

Crystal groaned again, waving her hand weakly in front of her as if trying to swat something away—then she fell silent and the hand that Claire held went limp.

“Jaypers! I think she’s fainted! Please help her!” Claire’s frightened eyes flew to Pepper.

“That is what we are doin’ love. Continue to hold her hand; you are helpin’ to keep her grounded. Wyndon,” the dog’s eyes shifted, but his head stayed still, “please stay where you are. She needs your energies too.” The big dog thumped his tail softly and whined.

“She is vaning quickly, look.” Luis thrust his chin towards Crystal.

David stared at Crystal in horror. Claire gasped and Madelynn’s eyes darkened. Crystal’s light had begun to fade. No one had realized that she even had a light, but now they noticed darkness around her, like a shadow had been cast over her body. Wyndon whined and nuzzled Crystal’s hands, but she continued to recede into darkness.

“If we don’t do something now, she’ll be lost!” Angel cried out.

“My God!” Cosmo shouted in a terrified voice. “What is happening?!”

“Everyone, stand and get in a circle. Hold each other’s hands tightly and do not let go! Chaos draws near!” Kolie cried.

A great wind swirled into the room, knocking books off shelves and pictures from the walls. Claire screamed, throwing herself over Crystal. A loud wailing began careening around the room and the wind picked up; within the circle, the air was quiet and calm.

“Amin,” Madelynn shouted over the wailing, “ye must go an’ check on Deloria. I fear she may have escaped. Hurry!”

The small man nodded briskly and quickly made his way out of the room. As he left, he had to dodge flying pillows and books that flew through the air.

“I’ll go and help.” Daniel quickly caught up with the small man. He did not want to stay in this room which he now presumed was

haunted. Plus, Amin could probably use his help if the crazy old woman had escaped. He'd hoisted her over his shoulders once before, he could do it again.

Pepper's black and white hair flew madly about her face. "We must not break the circle," she shouted. "Do not bloody let go!" A pillow and a lamp flew over her head. Crystal is in trouble," Pepper's desperate eyes searched her friend's faces. "We have been witness to what this beast can do," she hissed, "and we can't let him take her. Her spirit is calling for help, but its evil coil is wrapped tightly around her throat.

"My friends, we must answer her call and we must do this without thought for ourselves. Remember, Crystal came back to the planet knowing it would be dangerous." Pepper's eyes beckoned her friends'. "If we do not offer her our aid, the beast will take her and another course may be set; one in which humanity might not survive. We are no longer Crystal's guardians, we will be her soldiers and we will fight at her side."

"Do you know vot you are doing?" Luis growled.

Pepper glared at the man who loved her friend. ""If we do not do this, she will die. You know this, Luis. If she dies, then all of our trials will have been for naught."

"Ve vill never be free," Luis muttered glumly as he looked at Kolie, the woman he'd loved for over half of a century. Kolie's eyes were soft and kind. She smiled and nodded her head.

Luis narrowed his eyes and searched the faces of those who stood beside him—the ones he'd kill for. They returned his stare with quiet nods of their own and then he, too, quietly acquiesced with a nod. If they were willing to sacrifice their future freedom, then so was he.

The wind whirled and screamed around the encircled group; throwing vases and books, pictures and baskets through the air. Wyndon's fur bristled; as did Lady's and Vincent's, but they stayed still, never once moving.

Pepper looked at Crystal, who was now completely cast in shadow, and she spoke in a clear, loud voice. "To you, Crystal Blue, I give you my speed, for in your travels you will surely need."

Kolie continued loudly as the noises outside the circle grew. "To you, Crystal Blue, I give you some memories, a cleansing breath in front of your enemies."

Sandra was next. "To you, Crystal Blue, attention to detail I give, you must remain focused to help all to live."

Marty shouted over the shrieking and the wailing. "To you, Crystal Blue, some courage to take, you'll need it for when your spirit awakes."

"To you, Crystal Blue, whose spirit will fly, I give you clear vision so others won't die," Daisy said with a wild look in her eye.

Levi spoke loudly and quickly. "To you, Crystal Blue, I give you some things, a thought that will bite a touch that will sting."

Angel said, "To you, Crystal Blue, my colors are yours, my magic will guide you through earth's hidden doors."

It was Luis's turn next and he turned his head and spat into the air. Turning back to Crystal he bowed his head and said, "To you, Crystal Blue, with the beautiful glow, I give you my music ven all others go."

The only one left was Madelynn, who didn't know if she could speak. Her granddaughter was no longer cast in shadow. A beautiful blue glow was illuminating Crystal from within—she looked radiant. Vincent meowed loudly as if to encourage Madelynn. "To me lovely, Crystal," she said, "I give ye me part, t' both me lovely granddaughters th' jewels in me heart."

Outside the circle all was quiet. The wind had stopped and the wailing had ceased. Only a few papers floated softly through the air, landing lightly on the floor. Now there was a quiet calm, but the air still felt electric. All who stood around Crystal were windblown and slightly battered, but they'd all held on, never letting go.

