



**GODS OF  
TOMORROW**

**LAWRENCE  
*BURK***

# Gods of Tomorrow

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## Introduction

Three hundred and fifty years have passed since the Comet Providence altered life on Earth and created the existence of demigods with supernatural abilities. As original descendants, their powers were a genetic gift, and their duty was their burden. Every civilization had to choose whether to love their demigods or fear them, or both. Most people accepted them unconditionally, never having known a time without them, but for some, their presence had a far less admirable meaning. A growing population of skeptical citizens revealed the necessity for change.

The Earth's population had grown to fifteen million, to include six demigods who were given their powers to protect humanity. This is the story of those demigods and their struggles to remain relevant in the face of change. It was supposed to be a time of peace and prosperity, and for hundreds of years humanity existed without turmoil, but like the gods of yesterday, over population and the demands upon the demigods created a paradox, which needed to be resolved.

Supreme counsellors passed down their supernatural powers to the next presiding generation during a Tricentennial Celebration. However, when a mining accident took the lives of the Supreme Counsellors in the middle of their reign, their powers were temporarily returned to the earth, and laid in state until they could be passed down to a new brood of demigods.

With the absence of the gods, negative forces slowly surfaced within the growing society and created a lack of confidence and control in the lives of many.

The gods of the ancient world couldn't keep up with the populous and allowed themselves to be overrun. They lost control

over them and ultimately receded back into a spiritual realm, lost to history as myths and legends. The gods of today would be tested by a similar growing population and must come to terms with the people's desire for independence, and their own ability to adapt to a life without supernatural powers. The mysteries of tomorrow will not be solved by the gods, but by the spirit within the human heart.

## Chapter One

Below the bustling streets of East Providence, in an underground tavern booming with business, social dissidents felt free to express themselves without the fear of judgement from the demigods or their followers. The demigod's control over the people made a growing population of citizens suppress and hide their thoughts and desires. Resentment had grown among many who saw the demigod's presence as a danger to their freedom. In the back of the tavern, Ryan and Geoff engaged in conversation over a pint of beer and shared their desire to rebel against the gods.

Mistaken for music, a hideous noise echoed off the stone walls under the city expressed the chaos within its patrons' consciousness; music with no melody, no rhythm or rhyme, just random tones, and notes that they thought would prevent the supernatural powers of the gods from penetrating their collective thoughts. They were wrong.

Colt knew of this bar; it wasn't the first time he had been there. He was on a mission to quell a growing resistance. He walked boldly down the stairs into the tavern where his suspect was located. His presence was immediately felt by all he had passed within the walls of the dark corridor leading to the main chamber. Ryan and Geoff were in a corner booth, deep in conversation as Colt walked straight to their booth and sat next to Geoff. The insidious music mysteriously stopped, Colt stared across the table at Ryan and calmly said, "I know everything," he stared at him with intense intimidation. His voice was deep and powerful, he asked Ryan, "Do you know everything?" He paused, "Well, do you!" his voice rose sternly.

"No," Ryan spoke with a quiver in his voice.

"That's right because you and I are not the same. Accept it, I am not on your planet, you are on mine." Colt attempted to leave no doubt in Ryan's mind that he was no force to be reckoned

with. “Do you see the girl with wild black hair behind me? In five seconds, she’s going to point at you,” he counted down “four, three, two, one,” and true to form, she pointed at him.

Ryan knew Colt was controlling her, which served as a reminder that he was inferior. Colt continued, “Your disrespectful disposition to us is near retaliatory attention. Perhaps instead of focusing on overthrowing us, you should concentrate on making the best of it and help us.” With that warning, Colt snapped his finger, and another girl came forward yelling and pointing at Geoff and claimed he assaulted her. Security came from all directions and had Geoff constrained to the ground within seconds. Ryan appeared shocked, but not nearly as shocked as Geoff. Colt then asked Ryan, “How do you want all this to end? Your friend will be brought to the council for which I preside. That’s right, his fate is directly in my hands, as is yours. I suggest you reconsider your position.”

As he stood to leave, for good measure, Colt gave Ryan a telepathic blast of subatomic energy that causes the human brain to kickstart itself, much like rebooting a computer. This experience was referred to as berserking. The phenomenon made people realize that their brain had been turned off and restated, all the while knowing there was an unaccounted-for period in between. Up was down, right was left, vertigo twisted their mind, all designed to cause a submissive resignation in people’s attitudes. Colt left as fluently as he arrived, while Ryan was left to deal with the accusations causing quite a ruckus behind him. Ryan wondered why Colt set up his friend and not him, why didn’t he force some hypnotic mind control over him? He used to feel safe in the tavern but that was clearly no longer the case. He had so many questions and no answers. Feeling totally violated and confused, he sat back in the booth and finished his beer in a daze.

Because Colt rarely got personally involved with human behaviors, things tended to become volatile when he did. At least

it wasn't Fagan who was assigned this mission. Fagan wasn't as big or powerful looking like Colt was, but he was more devious and ruthless. The other four demigods were daughters of the previous Prime Counselor, the chief of the Supreme Counsellors, and would have conducted themselves in more respectful and regal manner. They carried themselves more as prima donnas and could not understand why the people would not love and admire them. Even though Colt was forceful and abrasive, he was the right demigod for the job. He had no intention of hurting anyone in the tavern, he was sending a message. When Geoff stands at the council to answer for the false claim, Colt intended to let him go with yet another warning about being faithful to the gods. Fagan, on the other hand, may have just as well erased Ryan and Geoff's memories and left them to wander the streets.

Prudence, referred to herself more as a princess than a god and ruled over her three sisters and fellow demigods by virtue of seniority. They all lived together in a castle, atop of a 1500-foot manmade mountain, built a century prior by the demigods that came before them. The mountain majestically stood to the east of New Providence and looked down on the delta plains city like a symbol of majesty.

“How bad is it, Colt?” Prudence asked, upon his return.

“There is definitely a movement to discourage our control,” Colt said.

“I knew it,” Fagan blurted out. “How bad is it, what do you make of it?”

“I believe that we spend too much time in their world.”

“Their world? You mean our world,” Fagan insisted.

Prudence interrupted, “Colt is right, if they are to love us, they need to come to us. We should reconsider letting them govern themselves a little more and only get involved as we are needed.”

Colt looked confused and said, “I thought that is what we are doing. We have proven ourselves to be fair and just. Century



after century we've protected and provided for them, that's what we do, that's who we are."

