door opened and John walked out ... straight into the lap of luxury.

That phrase was the only way to describe Solomon Isaacs office.

The entire floor, which seemed to stretch forever, had walls and a ceiling of the clearest glass, maybe crystal, they were that clear. All of the windows let pure sunshine in. There wasn't a drape, blind or curtain in the room that John could see.

The floors were of solid marble, those small portions that were not literally paved in gold, he saw.

Years later, John told a friend, "If you think I'm joking, I'm not: it wasn't gold covered linoleum or something fake. Given the quality and purity of everything else I could see, the gold squares had to be 14 karat, not quite pure but with just enough other stuff added to give them strength."

The largest piece of furniture in the room was Mr. Isaacs' shining chrome desk occupying one entire long wall. Behind the desk was a gigantic golden sunburst covering the wall from edge to edge.

Beyond that, there was a scattering of art work, mostly marble busts, but some from Native American—Aztec, maybe—and other ancient artifacts scattered about on pedestals. In the second or two John was able to look around, it seemed all of the art honored a sun god.

One missing item came to his notice immediately: there were no chairs or furniture on either side of Solomon Isaacs desk. No one sat down, not Solomon Isaacs nor his guests. That meant visitors came and went, quickly, John guessed.

"John Greenwood," Solomon Isaacs said in his deep baritone voice and looking down at him from his lofty 7-foot-plus height behind his trademark huge dark glasses from his position just inside the door. "I see you've met my ex Maia. How is she doing?"

"Good," John replied, recalling exactly what Maia had told him before leaving. "She gave me a message for you. She said she wanted you to call her on Monday and that she was tired of dealing with lackeys."

“That sounds just like Maia,” Isaacs said, smiling: “Straight and to the point.”

Before John could react, Isaacs did something John couldn't believe: one second he was behind his desk. The next, all 7-feet, 350-plus pounds of solid muscle—from the way his clothing hung to his frame—of him wrapped a hand around John's throat and lifted him off the ground.

“Maia is mine,” he snarled, looking up into John's face. “Lay a finger on her or even look at her lustily and I'll put you in so much pain you'll wish you'd never been born.”

For emphasis, he ripped the glasses off his head. The light pouring out of his eyes was like looking straight at the sun: it was hot, it was intense, it was blinding and John felt like his eyeballs were boiling in his skull.

The giant dropped him so fast that John's feet missed the floor, causing him to land on his butt. John rolled backward, striking his head on the gold floor, making his noggin ring with pain. He was also momentarily blinded and his face felt like it just been shoved into a blacksmith's forge.

Now that he'd shown John the very big, thick and powerful stick, it was time for Isaacs to show John the carrot. President Isaacs, using his formal title, waved a hand and one of his glass walls became a computer screen showing yachts, tropical islands and uncountable gorgeous young women, all fawning over someone: John.

“This and riches beyond your wildest dream of avarice will be yours if you perform, and perform well, for me,” Isaacs said. “But it starts with this deal. I want Gentle Ocean out within two weeks. On Day 15, the demolition charges go off and the bulldozers scrape up whatever's left whether they've vacated ... or not.” The promise of demolition was clear, as was the threat of harm to anyone left behind.

“Now get out of here,” Mr. Isaacs roared, his voice loud enough to send John's hands racing to protect what little was left of his hearing.

A bodyguard—not that Isaacs needed one—seemed to materialize from nowhere. He grabbed John under the elbows and frog-marched him back to the elevator. The guard pressed the one button on it and down they went, more sedately this time, to his floor.

Dragging himself toward his cubicle, one hand pressed behind his neck because of the headache John had gotten when his head hit the floor and still recovering his vision, John walked right past the reception desk.

“Mr. Greenwood, Mr. Greenwood,” Sue called, “You’re going the wrong way.”

“Who in the hell is Mr. Greenwood,” John asked, still in a daze after what had just happened. Frankly, it was all so bizarre John wasn’t sure if any of what he remembered was real or not. “Mr. Greenwood, that’s me,” John realized. As his brain was digesting that had taken place with Mr. Isaacs, his feet retraced the steps to his cubicle, steps he could—and had—taken in pitch darkness while working late on many occasions.

John backtracked to the reception desk, reading her nametag (it seemed like there was new young girl here every week and John could never keep track of them) and said, “Sue, what do mean I’m going the wrong way? my cubicle is over there,” pointing at the tightly packed jumble of desks, computers and low divider screens a few yards away.