ILLUMINATING CRYSTAL

Pepper closed her eyes and took a deep breath. “The threat has left.”

They stood around Crystal’s still form and held their breath in anticipation to what would happen next—no one knew.

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CRYSTAL OPENED her eyes and found herself sitting in an empty room, much like the one she’d found herself in after finding the manuscript. But this time, there was no bright light and there was no pain—in fact, she felt nothing. She felt cold and empty.

“Hello?” her voice sounded hollow and foreign to her ears.

She heard a noise behind her and whipped her head around to find a large, shadowy shape slithering along the floor. She stared at the creature with deadened eyes—she knew it came for her.

Detached, she watched a black mass, like a heavy, dark storm cloud, roil up angrily behind the creature—the energy it created felt like static electricity. Crystal could feel the hair on her arms lift, but her heart beat dully—she had no fear of this strangeness. It was as if she’d accepted her fate. She watched as the creature and the storm cloud drew closer and closer.

Suddenly, one-by-one, animals began emerging from out of the storm cloud: a horse, an orca whale, a mouse, a cougar, an eagle, a scorpion, an iguana, a wolf, a white lion, a bear, and a small blue dragon.

As the animals emerged from the darkened storm cloud, a blue, serpentine wisp of smoke began to wind itself around Crystal, growing larger and glowing brighter as each animal emerged.

Crystal felt herself grow stronger as the animals and the blue smoke circled around her. She felt energized, like she was on fire, and she stood up with eyes blazing. The blue light around her became brighter and brighter until the darkness of the storm cloud and the shadows of the snake-like creature were no match for it and

they quickly faded away—for whenever there is the smallest bit of light, no darkness can exist.

As Crystal felt the energy that fired through her begin to subside, a tall, dark-haired woman walked through the circle of animals and the brown bear went to her side. She was the same woman that Crystal had seen before, the woman with the dark eyes who wore the blue headband. Crystal stared at the huge bear with the long, brown shaggy coat that now stood next to the woman. The bear returned her stare with its beady, black eyes and a twitch of its black nose.

The beautiful woman nodded her head and smiled at each one of the animals. “Thank you,” she said softly. Then she turned to Crystal. “Your soldiers serve you well,” she said. “Their devotion and sacrifice has saved many from certain misfortune. It would be wise for you to seek their counsel when you feel the need.” The woman flashed a quick smile.

“But beware,” her smile faded quickly as she whispered, “the dark serpent is cunning. It does not play by the rules; in fact it makes its own.” Her dark eyes flashed. “It walks in shadow and will hunt you down. Your soldiers have saved you, but the serpent has stolen your memories, take care when they return.” With that, the woman and the bear disappeared.

Crystal heard the woman’s voice. “You’re illuminating, Crystal. It is time for you to return. After all, you are the child of the stars that they’ve been waiting for.”

** Ÿ **

“DAVID, MADELYNN.” Amin stepped into David’s living room—his voice sounded odd. Everyone’s attention was drawn to his urgent tone and Claire gasped at his unkempt appearance. The small man’s face was pale and his tidy, white suit coat was soiled and torn.

David stood up. "Amin? What happened?"

"She took him," Amin's voice trembled, "she took the boy."

Cosmo's stomach lurched. Daniel!

Madelynn rushed over to Amin and put her hand on his shoulder. "Amin? Who took the boy?" she whispered.

"Deloria, she took Daniel. I tried to stop her, but..." he sat down on a chair and shook his head, "she got her hands untied. I tried to stop her, but, she took him before I could."

Cosmo's eyes were wild and his fists were clenched. She'd hurt him before and she would again. He turned his anguished eyes to Madelynn. "We've got to go find him."

Cosmo's narrow shoulders sagged as he looked at Crystal who appeared to be sleeping. She hadn't yet awakened. He didn't know if he could handle this—first Adam, then Crystal, and now Daniel.

"She'll be back," Luis growled. "Deloria won't hurt him, Cosmo. She can't."

"What do you mean, she can't?" Cosmo cried. "She did it before."

Claire walked over to Cosmo and held his hand. Her heart broke watching him fret over his grandson. Poor Daniel, she thought. He always seemed to be the one who got hurt.

"She won't hurt him because then we won't give her what she wants. She'll be back," Luis said again.

"We can't just stand here," Cosmo cried. "We have to go find him. And, Crystal..." His voice trailed off in despair.

Pepper smiled and gently led Cosmo over to a chair. "Dear man," she said to Cosmo as he sat down, letting her eyes roam over his familiar face—his features were identical to Constantine's. "They're both safe, I assure you."

"Amin! Did you make sure the book is safe?" Madelynn's voice cried out fearfully.

He nodded his head. "She doesn't know where it is. I moved it last night. She'll never find it."

"Are you sure?" Madelynn asked.

"Yes, I am sure."

Pepper looked at Crystal. "Crystal will be all right, Cosmo. If the book is safe, she is safe."

"Don't worry, Cosmo," Luis said. "Ve'll get your grandson back."

"But what does she want?" David asked. "You said she'll be back, looking for something."