"I disagree to this extent," Fagan said. "This may be the time we need to protect ourselves. Every dynasty before us has changed and fallen. Are we going to be the next generation of counsellors to fall?" he argued. "This rebellion has to stop before it gets out of hand."

"Calm down," Prudence replied, "before we convene the council for guidance, each of us must go among the masses and see for ourselves, what the situation is then shall share our observations."

Colt spoke out, "We agreed that I would look into this, why do you now assert control?"

"Because I can," she replied with confidence. Colt couldn't argue, she had all three of her sister's votes and voice.

Fagan offered, "If they need to come to us in order for them to love us, why don't we give them a natural disaster to force them to it, as our ancestors have done?"

Even Colt saw the apathy in his statement, "We're better than that, waging war to force servitude is archaic. Prudence is right, we all need to see for ourselves the extent of discontent before we can come to a just decision. For the one called Ryan, I felt his pain and fear of us, but felt very little love or respect. We need to know why they are discontented if we are to change things. The people should not fear us, they should love us."

"Ok," Fagan said, "I'll disguise myself and mingle among them, but do not expect a compassionate referral. Our responsibilities are much greater than the attitudes of a few malcontents and may I remind you all, the masses have turned their backs on us many times in the past."

"That was eons ago," Prudence said, "and you're fooling yourself if you think they owe you, their devotion. The only reason we have the powers we have, is for their protection."

Fagan replied, “That doesn’t mean it won’t happen again, sometimes we have to protect them from themselves.”

They were all thinking to themselves about the situation as they parted ways and continued with their day.

After his head cleared, Ryan left the tavern and went down to the courthouse to vouch for Geoff and get him released, pending a hearing. “What the hell was that about? Geoff asked him.

“Colt was sending us a signal.”

“A signal? No, a signal is the waving of a hand or a flashing light. What he did was malicious. He looked right at you and did this to me.” Geoff proclaimed.

Ryan understood but didn’t apologize. “He was giving us a chance not to play this game, but I don’t see it that way. It’s a game to him because he knows he can control us, but it’s anything but a game to us, it’s who we are. They want to take our freedom away and I don’t believe we should let them.”

Geoff said, “I agree to some extent, but you’ve become obsessed.”

“So be it,” Ryan said. “I don’t want someone knowing my deepest secrets and desires, I don’t want to be watched or listened to all the time. No privacy, no freedom of thought. No, I can’t live like that.”

“They have always protected us and guided us though some very terrible times,” Geoff admitted and tried to downplay the severity with which Ryan saw it.

“Yeah, but at what cost?” Ryan replied.

Geoff knew Ryan had no chance, but asked him anyway, “So, you can’t physically match Colt, you can’t mentally match Colt, and I doubt if you could spiritually match him, how do you propose to beat him?”

“I’m not,” he paused and with a raised brow, “I plan to let him beat himself. I will let his actions prove to the people that my claims against him are true, thus encouraging others to resist

them. Hell, you've seen what he can do firsthand, if he can do to one of us, he can do it to any one of us."

"So, you're a sacrifice?" Geoff asked.

"Aren't we all? Ryan muttered.

Geoff thought about it for a couple seconds, "Ok, how are we going to do this?"

Ryan said, "There might be a bug or two to figure out, but I plan to stand at the fountain downtown and holler out Colt's spiteful actions. He will retaliate and the people will see malevolence. All I need, is to have people pass the word around to be in the square at eight o'clock so they can witness for themselves that the gods are tyrannical."

"You are certifiable. Why don't you just start a rumor that one of the gods is plotting amongst another, to get them to fight?"

"They will see through that immediately." Ryan stated. "I need them to take action publicly using their own ego against them, rumors just won't do."

"What makes you think they won't see through your plan?"

"I'm betting they haven't looked inside themselves in fifty-years. Even if they thought it was a trap, they're too arrogant to believe they could be fooled."

Geoff mumbled, "Like I said, you're certifiable."

Prudence and her sisters, Elle, Emma, and Eave, who have occasionally referred to themselves as Sugar, Spice, and All Things Nice, talked with people in town. Emma loved to touch people; she gained so much knowledge of them with just the touch of an arm. Eave and Elle were the youngest, both had long golden hair and looked like angels. Men and women alike have been spellbound by their beauty. Prudence absorbed all their thoughts and emotions and came to her decision. "Girls, we should offer this Ryan fellow a proposition. We should create a department to act as liaison between the people and us. We need

to persuade him, even if we have to hypnotize him, we need him working for us rather than against us.”

The four walked through the streets of town, with eyes on them from all directions, and they knew it. They loved the attention and they felt they deserved it. Like heavenly angels, they passed the people smiling and touching them, glowing with a vibrant golden hue. They stepped down into the tavern and took a seat in the corner. He didn't know why, but Ryan felt the urge to go back to the tavern. Once he entered the tavern, he understood what it was that compelled him. He walked slowly toward them, the closer he got, the brighter their aura drew him in. “Have a seat,” Prudence gestured beside Elle.

Ryan was caught off guard. He had never met the sisters but had heard rumors of their beauty and charm. He sat nervously, careful not to touch her. Prudence addressed him more intimately than he expected and caught him off guard once again. “How may I be of service your highness?” He didn't know how to address them and nervously spit out his salutation.

“I am Prudence, and these are my sisters Emma, Elle and Eave.”

“Call us...” Elle tried to interrupt.

Prudence stopped her by raising her hand, then turned to Ryan, “We are here to offer you a chance to be revered by your people, accepted by us, and given a chance to truly make a difference in society as a whole. Basically, the opportunity of a lifetime. We want you to work for us.”

“Uh, I don't understand,” he said.

“It's no secret you are unhappy with us. This confuses us because your unhappiness may affect the lives of many people, people for whom you have no right to affect. You see, as protectors of our fragile civilization, we cannot allow harm to come to our citizens as long as we have the ability to prevent it. You would break your own rules and allow your brothers to be harmed, just to prove you don't need or want us? We have an

alternative; we shall give you a little power to better communicate directly to us the needs of the people and their desires. But mind you, we only assert ourselves in the big picture of things. We do not answer prayers. Those things you must do for yourselves.”

“Before I decide, can you answer a question?” Ryan needed to know, “can you talk with my parents?” His parents died a couple years back and never had the chance to reconcile their differences.

“Yes and no,” she said. “I can see every thought and memory you have of them. I can look into your soul and retrieve them, then show them back to you, but they cannot answer your questions, you have to answer your own questions.”

She knew exactly what he was thinking and feeling and told him exactly what he needed to know. She was much more spiritually powerful than Colt. Ryan felt he could trust her, but he also knew it could all be a deception. “What do I have to do?” he asked.