“No, Mr. Greenwood, your office is over here,” she said, pointing to the southwest corner.

John was obviously still in a daze because Sue came out from behind her desk, took his hand in hers and guided him to his office. While it wasn’t nearly as big as Solomon Isaacs’, it was huge compared to his cubicle. There were several photos of an attractive couple with three kids scattered about the place plus golf trophies and assorted knickknacks. He knew they must belong to the previous occupant since John wasn’t married and had never fathered any kids, at least any that he knew about.

Before John could ask about whose office it was before and what had happened to them, Sue guided him to the soft, Italian leather chair behind the large desk and sat him in it. Her next stop was the full bar in one corner where she poured him a cocktail, handing it to him in a cut leaded crystal glass.

On her way back to his new desk, Sue undid the top two buttons on her blouse. When she bent over the desk and handed him the drink, John had a great view of her substantial physical assets.

“Mr. Isaacs said I was to provide you with anything you desired,” she said, her low throaty voice doing a cat’s purr justice, “anything at all, just as long as you deliver Gentle Ocean on time.”

Sue’s last comment acted like a slap to the face, bringing John back to reality. His right hand, underneath the desk and out of Sue’s sight, found the original one of Maia’s

business cards he had stuck in his pocket. John touched it to make sure it was still there and he hadn't dreamed about meeting her.

He looked at the drink, decided he didn't need it or want it, and asked Sue to get him the Gentle Ocean file, plus anything else she could dig up on Maia Solomon Isaacs.

Before leaving the office, Sue smiled. She finished unbuttoning her blouse and removing her bra before turning around and saying seductively, this time flashing her now uncovered tits, "I get off at 5. Care to join me for a little R &R as in romping and rolling?"

"Thanks, but I'll need a rain check," John replied, though his body was already stiffening at the sight of Sue's boobs. "I've got work to do."

John's still stunned eyes and brain—he couldn't decide if it was from being blinded by Mr. Isaacs glare or the sight of Sue's gorgeous chest—were spinning like tops. The only way to stop them was to start tapping away on the keyboard of his computer. Unlike his old machine with a single screen, this one had three large high-definition monitors hooked up to it. The second his fingers hit a key, they began waking it out of sleep mode and allowing him to begin looking at the company database.

"Mr. Greenwood, the files you requested are now in your personal directory," Sue said through the intercom. "Would you like me to show you where to find them?"

"No thanks, Sue," John said, recalling how she'd almost poured herself into his lap a moment ago. "I can locate them."

Not more than a second after disconnecting with Sue, the office door burst open and a disheveled George Martinson—John's boss—crashed into the room.

"Greenwood, you sonofabitch," he yelled, "I was supposed to get this promotion, not lowly little you. My wife and I were counting on it. We'd already spent part of my new salary, you little weasel. And what did you do to poor Linda Cho? She was bawling her eyes out a second ago. This was her office, you know."

Before John could respond, a uniformed security guard who could have been a twin of the one in the private elevator, strode in, grabbed John's former boss roughly by both arms, lifted him up so his toes barely scraped the floor and hustled him out. "No worries, Mr. Greenwood, sir. I'll make sure this garbage never bothers you again," the guard said on his way out the door.

A second guard came in with a large cardboard box and began shoveling Cho's photos, keepsakes and mementos into it. "Hey," John said to the guard. "Be careful with that stuff. She doesn't want it all broken."

The guard looked at John strangely and said in a voice that was identical to Isaacs, though the two looked nothing alike, "why do you care what she wants? You're the boss now. Isn't that what you've always wanted?"

"He has me there," John said, thinking of Isaacs. "Yes, I have secretly dreamed of having my own corner office. Who hasn't? But I prefer to help push others up the ladder, not step on them while I climb it."

## ***Like It? Buy It Now***

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## ***About the Author***

David B. Reynolds lives and works in California where many of his stories are set. A former weekly newspaper reporter and editor, he now works as a Certified Technical Writer.

In addition to spending much of his free time writing, the author is a frequent reader of action and science-fiction novels and short stories. Many of his stories pay homage to extraordinary works he read in the past.

If you enjoyed *Maia, Mother of Worlds*, please leave a review on Reynolds' Amazon.com page. You can also download (in PDF format only) free sample first chapters—and some complete stories—at <https://storiesbydavereyn.wordpress.com>.