"She wants th' blue crystal, David," Madelynn whispered. "But she'll not find it."

"And looking for her won't do any good, Cosmo," Sandra said quietly. "We'll be stronger for your grandson if we stay calm and keep our wits about us. We'll be ready for her, won't we?" Sandra's small eyes landed on each one of her friends.

They nodded slowly, each one knowing what they might be up against.

"Gran!" Crystal cried out, "What are you doing here?"

Crystal, now awake, stared at her grandmother with surprise. Then her eyes roamed the room.

Everyone noticed a light and a power they'd never seen in another's eyes before, and they were mesmerized by the blue power that seemed to emanate from her.

"Claire," Crystal furrowed her brow when she saw her sister, "what are you doing here?" Crystal noticed Wyndon. "And who is this?" She continued to look at the big dog and, after a moment, she smiled and patted his head. "Hello, Wyndon." It was as if she'd known him her whole life. The huge dog wagged his tail.

"Cosmo, why are you here? And why are Aunt Daisy and Uncle Marty...why are you all standing around me in a circle?"

No one had expected this response from Crystal, not even Pepper or Kolie.

"Crystal, don't ye remember?" Madelynn whispered.

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Crystal shook her head. "No, why are you here, Gran? What's happening? What's happened to David's house?" She stared at the room in shambles all around her.

Madelynn shook her head and stood up. "I don't know, 't is certain I really don't know. Pepper?"

"Give me one moment, will you please?" The exotic woman went to the corner of the room and stared out of the big window that over-looked the lake.

"David?" Crystal looked at the man who stared back at her with a puzzled expression. "What's going on? I thought we were supposed to keep this a secret, you said that nobody was to know."

TWENTY - SIX

*"From our ancestors come our names, but from our virtues, our honors."
Latin Proverb*

Crystal hated feeling like this. Not knowing what happened made her feel betrayed and extremely vulnerable. She felt like everyone had done something behind her back, like they didn't trust her enough to tell her anything. As she stood and stared at everyone she became angrier and angrier. She started to stomp out of the room with Wyndon at her heels, but was stopped by Pepper before she could leave.

"Jaypers," Crystal whispered. She thought she was the most beautiful woman she'd ever seen. She stared at Pepper with her mouth open.

Pepper smiled and led her back to the couch. "Sit down, please, love," she said gently.

Crystal sat down with a huff.

Claire stared at her sister. She was relieved that Crystal was back to her old feisty self, but she was confused. It was only yesterday that Crystal had looked at her the same way, asking why

she was here. She gave her sister a small smile and wondered if she remembered there was a serpent tattooed on her neck.

“Well,” Pepper began, “I know what has happened to Crystal.” She held up a large, dark green stone, beautifully polished and buffed, that fit in her palm perfectly. “I have come to rely on this stone as the information that I have received from it has never failed me,” she stroked the stone with her thumb. “Crystal doesn’t remember anything that’s happened since she was marked by the dark serpent.”

“What do you mean, ‘marked by the serpent’?” Crystal cried. “What serpent? I don’t remember anything...” Her eyes were wild.

Pepper took Crystal’s hand and looked into her eyes. “Do you trust everyone in this room, Crystal?”

Breathing rapidly, Crystal looked at everyone with narrowed eyes and then she slowly nodded her head.

“Do you trust the dog, Crystal?” Pepper asked. “You only just met him, did you not?”

Crystal stared at Wyndon and felt a solid, peaceful assurance emanate from him. “I trust him very much.” Crystal’s voice shook with emotion.

“Then will you do something for me, Crystal? Would you put your arms around him? This may help you remember.”

“Please, Crystal,” Claire whispered. “You must remember.”

Crystal took a deep breath and knelt down next to the large, black dog that had loyally sat at her side. She wrapped her arms around his neck and leaned in against his thick fur—he smelled good, like woodchips and fire. She held onto the dog for a long while, listening to his steady heart-beat along with her own.

And then, she fell asleep.

Wyndon whined and looked at Pepper with soulful, brown eyes.

She nodded her head. “That is good; she needs the sleep to help re-connect with her spirit.” Pepper looked at her friends with sad eyes and whispered, “When she was cast in shadow, I believe she

died. The dark serpent had her, but just for a moment. We were just in time."

Madelynn gasped and choked out, "What are ye sayin' then?"

"Her spirit left and she died, but her heart did not."

Claire's eyes were wide with shock. *Oh, no! Not again!*

Pepper said softly, "We are a part of her now; we will be her soldiers when she needs our strength. We were with her before," she looked to each of her friends, "but we are now bound to her in more ways than we can begin to imagine."

Luis grumbled and Kolie patted his hand.

"But will she remember?" David whispered, wondering how this could have happened to her.

"Time will tell," Pepper said softly. "I know that she was in-between worlds for a small bit of time, whether or not she leaves her memories there won't be known until she wakes up."

Claire shuddered at the thought of her sister 'walking in-between worlds.' It must have been dreadful.

"Where did that awful wind come from?" Cosmo, still shaken, asked in a shaky voice while staring at Crystal who slumbered peacefully on the floor next to Wyndon.