“Good,” Prudence said, smiling at her sisters. “Colt and Fagan may find their way back to you; if they do, tell them I have called upon you to serve. They will not harm you, in fact they will leave you in record time to confront me. I will call upon you again soon to hear the people’s grievances of late.”

Up on the mountain, Colt and Fagan knew what prudence had done. “Why did she fuss about this at all, if she was going to evaluate and take control of it herself?” Colt asked Fagan.

“Because she can,” in a condescending tone, Fagan said.

Quick to push Fagan’s button, Colt snickered, “I definitely feel resentment.”

“Prudence!” Fagan called out. An echo across the mountain resonated all the way downtown. It wasn’t long before Prudence returned.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t give you a chance to provide your input, please forgive me,” she stated rhetorically. “I saw the perfect opportunity to remedy our problem and took it. We will

allow them a department to bring grievance to us. The one called Ryan will be in charge and will serve only as a way for them to communicate with us.”

“But we’ve always been able to communicate with them.”  
Colt was confused.

“Yes, but now they will believe we are actually listening,”  
Prudence suggested.

“And what happens when we don’t fulfill all their silly or selfish demands? When their cries for help with the hardships of daily living go unfulfilled, what then?” Fagan questioned.

Prudence’s reply came with a solemn tone, “They don’t want us to fix things, they just want us to let them fix things.”

“They will blame us for every little hardship,” Fagan said. “I don’t believe they are looking for freedom, I think they are weak and need us more than they are willing to admit.”

“Maybe so, but we have to remember, it is their survival that gives us purpose. Our duty is to them, not the other way around.”

Prudence was the wise one, Colt knew it, and knew he needed to pay attention. It was easy for Colt to influence Fagan, any suggestion of playing with the minds of the average person would fuel Fagan’s fire for mischief. Colt couldn’t boast as much about Prudence. She always had him under a spell. He desperately wanted to believe that the people worshipped him as they did her. He wasn’t jealous, he was envious and under a spell. He knew she was right, and his pride was all he had that kept them apart.

High atop Mount Baker, the demigods were discussing their objectives, while Ryan was consoling his own family in the town below. His fiancé was the only person in his life who could persuade him to do anything. Blanca came from an affluent family, gifted in many ways and very much in love with the Gods. Ryan was trying to save her from the Gods, and she was trying to get the Gods to save him. Now they can both be true.

“Darling,” Blanca said softly, “We must do this. You will see everything clearer and be closer to our creator than ever before.”

“It is clear, I cannot hide from them, they can easily control me, there simply is no other option. Maybe this is the best option. I had a conversation with five of the six gods within twenty-four hours. I personally have never been that close to any of them.”

“Tell me what it was like,” she whispered.

Ryan said, “Colt was a little bit scary, but in a calculated way. He’s much bigger than I thought he would be, but you could tell he could wield his form well. He was intimidating. The sisters, on the other hand, were angels of mercy. I now understand your admiration toward them. Such warmth and beauty are addictive.”

“Can I meet them?” Blanca grabbed his hand and pulled him near.

How could he refuse? “Of course, you will meet them but be careful.”

Mentally fading away in thought, Ryan recalled every facet of his encounter and realized he was in fact, at the demigod’s mercy.

“Ryan? Blanca looked into his far-away stare, “can you hear me?” she said as consciousness regained his presence.

“Yeah, I can hear.”

“When can we visit the mountain?”

“That’s not up to me. Let’s give them a little time to figure out the protocols. I wonder, now that I’m working with them, will they let Geoff off the hook?”

Blanca suggested that Prudence wouldn’t allow it. “The Prime Counselor has the last word. They always have. She will make it right.”

“I’m glad someone has that much confidence.”

Ryan and Blanca have been together 12 years and Ryan would occasionally make a reference to starting a family. Blanca felt he was about to bring it up again and reminded him, "I'm only marrying once, I'm only having one child and that won't happen for quite a while. That is the plan, which has always been the plan and you have always known that."

"I didn't say anything."

"You were going to."

"This is what I didn't like about the gods. They were always in your head."

"I'm sorry," she said. "I shouldn't have presumed what you would say."

Ryan shook his head. "I understand. You want to wait till after your youth to have a baby leaving your entire adult life to be a mother. I know I must wait if we are to stay together, I'm just trying to humor myself to stay focused and faithful."

"Hey," she smiled, "Tell me more about the sisters."

"They were hot, I cannot lie. You will love them. They remind me of Aphrodite."

"And you were hypnotized?" she asked.

Ryan didn't have to say anything, she saw it in his face. Blanca fashioned herself to be sensual, impersonating her angelic mentors. It's fair to say that Blanca idolized her gods.

Back up the mountain, Colt and Fagan stood on the terrace patio looking down at the town. "New Providence had changed so much. The Creation of this mountain was the first sign that we needed to distance ourselves from them," Colt said to Fagan, sipping on his honey nectar. Why would our ancestors build this home a quarter mile into the sky? Why did they need to separate themselves from the people? Were they protecting themselves or were they placing themselves above them, as I suspect?"

"I'm with you," Fagan said, "they were clearly separating themselves; they must have created this home as a sanctuary. Prudence working with that guy doesn't convince me that it's the



right thing to do. I'll choose my own conclusions; my concerns will not be cast aside. I don't need her telling me what my responsibilities are." Fagan not only had resentment to Prudence's position as Prime Counselor, but she was also making his ulterior motives for mischief difficult. Colt would have to stay light on his feet to keep up with him.

"I know you're up to no good, I can sense it in my bones. I just want you to know, if you plan on doing something stupid, I'm not with you. Your honor depends on not crossing Prudence."

"I know, I'll behave, but just take a moment to listen. Come over here, can you hear them?" Fagan held Colt's arm and pointed down the mountain. "Can you hear them begging us to provide crops, a new job, or answers to questions of love. They are weak and needy, then turn around and blame us for the rain. We command the heavens; they should honor us. Sacrifice for us to prove their worth. Yet all we hear is, give me this and give me that."

"Fagan, I must say, you have had your moral compass degaussed. These people you despise are our wards. We have an obligation to them, remember, they need us."

"Can't we just send them off to an orphanage?" Fagan jokingly hinted.

Colt smiled. He knew Fagan was just venting frustrations. "You know? That Ryan fellow had a very strong will for a commoner. We should evaluate him with a little more credibility. We are not to self-important that we can't learn from a commoner, are we?"

"Agreed," Fagan said as he finished his nectar.