After a few quiet moments, Madelynn gasped as the truth dawned on her. "Claire, would ye please show us Crystal's tattoo?" she asked.

Claire gave her grandmother an odd look before she knelt down and gently pulled the neck of Crystal's sweater down.

There was a collective gasp when everyone saw the double serpent that now twined itself around Crystal's throat. She no longer had one snake wrapped around her neck, now she had two—one gold and one blue.

"Vell, I'll be damned," Luis whispered.

"'T is just as I thought," Madelynn whispered. "Th' wind was not a threat t' Crystal; it was a result of th' blue serpent comin' t' her aid—she heard her call. Th' wind was th' result of these two powers

comin' together, much like what happens when positive an' negative charges collide, it creates a great disturbance – th' serpents are polar opposites, th' proverbial good an' evil, or light an' dark."

Claire stroked her sister's hand. She looked so peaceful in sleep. She struggled with her grandmother's words, they were ominous and frightening.

"Now that Crystal wears the mark of both serpents, she carries both the light and the dark," Pepper added. "The blue serpent stepped in and gave Crystal her mark because we offered our gifts freely with compassion—she knew Crystal was dying. Her new mark has made her stronger."

"The dark serpent feeds on fear and ignorance that exist in our world and these energies have made it very strong," Levi said. "Crystal was born to illuminate, enlighten and empower humanity—the dark serpent fears an enlightened world and Crystal's mission is a threat to its existence. But it fears the light of the blue serpent even more."

"The blue serpent represents divine feminine wisdom and compassion," Sandra offered, "which, by the way, is represented by the eleventh layer of human DNA. When Crystal discovered the manuscript, this was the atomic layer of her DNA that was activated and most likely strengthened her heart against the dark serpent's initial attack. Most likely, her compassionate nature was amplified as well."

"How could you possibly know about her DNA adjustment?" David asked incredulously.

"There is nothin' that we don't know about Crystal," Madelynn said softly. "We are very closely connected t' her. We know about th' eleventh layer bein' activated, an' we know about th' cosmic lattice an' the akash."

"I felt another source of power when we were in the circle," Marty alleged quietly. "I believe this is the light that protected

Crystal when she first found the book – the white mist that she claimed protected her from the serpents.”

“And I felt the shaman’s power,” Daisy added, patting her husband’s large hand. “It was very strong.”

“I felt that too.” Pepper’s eyes roamed over Wyndon who had snuggled closer to Crystal.

Madelynn looked at her granddaughter with soft eyes. “Crystal has many protectors t’ be sure.”

“Vy did she hug the dog, Pepper?” Luis asked.

Pepper smiled. “They are kindred spirits, Luis, and their bond is very strong. He will help protect her memories.”

“But she only just met him,” Claire whispered, stroking Vincent’s back.

“And she remembered him, even though she forgot everything else,” David said.

“That is why she will need to remain close to him,” Pepper said quietly. “I believe she will need his protection from many things.”

Madelynn sighed deeply. “Marty, could ye take Crystal upstairs then?” she asked. “She’ll be needin’ t’ rest an’ we still have much t’ discuss.”

“Claire, go on with yer sister an’ stay with her. Let us know when she wakes up. An’ Marty, come right back down, we’ll wait fer ye. Claire will keep an eye on her sister then.”

Marty gently picked Crystal up and carried her from the room with Wyndon following close behind. Claire, with Vincent in her arms, began to follow, but before she left the room, she laid her hand on Cosmo’s shoulder. “He’ll be all right, Cosmo. Don’t worry,” Claire smiled softly. “Daniel is very brave.”

Cosmo wearily nodded his head as he reached up and patted her hand.

Madelynn sat down next to Cosmo—he looked lost. “Would ye like to go home now, Cosmo?” she asked softly. “’T is probably best if ye were home in yer own bed. An’ Cosmo, don’t worry about

Daniel. Deloria has seen somethin' important in him that makes him special—she won't hurt him because she believes that she needs him. There are forces involved here, Cosmo, that are greater than us. We have t' have faith that Daniel's part in this is not yet over. Can ye do that for me? Can ye do that for Daniel?"

Madelynn's words helped ease his fears. Maybe Daniel's part wasn't yet over. He had shown great courage in the last two days: protecting Claire and recovering from the large dog's attack with relative ease. He was after all an Attis, made from sturdy Greek stock. Cosmo gave Madelynn a weary smile. "Thank you, Madelynn. I shouldn't lose faith so easily. He's a strong lad. I just hope that Deloria doesn't hurt him."

Madelynn patted his hand. "Ye go on home an' get some rest. Give Amin a moment; I'm sure he'll bring ye home. I'll have David call ye if anythin' happens."

Cosmo stood up and turned to David. "Kiss Crystal good bye for me, would you?" he asked quietly. "I might not see her again for quite a while."

David smiled and grabbed the old man's hand. "'Course I will," he said gruffly. He was just as shaken up as the old man at Daniel's disappearance. He feared for Daniel, but he had more than the boy to worry about. Amongst all his other responsibilities, he worried about Crystal and now he needed to find his brother and his wife.

David sat down wearily. Lady came over and laid her head in his lap. She too had a long and busy day. He stroked her soft head and hoped he had the strength and the fortitude to carry out the mission. Last night, Madelynn had told him that the book and the blue crystal were two parts of a whole and both were extremely valuable—not in a monetary sense, but rather they were both ancient artifacts that contained extremely rare and cherished information. If either fell into the wrong hands...well, she hadn't said what could happen, but by the intensity of her gaze he'd gathered it wasn't good.

TWENTY - SEVEN

"In our every deliberation we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations."

From the Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy

"David," Madelyn peered at him closely once Cosmo and Amin had left, "what has the book told you to do next?"

"We're to go to South Dakota and meet with the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council, tomorrow."

"Ah, excellent," Daisy folded her hands together, "Crystal will begin her travels with the Lakota Sioux. They are direct descendants of the First Nation blood lines and ancestors of the Bear Clan and the Atlantean Serpent. You will learn more from them," she explained. "They will help Crystal clear away any doubts she might still have and most likely, they will have a ceremony to initiate her for the mission. A very important date draws near for the Lakota, a time of great sorrow. Crystal's visit will greatly honor them."

"I have some words of warning, David," Pepper said. "The first thing is you must never let Crystal near the book."

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David nodded his head. He'd heard these words before from Cosmo.

"The manuscript that you decipher, David, the book that Crystal found, is the Akashic Records in 3-D," Pepper explained. "This book has chosen you to be its keeper. You must be very careful with this book, for it is very powerful and very dangerous. You may be immune to its seductive pull, but Crystal is not.

"You see, this book is inter-dimensional and close to the source of all that is. It will try to seduce Crystal back to where it feels she belongs. She and the book resonate at the same frequency—a very high frequency. If Crystal comes into contact with it...well," her dark eyes bore into his, "I cannot stress the importance of keeping her away from it.

"Remember what you learned in the mystery schools, David. Because of her DNA activations, the atomic structure of her cells has turned crystalline, changing her human template, just like what happened to the visionaries and divine prophets before her who heralded great change. They too resonated at higher frequencies which enabled them to do their work.

"Like them," Pepper said, reminding him of something he already knew, "she's a shaman, an avatar who has the ability to access divine information with relative ease because she's no longer bound to this earthly plane—she can easily travel through earth's twelve overtones."

David nodded his head, although he was a bit surprised. He hadn't realized Crystal held so much power. "I tried to tell her this, but she didn't believe me." Then he added sadly, "but now she's forgotten everything."

Pepper smiled. "Her conscious mind, yes, but not her unconscious mind. She'll never forget who she is."

David shook his head, she really was special. In order to be able to perform these tasks that Pepper spoke of, the masters before her

had studied for dozens of years. Crystal gained this knowledge in a matter of minutes. He shook his head. Unbelievable.

“But, I cannot tell you anymore than this, David,” Pepper said. “The manuscript will explain more as you decipher it. Pay close attention to what it says.

“In many ways Crystal is very powerful, but now because of her dark mark and past betrayals, she is weaker than she was meant to be for this mission that she was born to fulfill.

“You see,” Pepper explained, “Crystal came back to satisfy a contract her ancestor made with a group of ancient beings many light years ago. These ancient beings have cared for the planet for thousands and thousands of years.

“The ancients promised that if mankind did not destroy the planet by the year 2000, they would freely offer them the gifts of the masters—the compassionate nature of being human. In return, the ancient’s energies that are held deep within the earth would be released, no longer being bound to the earth. And humanity, having re-gained the sacred knowledge of the masters—their divine birthright—they would be honored as the new caretakers of the planet.

“But when Deloria and her wretched deceit defiled the sacred tomb, their agreement was compromised. You see, within the tomb lay the blue crystal that protected the sacred contract. For thousands of years, the sacred knowledge had been cherished and well-guarded within many indigenous tribes. But as a result of this treacherous breach, the darkness that was unleashed sought out the guardians of the secrets and has wreaked havoc upon many of the ancient tribes.

“Fortunately for many, Crystal chose to return despite this betrayal. When the world-wide celebration for peace and harmony occurred twenty-three years ago, it brought more light to the planet and raised the vibration of the planet enough so that Crystal could return. But now her mission and her well-being will be much more tenuous.

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“Many of the tribes she was to meet with have been virtually exterminated and their sorrowful memories lay buried deep within the earth, laced with betrayal and without hope for release. There are only twelve of the original thirty-nine tribes left. What was to be a joyous celebration will now most likely be a mission wrought with danger and treachery.”

Kolie smiled and said sadly, “It is no secret why Deloria chose my colleagues and me for her ill-fated trip. All of our unique bloodlines are directly tied to a tribe that guards a sacred message.”

Luis grumbled and Kolie squeezed his hand. “The reason the dark serpent was unable to destroy the twelve remaining tribes is because with our unique powers, we were able to protect them,” Luis said, “and now we must protect Crystal too.”