Elle came over to Fagan with a drink in her hand. "You boys need to stop seeing each other this way, people will talk. I brought you another drink Fagan, don't you want to come lay down with me and tell me everything you two are talking about?"

"Have you no shame?" Do you think you can seduce me into telling you what we conspire?"

“You just did. Look honey,” she takes her drink back, “If you mess with Prudence, she’ll neuter you.”

It took a lot to scare Fagan, but he believed her. Elle was the one goddess he couldn’t resist; he’d step into a volcano for her. “She tortures my soul, one day she will love me.”

Colt laughed at him while he stood there stunned and simultaneously excited.

Eave and Emma watched from the tower doors. “What was Colt doing in the tavern in the first place?” Emma asked.

Eave said, “Prudence says Colt suspected a social uprising against us and was checking it out.”

“So, what is Fagan’s problem?” Emma asked.

Eave replied, “He is an agitator, that’s what he does, he agitates.”

“You like that in him, don’t you?”

“I guess you could say he is my forbidden fruit.”

“I worry about you Eave, Fagan is rotten.”

“Perhaps, besides, he has eyes for Elle.”

Elle went back over to her sisters, “We better keep close watch on this one.”

The town’s clock tower struck ten and echoed up the mountain. Prudence pulled a chair from under the canopy and set it out in the middle of the patio. Compelled to follow, the others each grabbed a chair and met with her in a circle. “Our family below is growing up,” she started. They are like teenagers rebelling against parental control. They want independence yet are too naïve to see the dangers ahead. We shall give them room to make their own mistakes, but please, let’s not help them cause any.”

Prudence spoke to them as a parent would. There was never a time that she wasn’t fully in control of herself and everything around her. Colt marveled at her poise and confidence; Fagan feared it.

“Ok,” Colt said. “Ryan gathers concerns from the people and conveys them to us. Then what?”

“We listen.”

“That’s it, we listen?”

“Yes, that’s it. Right now, they think we don’t care about them anymore. If we were to merely listen, the message would be that we do care, and that is all they are really concerned with. They just want us to care.”

Colt said, “This has got to be the easiest remedy to any situation I have ever seen. It literary requires us to do nothing and it achieves everything. If it works, you’re a genius, but what if it doesn’t?”

“Then it wouldn’t have cost us anything to find out.”

“Should I speak to him,” referring to Ryan, “about my conduct in the tavern?”

Prudence looked at him with only a look she could give. “If it’s easier to forgive yourself in his presence, he will get the point and you wouldn’t have to admit you infringed on his rights. Truly we, as gods, can justify all we do, right?”

“I hate it when you do that,” Colt said. “Of course, I’m going to apologize. I don’t have the finesse with people as you do. Sometimes I think you like poking fun at me.”

“I do,” she smiled.

The following day Colt descended the mountain to clear the air with Ryan. Having Colt in town two days in a row seemed strange to many and drew a small crowd. “Ryan, tell your friend I’ll take care of that little situation. You must know that I will do what needs to be done for the sake of protecting everyone as a whole.”

“I have no doubt,” Ryan replied, not really knowing what he meant.

“Well, I’m glad we talked,” Colt said as he prepared to leave.

Ryan saw his discomfort in conversation and the poor attempt at an apology was better than no apology at all, but he felt there should be something more. “Excuse me Colt, may I ask a question of you?”

“Of course.”

“You singled me out among millions of people, where my thoughts or words so loudly disruptive to you that I truly needed this intervention?”

Colt thought for a moment. “Prudence is much better at communicating with normal people. I may say things differently, but I have always conducted myself within the responsibilities for which I am charged. Any form of animosity toward us signals the possibility of another coup. The spirits of the world rely on us to keep the peace.”

“Thank you,” Ryan said, “I am better informed.” Ryan found himself questioning his own motives as he assumed Colt was being honest. ‘Would the gods lie to me?’ he thought to himself. ‘How are the spirits involved?’ ‘Why do my thoughts matter so much?’

“I’ll leave you alone now,” Colt said, “Your thoughts are loud, but I’ll keep them to myself.”

Ryan felt a little embarrassed, having his thoughts exposed, but quickly regained himself as people approached him with curiosity.

“What did Colt want with you?” a man asked.

Another came forward, “What did he say?”

Before he knew it, a dozen people gathered around him hanging on every word he spoke.

“I have been tasked to talk with you all and relay your concerns to the gods. They fear our needs may be neglected and desire to know what concerns us.” Surely, he wasn’t the only one discontent with regards to freedom. He had to be careful how he worded his questions, he knew the gods were listening. He picked

out one man and asked him, “Do you revere the gods with love or fear?”

The man hesitated. “I have never thought of it. I suppose I love them, but then again, you have to fear them. They are very powerful.”

That was of no help, he asked another, “Do you believe the gods care about you?”

“Oh yes,” the man said.

“How?” Ryan asked.

The man just stood there thinking for a moment. “Because I’m healthy, have a family, and I’m happy I suppose.”

Then Ryan turned to a younger man, “And you, do the gods take care of you?”

“I think they do.”

“How so?”

The man said, “I feel their presence. When I decide something, I feel their confidence when I’m right and their disappointment when I’m wrong. I’ve learned to change my mind accordingly and I am right more often now.”

This was an answer at the root of his complaint. “So, you say the gods know what you are thinking?”

“Yes, I suppose so.”

“And what if you were to think of something private, aren’t you afraid they would know of it?” Turning to the crowd, “Do any of you have thoughts to hide?” And with that parting question Ryan walked away. He felt he planted a seed. He knew that if he weren’t subtle enough the gods would see through him and would ultimately assume that they would. His best defense would have to be truth. He was concerned about freedom, if the rest of the population wasn’t so concerned, so be it, he needed to know.

Colt, still monitoring Ryan, realized his motives and summoned Fagan. “We can’t allow this. We gave Prudence her chance and it didn’t work.”

Fagan agreed, “Do you want to fry his neurons?”

“No, let just wipe his memory,” Colt said with reservation. “Prudence will know so we cannot harm him. Erasing his memory will put things back to before, then we can give him something to think about.”

Colt and Fagan returned to Ryan while he was on his way home. As soon as Ryan saw Fagan, he knew there would be trouble. “Why are you here?” he asked nervously.

“You wish to form a revolt even after Prudence had granted you clemency and repay her trust with total disregard for us. Our compassion is wasted on commoners like you,” Colt implied.

“Please, no, I am just searching for freedom. Freedom to think and freedom to be me.”

“That my friend is what we will give you.” Fagan concentrated and Ryan began to shake.

“Just his recent memory,” Colt reminded him. “Take the last three days and make him think he had been camping.”

“He doesn’t camp,” Fagan said, “I made him think he was hung over in the back of that tavern the whole time, I even left him with a terrible headache, which was for fun.”

“We had better get back, Prudence will learn of this soon and I’d rather have those discussions at home,” Colt said. “I have another idea, I know you’re hot for Elle, but Eave has had her eye on you. If we can convince her to stand with us, Prudence won’t have control and will have to work with us.”

Fagan thought for a second, “You’re almost as devious as I am,” he said with a snicker.

Ryan was almost home when Colt and Fagan approached him. Their encounter only lasted a minute, and now he was about to walk into Blanca’s house believing he was on a three-day bender and didn’t know what he was going to say. He had never done anything like that before and tried hard to work up the courage to confess.

Blanca opened the door, but Ryan just stood there, quivering with shame he said, “I am so sorry. I’ve never done this before; can you forgive me?”

“What on earth are you talking about?” she inquired.

“My drinking. I don’t know what came over me.”

She leaned in and took his hand. Pulling him into the house and said, “I still don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“I must have passed out in the tavern; my head is split in two. I don’t ever recall getting that wasted.”

“Ryan, you’ve only been gone an hour. What are you talking about?”

Ryan was confused. “What was the last thing we talked about?” he asked, trying to retrace his steps.

“We were talking about you taking me up the mountain to see the gods.”

Ryan searched for an answer but that would have been the last thing he would do. She must have been messing with him or perhaps he was messing with her, meeting the gods was definitely something he would have refrained from. He admitted he hadn’t slept well lately and excused himself to his room.

Blanca was left as confused as he was. He was acting very strangely. She even began to doubt his accounts of meeting with the gods. ‘Perhaps he needs some help,’ she thought.

## Chapter Two

The mountain was both a sanctuary, and a prison. Two hundred years ago, a meteor brought a small amount of a new element to earth from a distant galaxy, a galaxy with mysterious properties that didn't adhere to the principles of relativity we understood on earth. Truesite had a negative mass. Once thought impossible, this new element provided a means to alter gravitational fields. The demigod's predecessors extracted the Truesite from the meteor and spun it into the threads of their robes, giving them antigravitational ability, allowing them to ascend and descend the mountain with weightless ease. The ability to step off of the mountain, like stepping off an escalator, and walk up and down the side of the mountain, gave them the freedom to come and go from their Olympus balcony to the world.

"You defied me," Prudence blistered Colt and Fagan as they approached.

"Three of us made the decision, therefore it's a stalemate," Fagan said, as he stared into Eave's eyes, hoping she would accept his unspoken request for support.

Prudence turned sharply toward Eave sharply, "You too?"

"It is for the better, dissidence cannot be rewarded, we have an obligation," she confessed.

Fagan felt more confident now that Eave had saved him.

"So, what now?" Prudence said. "You left his friend and a group of witnesses in a bar with a bitter memory of your temper. You left his girlfriend under the impression he's falling apart. Are you going to zap them all?" she said sarcastically.

"No," Colt said, "I planned to allow the others to see Ryan's memory lapse as what it is, a warning to others not to tempt us."

"Oh, so now it's 'I plan.' Do you really want to go a couple rounds with me Colt? I'll tell you what, now that there are



three of you, we'll sit down together and hold council and see what the spirits have to say.”

“This is not personal Prudence, this is our mandate, we should have held council long ago. Strictly, professional.”

As they entered the grand room, in the middle of the castle, sitting upon a marble pedestal, a massive table, sixteen feet long by eight feet wide and five inches thick, of solid redwood captured their attention. Curtains draped the walls and the sun lit brightly though the open ceiling. The other demigods, each dressed in their ceremonial robes sat evenly spaced around the table. Their ceremonial robes were similar in design to their Truesite robes, but instead of an antigravitational property, the ceremonial robes were quite heavy, having gold embroidery, and if worn too long would prove discomforting. Prudence’s chair, at the head of the table, was larger than the others in honor of her position as Prime Counselor.

Addressing Colt in her opening remarks, Prudence began, “We are of the same blood as the people we serve. We are them, and they are we. We have been given a power that we have yet to earned, that is the difference between us, yet you have asserted that your fears and insecurities are more important than theirs.”

Colt, sitting across from her at the other end of the table answered, “I contend only that our responsibilities to the people are to all the people and not to just a few.”

She replied, “Do you recommend fear as the primary means to deal with common folk?”

Colt saw the trap, but Fagan didn’t and spoke, “Just like a pet, if it’s afraid it will get punished for peeing on the carpet, it won’t pee on the carpet.”

Prudence said, “I see. I’ve heard enough.”

Colt turned to Fagan, “Idiot.”

“What?”

“You just supported her argument that we were acting inhumanely. By referring that they are less than human, and we should treat them as such.”

“Shall we connect?” she asked rhetorically. They extended their arms out over the table with their palms up. Each uncontrollably released their spirits to a single consciousness and drifted off into a trance. “Mother and father, faithful keepers of the spirits, bear witness,” Prudence began. Their powers and the energy flowing through their bodies formed a circle around the table. Soon all six counselors felt the same presence, a familiar force within them they could not deny nor control; The spirits of the wind and water, fire and ice, the pulse that keeps the universe in time, settled within them.

The invocation of the gods not only brought the spirits to the mountain, but the people in the town were also witness to the aurora which engulfed the mountain top. The glow beamed in various colors as lights blasted forth in spectacular fashion. The town folk knew the gods were active and that had never been a good thing.

Prudence continued her oration, “As foretold, the people need time away from us. Their independence is crucial for a fair assessment of their spiritual privilege. Asserting our powers to manipulate them deprives them of their inherent destiny. They must have the ability to choose their own path. Tomorrow we shall meet once more for final disposition at which time, a verdict will be rendered, and action will be taken.” As Prudence finished speaking, they all began to regain their composure. Each hearing and feeling the words of the spirits through Prudence accepted the outcome but it failed to remove their doubts and left them confused about the actions to be taken.

“But how shall we achieve that?” Colt questioned. “We sit on each of the six courts, we are deeply engaged in their society. And what of us? Are we to be cast out and banished to this mountain forever?”

“Of course not. Leaving them alone doesn’t mean we have to disappear, only that our ability to influence them will be altered. They must make their own decisions.”

Prudence later confronted Fagan, “You are a bad influence on Colt, the next time I’m manipulated to convene the council, it will be to strip you of your powers. Do you understand? Leave Colt and Eave alone.”