David looked at the faces of those who sat around him. Their expressions were a mix of regret and pain—they’d obviously seen a great deal of tragedy.

“It is imperative that Crystal seeks our aid and uses our powers when she is in danger,” Kolie said. “We can assist her and she will most likely succeed. Then the blue serpent can do her job—travel through the subterranean tunnels deep below earth’s surface and release the ancient energies.

“The blue serpent has lain dormant for thousands of years...waiting while the dark serpent poisoned men’s minds and used them to destroy and kill thousands of innocents. It is her time to heal the planet of those sorrowful memories, and the more compassionate and enlightened humanity becomes as Crystal unveils the sacred truths, the stronger will she be. This is how the contract was written, and if all goes well, all of mankind can remain on the planet for another twelve thousand years.”

“We can only hope Crystal stays safe and the information she unveils will be enough to illuminate all of humanity,” Angel whispered. “If she dies or is incapacitated before all twelve tribes have unveiled their sacred data, chaos will reign for some time as the

world enters the Fifth Age. Those who don't honor their true divinity and their new compassionate role as caretakers of the planet will discover the higher vibrations of the new earth will be too much to bear and they will most likely die."

Pepper gave David a tired smile. "You must ensure that she travels safely and completes her tasks, David. The first nation people know of and honor Crystal's ancestor—a goddess from the stars, loved and feared by many, who has walked the earth in many different forms.

"But because she bears the dark serpent's mark, some may not trust her and she may be tested," Pepper said solemnly. "Many dangers await her along her journeys, my dear boy."

David dragged his hand over his face. Holy Shmoly, he borrowed one of Crystal's favorite expressions, what had he gotten himself into?

"And you must also protect yourself." Pepper grabbed his hand. "You, David, are the book's one true keeper. You are just as important to this mission as Crystal is and just as vulnerable to the sinister dark power that seeks to thwart her mission. Do not ever forget that. You, my dear friend, like Crystal, came back to the planet for a special purpose. Why do you think we worked together so many years ago?" Her eyes twinkled when she saw his surprise. "That was no accident. Your knowledge and well-being are key to her success."

"Take good care of me granddaughter, David," Madelynn whispered, her blue eyes glistening with unshed tears. "I fear that ye an' th' fey dog Wyndon will be very busy keepin' Crystal safe."

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THE BIG yellow bus lumbered on its way down the dark, cold and empty highway towards the South Dakota reservation. There was an anniversary drawing near of a time where many had died

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and the small group of people inside the bus—some asleep, some awake—felt something stir within them. Heaviness lay in the hearts of those whose ancestors had walked on this land – they felt the pain and the anguish they’d not felt the last time they had traveled this way.

Serena looked at Adam who was laid out in the back of the bus, covered in a heavy wool blanket. Will had never left his side and had done what Grey Eyes had instructed before they’d left Minneapolis. He’d kept the small bowl of sage lit and once every hour he’d waved the smoke over Adam with the beautiful white feather that Grey Eyes had told him to use. The scented smoke smelled wonderful and had calmed Serena’s frayed nerves. It seemed to help Adam as his color improved and his bruises were already fading. She hoped the visit to the Sacred Hearth would help her brother.

Her phone vibrated in her pocket. She looked at the screen and saw that he’d finally returned her call. “Hi Cosmo,” she said quietly. “You got my message.

** ✧ **

CRYSTAL AWOKE from her dream with a start. She felt as if she’d been in the dream for days. Then its nebulous thread began to fade as most dreams do and it receded into the place where it’s most hard to grasp. She opened her eyes and for a moment she had no idea where she was. Then she looked around the beautiful blue room and she remembered. She was in David’s house and today she would have to get on an airplane.

Bollocks.

She snuggled deeper into the covers and thought about her imminent departure. She’d be traveling to South Dakota. She didn’t want to go, but then her lips lifted into a soft smile as she realized she’d most likely be meeting some of Adam’s relatives. Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad.

She sat up and stretched. She felt wonderfully refreshed, as though she'd slept for hours and hours. She thought of Adam again and smiled. She would miss him, but she'd think of him often as she walked under the stars.

Crystal jumped out of bed and nearly stumbled over a large sleeping form. Wyndon scrambled to his feet and cocked his head to the side. Crystal peered at him with one eyebrow raised.

He wagged his tail.

Then she smiled. "Well, hello Wyndon. Are you all packed and ready for an adventure?"

Woof!

She smiled and patted the dog's great head. As Crystal patted his head, tiny threads of her surreal dream seeped slowly back into her memory: dark storm clouds, blue animals, large snakes and strange underground worlds filled her thoughts.

Her eyes flew open wide. "Bloody hell!"

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Will she remember?

Her memories are in her heart; if she opens it she will remember everything.

Will she learn from them?

Time will tell.

The soldiers have made a great sacrifice.

It is what they were meant to do.

And now, he waits for her in sleep.

His people are strong; if she listens, she may succeed.

I am anticipating a great journey.

As am I. As am I.

~Acknowledgments~

There are many who need to be thanked –some know who they are—some don't.