She spoke with such confidence and commitment; Fagan knew he had to be careful. He hadn’t even had a chance to talk with Eave yet. He owed her a debt and an explanation. After Prudence left the terrace, Fagan thanked Eave for her support. She in turn, reminded Fagan of a simple truth about continued support, “You put me on the spot, yet I protected you. I’m sure that will weigh heavy on you as we enter a more intimate relationship, because my continued support comes at a price.”

He knew what terms she was referring to and had to be careful, the last thing he wanted at this point in his life was to settle down. “If you’re wanting companionship and affection we can get along fine, but if you’re wanting a long-term relationship, we should probably rethink this entire scenario.”

She asked, “What do you mean?”

Fagan wasn’t the tactful suitor she may have hoped for and in his rough but reserved manner he said, “I’d rather apologize to Prudence now, than apologized to you for the rest of my life.”

“What?!”

“I mean, I have flaws when dealing with the ladies. As much as I’d like to think I’m all that, I sometimes come across as crude and fear a long-term relationship would wear thin on you and I’d be forever trying to make up for it.”

“You know, I think that may be the most honest and insightful thing I’ve ever heard you say. Ok, how about we just take it a little at a time?”

“Deal.”

Fagan knew he had dodged a bullet. He liked Eave but never thought of being with her. With only six demigods and four of them were sisters, relationships between them were usually a contentious affair. Due to the competitive nature of their stature and the fact that relationships with commoners were all too easy to fall in and out of, they customarily refrained from being intimate with each other. As the Prime Counselor, it was Prudence' decision on future interaction with the common people and that tore at Fagan's sense of purpose and prestige. 'Having supernatural abilities and not being able to use them makes no sense,' as he's said many times when questioned about his interventions. He was looking for alternatives and would not rest easy while Prudence deliberated her options.

Prudence had already made up her mind what action would be taken and would announce it in the morning. Meanwhile, she returned to the town and addressed Ryan at his home. "Tomorrow at the quarter sun, the council will meet again and the freedom you seek will be granted. You will be present. It is you that will become the prophet of the forgotten gods."

Ryan's reply was a cross between shock and ecstasy. "Madame Counselor, whatever do you mean?"

"You are the only one to have been in all of our presence, no one is better suited to bridge the communication gap between us and the people. Tomorrow you will bear witness to the end of an era. When the earth no longer has our spirit to depend on, you will learn your purpose." She placed her hands on his arms, "As you look into my eyes, see the love of life within them, and as you gaze into my eyes tomorrow, you will see a different me. At that point, you may experience the deepest sense of loneliness, knowing we can no longer protect you."

Blanca came from around the corner of their den, "I heard everything. I knew that drunken story was crap, tell me what's going on," she demanded.

Prudence announced her leave, “I’ll be back to receive you at ten,” Then addressed Blanca, “Believe in yourself as you believe in us, you’ll be fine,” turned and walked away.

“What is happening,” she asked solemnly.

Ryan explained, “It turns out, my discontent caused the gods to act, and in my favor. Unfortunately, I now feel that may not be a good thing. I have an ominous feeling yet am very excited.”

Though even common folk had some telepathic abilities, none were able to see what was coming next. Not even the other demigods knew of her decision.

She arrived promptly at ten to bring Ryan back to the mountain. When they arrived at the base, she parked her commuter in a garage warehouse at the base and held his hand as they began to walk up the side of the mountain. Ryan was in awe, laughing to himself all the way to the terrace. He asked, “why couldn’t we have simply flown up here in the commuter?”

“We’ve installed a device that creates an electromagnetic barrier around the top of the mountain, security measures, you understand. We can’t allow easy access for uninvited guests.”

The other demigods were already sitting around the grand table. “Ryan, please have a seat,” she pointed to a large chair about twenty feet away to the right, facing the table. She took her seat at the head of the table and begun her address, “It is with heavy heart that we meet here today and evoke the powers of the universe.”

As she spoke, the air around her began to brighten in a beautiful golden hue. “It has come that we reach the edge of our gifted benevolent duty and relinquish the powers bestowed upon us by our creators. Society desires independence, and as it is in the universe, spirits make their own path.” She then bowed her head, extended her arms across the table, and said, “Mother and father, faithful keepers of the spirits, bear witness; We conclude our service to humanity by becoming of the fold. Accept our gifts

in perpetuity, though we stand forever ready to resume our commitment. Our time is service to humanity, has met its obligation and the will of the people shall now control their own destiny. Forever servants of your wisdom, we asked that you continue to protect us all from the mighty forces of our home.”

By now, the entire table was aglow. A silence, so silent, it stole the sound of their beating hearts. Prudence continued, but this time it was addressed to her peers, “We were chosen, and for that reason, we must live up to the duty we have sworn.” Her voice began to fluctuate as everyone’s consciousness began to refocus. Ryan sat forward in his chair clutching the frayed cushion with white knuckles. An aura around the table began swirled counterclockwise and got faster and faster. Ryan sat firm with his face of stone. Suddenly a peaceful calm preluded her closing statements, “The universe has provided powers throughout the heavens, and the earth had been blessed with powers of her own. Our powers shall be returned to the gods from which they came, and we shall return to the people.” She paused for a moment then continued in a mystical and hypnotic tone, “Over three hundred years had passed since our species came to be. The people no longer require constant protection. It is time to let their spirits free.” Prudence emerged from her trance, feeling quite drained and remorseful. Each demigod felt the warmth of the spirits in their soul begin to fade. Above the table, under the open ceiling, a vortex appeared and sucked out the magnificent aura, swirling like a tornado, right out into the bright blue sky.

Shortly after, their aura vanished completely, the presence of the spirits was gone. The demigods were no more, replaced by their true selves, and slowly began to feel a different attitude of hope. They were now on the receiving end of necessity and their confidence replaced with uncertainty.

Ryan looked on as the table faded under the open skylight to near darkness. Shadows fell upon her face and her voice

subdued by loneliness, spoke softly. Prudence said, “All of our powers will be gone come morning and we shall be as everyone.”

“Can you tell me more of the spirits?” Ryan asked.

“There are many spirits,” Prudence explained, “but only three we need to concern ourselves with, the human spirit, the spirits of the earth, and the multifaceted energy of the universe. Each of us were influenced by one or more of these spirits and to some extent, all common people gravitate toward one of them as well. You, for example, can feel fragments of the human spirit, though you may not know what it is you’re feeling. We were granted a much greater capacity to receive the spirits, thus common folk referred to us as demigods. In truth, we are just like you, but were given supernatural abilities, granted to us by the spirits, or gods if you will, to aid in the development and protection of humanity.”

Ryan thought to himself, ‘What have I done?’ He was already regretting his selfish indignation. It wasn’t his intention to eliminate the gods, he just didn’t want their control over him.

She said, “Do not accept responsibility for this outcome. You were not alone in wanting our departure. Many have similar sentiments about our existence for one reason or another, it was merely your voice we chose to answer. Prudence addressed her last words to Ryan before their session would officially end, “There may come a time when people need our faith and guidance, but alas, we shall be gone. Civilizations grow, societies change, all with the common goal of progress, forged with different tools. We will now have to forge our own destiny. We have outlived our usefulness and therefore, we shall recede to a state of obscurity and join with you in a common world. The spirits, however, shall never wane. The responsibility you now share is that of one who knows the truth.”

He now understood what she meant about loneliness and in that moment felt the spirits enter and leave his presence,

succumb to a true sense of defenselessness, and acknowledged a power existed beyond all creation.

The session ended with tears on their checks, knowing an era of heavenly prosperity was ending and a new uncertain era of independence would leave them alone and vulnerable. The sisters were sad, Colt was confused, Fagan was angry, and Prudence briefly felt a sigh of relief before she too, began to feel saddened. They just rose from the table and looked at each other as if to say goodbye, then walked away quietly. Ryan asked, "If you have given away your powers, wouldn't your ability to come and go from up here vanish? How am I to get home?"

Prudence laughed, forcing herself from her somber mood. "Our powers aren't needed for the robe, its powers come from the spirits of the earth. The element which gives it power reacts with the geomagnetic field of the earth and the spirits manipulate the field in our behalf. Let's get you home, by this time tomorrow, the people of the town will not remember us as having powers, Blanca won't remember us as gods, you will be the only one, the keeper of our memory."

Ryan thought of her words for hours, alone in his room, reviewing all that had transpired. Blanca managed to get him to come out of his room for supper, but he couldn't eat. They sat at the table, their dinner getting cold in front of them, as he described his experience up on the mountain. "I'm so very sorry Blanca, I believe I may have driven the gods away."

"Come now, how could you ever force the gods to do anything?"

Ryan sighed, "My distrust and reluctance to accept their nobility has caused them to lose their powers."

"What? Lose their powers? She asked in disbelief.

With his head in his hands, elbows firmly planted on the edge of the table, he said, "It's true. Maybe it's not entirely because of me, but definitely because of people like me." He lifted his head and continued, "The spirits of the earth and the



gods came together in a magical gathering and decided we no longer needed them, and that we would rule ourselves.”

“Ok, so we’ll rule ourselves. What does have to do with their powers?” she asked.

“Apparently, their powers will be returned to the earth, and they will become commoners. By this time tomorrow, I will be the only one to remember that they ever existed. That’s why I was taken to the meeting, to be a witness, and it saddens me greatly to know that I have taken your love and admiration for them away.”

She looked in his eyes and saw the truth about them. The emotion and remorse in his voice convinced her that he deserved her support. “If I am not to remember them, I shall not feel a loss, so if what you say is true, it will be you, not me, who will feel the loss and need me to be here for you.”

He lifted his head, feeling much better but by no means happy, he replied, “Thank you, I was afraid and ashamed to tell you of the council’s decision, and had considered for a short while, not to tell you. By tomorrow, it wouldn’t have even mattered, but I thought you deserved to know non the less.”

Blanca may not have wanted to start a family early, but she was sure she was with the right person, so making that commitment seemed more and more likely. “It’s ok, no matter what happens, we’ll take that walk together.”

They spent the rest of the night sitting together in arms, reminiscing of times they shared. Time passed quickly and before they knew it, the sun was beginning to rise. A new day, a new way of life, was what Ryan expected. “We talked of everything but the gods,” Ryan calmly said, “What are your thoughts?”

“What do you mean?” she was bewildered.

“Do you think they will go?” he replied.

“Go where? Who? I don’t understand,” she sounded frustrated.

Ryan then realized their presence was gone. It was a sorrowful moment, but he had to try to explain and didn't know how to begin. He pretended to be a little confused about it himself, "There is word that the gods have left and may not return. It was also said that people would forget their existence all together. If you are confused, it proves that they were right, and I am left the sole custody of their memory."

"I'm sorry darling, I don't know what you are talking about."

"That's ok, forget I said anything, it was imaginary."

She was so confused she stopped thinking about what he said. 'Maybe he's been studying ancient mythology again or has been hanging around a new crowd?' she wondered but didn't want to get involved.

Ryan felt tired and told her, "Well, I'm afraid I must go home now, it's been a long night," looking out the window to the rising sun, his mind was racing with curiosity about the future.

"No, please don't go," she said, "Just because I'm confused by your inquiries, doesn't mean I don't want you around. I feel we were meant to be here, right here, right now. Do you know what I mean?"

He said, "I know what you mean. We've been up all night; I think we could both use some sleep."

"Yeah, how about cooking me dinner this evening at your place and we can finish this conversation?" She asked.

"I'd love it." Ryan replied, glad to have more time to figure out what and how to explain himself.

No sooner than he arrived home, Prudence and Colt appeared to him in a vision. "Oh my," Ryan exclaimed, "I thought you would be gone."

"We're still here, it's our powers that have gone and with it, the peoples' memory of them," Prudence said. "The people need this chance, not only to prove it to us, but to prove to themselves that they are worthy."

It was a lot for Ryan to take in, “Thanks, I feel a little overwhelmed already, I hope I can live up to your expectations.”

Their image disappeared, he entered his home and went straight to bed. He slept for six hours and awoke with a new sense of purpose. The sounds of nature outside his house played like a melody in the background as he felt a welcoming sense of being. The midday sun was warm on the kitchen window and the smell of the coffee gave him a perky feeling, causing him to expect a good day.

Prudence and her sisters gathered around a vat at the far side of the grand room, upon which they viewed an image of Ryan’s life in the water. The image faded in and out of focus for a spell, then disappeared altogether. Emma asked of Prudence, “It’s sad to see this separation, can we still go down there any time we want?”

“Yes, but why would you want to. They won’t feel the same way for us, what would you gain?”

“Maybe they can feel something, and it may be just enough to keep them together; they wouldn’t have to know what it was.”

“You may be on to something, that’s a noble way to look at it. Let me ponder that awhile.”