My children are the loves of my life. Their enthusiasm for life, their courage in the face of uncertainty, their earnest struggles finding their path, and their love for each other inspires me to never give up that which I seek.

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~About the Author~

PB Morlen began writing this story back in 1995 when her children were very small and quite mischievous. Of course, she named two of her main characters after them. As she tended to her children, she tucked her story away, but she never forgot her beloved characters...they wouldn't let her forget.

For fourteen years, Crystal's story simmered in her brain and in her heart while she played with her children and gained a greater appreciation for Earth's changes and the dawning of a divine humanity. She dreamed of Crystal and Adam, David and Wyndon, Cosmo and Claire, Daniel, Gina, Madelynn, and the others.

And then, in 2009, after witnessing a rather enigmatic young performer whose insane talent inspired her to embrace her story and bring it to life, she picked up her pen and began completing her first book. She infused many of her own experiences into the story, and as yet, has much more to write.

Currently, PB Morlen lives in Minnesota. She attends college part-time, seeking her degree in Elementary Education as children tend to 'light up her life.' And when she pulls herself away from her writing, she loves to dig in her garden, paint, bike, canoe, walk her dogs, squish her cats, and watch her favorite T.V. show: 'House.'

She is currently putting the finishing touches on her second novel in the White Bird series, Crystal Blue Sky. Look for it available summer, 2012.

Please visit PB Morlen's website @ www.pbmorlen.com, or contact her at pbmorlen@gmail.com.

CRYSTAL BLUE SKY

Book Two in the White Bird Series

PB Morlen

Coming summer, 2012

ONE

A dimple on the chin, the devil within.

Gaelic Proverb

City of Jiroft

Kerman Province, Iran

January, 1960

Through narrowed eyes, she watched the brothers of Aryan descent walk side by side down the narrow street of the crowded city. “Perfect.” She all but salivated as she rubbed her pale, gnarly hands together. The small man had told her the truth; his brother was certainly a fine specimen.

She cackled quietly when she spied the dark form that she’d only just awakened from death’s slumber glide silently behind them. And then, before anyone spied her watching the brothers, she vanished.

The brothers hadn’t seen the disturbing form slink out of the cemetery they passed a few moments before. Its dreaded form shifted at an awkward gait along the ground keeping tight to the outer walls of buildings so as not to be detected by the unsuspecting pair. They didn’t know that something followed them. How could they?

Yesterday, Amin—the older of the two Fèrdôsë brothers—had met with the old woman and he had set up a meeting with the

woman for today where they would learn how they could earn some money. Even though the brothers were members of the Shah's Secret Police, they had often found themselves hopelessly hungry and desperate to remove themselves from the merciless group.

The two men were very unlike in appearance; the younger one was very tall and muscular, with long, black shaggy hair and startling blue eyes. The older brother was short, trim, and tidy, and wearing a bright white turban. Neither wore the gray and red uniform of the Secret Police; they had agreed to exile themselves from the group only three days before. Their outer appearance varied, but their inner workings were quite similar. After all, they were brothers and they were both hungry.

"I have not eaten since yesterday," the tall one rubbed his stomach. "It is unfortunate that I almost stole a mango from the fruit stand. That is how desperate I am."

"Wyndon, it is good that you did not attempt to steal the fruit," the short brother Amin nodded his head. "You know the penalty for theft. You do not wear your uniform for protection and you need both of your hands."

The tall one grimaced and clenched one fist as the other gripped the hilt of his belted scimitar. "I would not have been caught; I am fast and I am strong. Do not underestimate me brother. It was not for that reason that I hesitated. The fruit was rotten."

"Ah, well then it is good that you did not steal it. It would have been a tragedy if the price you would have to pay for a piece of rotten fruit would be the loss of your hand. If you are so intent on stealing, maybe you should steal from someone who could afford the loss, eh brother? It would not do our neighbors any good if you stole from them."

The tall man shrugged his shoulders and reticently agreed. He should not steal from his neighbors, Allah would not approve.

As the two men walked deeper into the city the streets narrowed into alleys where beggars cried for mercy, their huddled forms lined

the dark street—their hungry eyes stared out of gaunt faces in hooded robes—they dared not bother the men who carried the curved sabers. Wyndon cringed; he hoped their desperate situation wouldn't have them joining these poor pathetic souls anytime soon.

They neared a double set of doors—one amongst many—set into the wall of the building lining the darkening alley. As they approached, they could hear the loud pronouncement from the mosque begin to call out the mystical and powerful *adhān*; the Islamic call to prayer. Amin pushed one door open and the pair entered not knowing what they would find.

"This is where she said we should wait," Amin whispered. "She instructed us to wait here until she arrived. She will then tell us what we are to do; she promised me it would be honest work, and work that will pay well."

"Let us hope she comes soon." Wyndon's eyes darted furtively around the empty room. "I do not like being cooped up in this small space when I do not know what is on the other side of these walls. I do not want a night creature to come upon us and suck out our blood."

Amin smiled at his brother. They had both feared the vampire-like creatures all their lives. They knew they were myth, but nevertheless they had put great energy into staying away from them.

Unbeknownst to the brothers, the dark form that had followed accompanied them into the stale smelling room and curled up in a corner and waited until she came to give instructions. Its hooded red eyes gazed unseeingly towards the door as it waited for its gift. Wyndon shifted uncomfortably, he sensed something ominous approach. He held the grip of his scimitar tightly, he and his brother went back to back—he had felt the same threat—his weapon was already drawn.

Slowly, the door opened and what entered took the brother's breaths away. A woman, fairy-like in appearance, drifted in through the doors and stood in front of the pair. Her golden, waist-length hair

danced around her tiny form; her green eyes sparkled from her angelic face as she apprised the two men who stood before her. Both men were thoroughly entranced. She reminded them of the *peri*, the mythical fallen angels who appeared as fairies.

“Ah, splendid creatures,” she purred as she circled them. “And brave ones who carry their blades well. They will serve me quite nicely.” A tiny, pointed tongue darted out of her mouth and licked delicate pink lips.

Wyndon snapped out of his trance and thrust his chin at the tiny woman. “What is it that you offer?”

Her smile set off a pair of exquisite dimples. “Did not your brother tell you?”

Wyndon eyed her warily—he was beginning to feel trapped. The air in the room was beginning to feel quite heavy. What startled him the most was her mastery of the Farsi language. Never before had he seen women of her coloring speak his native tongue—it set his nerves on edge. He turned his head and tried to see his brother’s face; Amin hadn’t taken his eyes off the mysterious creature with the flowing hair.

Trying to snap his brother out of his spell, Wyndon jabbed him with his elbow, but Amin’s wide-eyed gaze remained fixed on the woman. “No, he did not tell me what you offer,” Wyndon said flatly. “Tell us now, or be on your way.”

Her twinkly laugh danced through the dark room and the hairs on the back of Wyndon’s neck stood up. Something about this female creature had his hackles up and he was becoming very nervous. “Brother,” he said loudly as he grabbed his arm. “Look at me.” He took his brother’s chin and turned his face towards him looking directly into his eyes. He stumbled backwards and fear gripped him at what he saw; two red eyes gazed out of Amin’s stony and very pale face.

He whirled and faced the little woman. “What have you done to my brother?” he bellowed.

She laughed again and folded her hands in front of her demurely. "I have not done anything," she said. "It must have been the vetala in the corner there," she motioned with her chin. "He's been following you two for quite some time."

Wyndon's eyes flew to the dark form huddled on the floor in the corner. *Vetala!*? His terrified heart hammered in his chest and blood rushed to his head so fast his ears hurt. But they were not real! It was what he feared the most! His hands shook and he began to sweat as the creature unfolded itself and stood. At once the back of his shirt was soaked with perspiration and his knees started to give way.

No, I must stay strong for my brother! Pull yourself together man!

"What is it you want?" he said in a low voice that shook with anger and fear.

"I see that you are very intelligent," she said lightly. "For your brother's life, an agreement you must make. The vetala will not harm him if you do what I say. If I were you, I would decide most quickly; your brother begins to wane."

Wyndon looked at his brother and saw that his skin was becoming paler and his cheeks had begun to sink in.

"He waits for my command," the little woman said again motioning to the demonic creature.

Wyndon fearfully eyed the corpse whose body had been overtaken by the demon: its feet and hands were pointing backwards indicating the markings of the vetala. He knew that his brother would soon join this demon in the twilight zone, the existence between life and the after-life, if he didn't act soon.

"What is it you want sorceress?" He asked the woman, now knowing what she was. These mystical conjurers were the only ones who could capture the vetala; making them slaves to do their bidding.

"You two must accompany me as soldiers of the Secret Police to help me gain entrance into your country. I have traveled with my students and they are now being detained at gun-point. I find this

very inconvenient. If you do as I request, then your brother will remain unharmed. If you refuse, his soul will be lost forever.”

How could he refuse? “Do you know what you ask?” Wyndon knew that if he and his brother were seen in the uniforms they had discarded they would be shot on sight.

“I know what it is I ask. I also know that if you do not answer me in one second I will instruct my demon to rip your brother into shreds.” She smiled daintily and showed off her perfect white teeth.

“Have your demon release him at once and we will do as you ask.”

The sorceress moved her hands quickly and silently instructed the vetala to release the small man from its death-like hold. At once, Amin sagged against Wyndon and shook his head which set his turban at an odd angle.

Wyndon stood tall and strong next to his brother and allowed him a few moments to compose himself. Amin was proud and would not appreciate any attention on his part. He knew his brother had composed himself when he heard him speak.

“Who are you and what do you want?”

The woman gathered her cloak, drew up its hood and headed out the door. “Get dressed and come with me,” was all she said.

Get dressed? Wyndon glanced down, and there on the floor were their dreaded uniforms of the Secret Police.

“Wyndon?” The small man’s eyes turned worriedly towards his brother.

“Do as she says,” he growled. “We will wear them one last time, brother. And then, as Allah is my witness, they will be burned.”