Meanwhile, Ryan walked to the tavern, witnessing squirrels and birds and flowers along the way. He never paid so much attention to his surroundings before but now felt that it was a blessing to notice the little things in life. He arrived at the tavern in time to see Geoff on his way down the steps. He wondered what Geoff’s memories would be. “You look no worse for the wear,” he said.

Geoff was a little confused, the entire memory of the altercation the night before had vanished along with the power that caused it.

Their memories of the gods vanished and left a paradox in its place. Ryan thought how fragile everyone’s mind was, that

having a lapse in memory made them fill in the gaps with whatever made the best sense at the time. He consciously decided not to mention anything related to the gods. “Geoff, old friend, let me buy you a beer.”

“Thanks, I’ll get the next one,” he said.

Just then, Ryan noticed the traditional racket that filled the tavern had been replaced with a more palatable musical score. Perhaps it was a residual effect from altering their perceptions of demigods. It was common for ordinary people to have telepathic abilities to a much smaller extent than the demigods, but that ability lessened to some degree in the grand scheme of things. He noticed that people appeared to be happy. He didn’t witness anything out of the ordinary in how people interacted with each other, except there were no references to the gods by name or title. It was as if they never existed, but Ryan knew there would be differences. He also realized how ironic it was, that for years, he railed against the intervention from the demigods just to end up being the only potential advocate for them.

He spent about an hour socializing with his friends in the tavern and realized he no longer had much in common with them. Without demigods to condemn, Ryan didn’t feel a part of their clique anymore. “I’ll see you at work tomorrow, Geoff, I have to go. I’m having Blanca over for dinner.” As he left, he had the feeling he was saying goodbye to the Tavern. It just didn’t seem to fit in with his new outlook on life.

His date night with Blanca seemed different as well. Without having discussions about the gods, they were forced to focus more closely on themselves and as a result, he felt Blanca may be coming closer to making a commitment to start a family. Their evening seemed more intimate to him, but he couldn’t be sure how much of it was a result of the changes and what would have been natural. After she left, he had another visit from Prudence.

This time her spirit came to him for help, “Ryan, we need your assistance. We are running out of provisions up on the mountain, it’s time for us to be acclimated into a normal life,” she spoke telepathically.

“What do you need me to do?” he asked.

“We need you to go to the north side of the mountain, between two markings shaped like clouds on the face of the largest stone, is a hidden entrance to the mountain. Hide your commuter within bushes. Upon your approach to the markings, the spirits will open the mountain to you. Inside you’ll enter a shaft that rises all the way to the top, call out to me and I’ll help you enter.”

“But the mountain is too high,” Ryan said. “You won’t hear me.”

“Yes, I will hear.”

“When do I need to do this?” he questioned.

“Go at first light,” she said.

The scenario kept him thinking and planning all night as to how he was to help them acclimate back into their society. He wondered how well they could adapt.

Early the next morning he called into work and asked for a day’s leave. Obligations and duties were strong and important principles in their society, so his managers knew that he wouldn’t have asked for the time off if it wasn’t important. They granted his request without further justification. His plan was to bring them to his house while he arranged to get them into their own residence.

He arrived at the north side of the mountain early and walked to the base of the mountain until he came to the cloud shapes etched into the stone. He wondered if he needed to call out to Prudence as he looked to identify a door. Suddenly a large area of the stone seemed to vanish leaving a hole in the base of the mountain. He walked inside and the opening closed behind him. ‘Am I stuck now,’ he thought to himself.

“Prudence,” he hollered up the shaft. He waited a moment longer, “Prudence, can you hear me?”

A second later came a reply, “I can hear you.”

“It is Ryan, I am here as you requested,” he bellowed.

She donned her robe and descended the shaft. “I see you found the entrance ok.”

“I thought you had left, I thought you lost your powers, but your spirit came to.”

“It’s true, I have no powers, I have not felt my own spirit much less the spirits of the earth since we abdicated our powers, I was not sure if you would receive my plea.”

“Yes, I guess it is like you foretold, I am left alone to know the truth of your existence.”

Prudence spoke sadly, “At first, I agreed that you needed your freedom, which was before I felt the loss of my own. I feel dependent and afraid; I have never felt these uncertainties.”

“It will be ok,” Ryan said caringly, “call to the others and come with me, it is my turn to care for you.”

She called up the shaft for everyone to join her. As they arrived at the bottom of the shaft, Ryan could feel a sense of relief among them. Prudence then asked her fellow demigods to hang their robes in the cabinet at the back of the shaft. As soon as the cabinet door closed, with the robes stowed safely away, the side of the shaft vanished exposing their exit. They walked out together, a little confused and afraid, but grateful for Ryan’s assistance. They’ve had their advanced powers for most of their life and to go back to living as ordinary people left them a confused and afraid.

“What do we do now?” Colt asked Prudence.

“Well, we have more knowledge of the people, the city, and the councils than anyone, I intend to return to by duties on the council as if nothing had changed.” she said.

Colt suggested, “I would like to travel, perhaps I could explore our world.”

“Without powers, I suppose you can be replaced on your council, but I’ve always believed you to be of strong character and principle, and by abandoning your duties, I don’t believe the people will be better off. Would you really consider leaving? Can you recall why you were chosen in the first place?”

“Yeah, you sure are making it hard to dream,” Colt admitted.

Fagan, Emma, Elle, and Eave all started to relax a bit with the conversation around them becoming more and more casual. They cast out ideas among themselves, looking for bits of support from each other, which seemly sparked desires for freedom, the freedom they relinquished upon accepting their powers and position.

Ryan brought them all to his home and called Blanca, “I need your help.”

“Ok, what do you need?”

“I have some friends that need our help.”

Blanca replied, “Who? Do I know them?”

“You kind of know them, can you come over? They’re here at my house now.”

Her curiosity wouldn’t allow her to dismiss this opportunity, she headed out the door excited to learn who these friends were and why he maintained a mystery.

She announced her approach to his house telepathically and Ryan opened the door. She entered and immediately noticed all six of them in the living room deep in discussion. “Ok, who are they?” she asked.

“You don’t recognize them?”

Extending her hand to Prudence, “Yes, you are the head of the high council, right?”

“Hi, I’m Prudence.”

Blanca then admitted she didn’t know the others.

Gesturing with her hand, Prudence introduced the others, “This is Colt, Fagan, Emma, Elle and Eave.”

“You are all on the high council, aren’t you?” Blanca asked in wonder then turned to Ryan, “So, how can I be of service?”

Ryan thought for a second and determined that Prudence may be the best person to try and explain. “Blanca, Prudence can explain much better than I can,” and looked over to Prudence with his brow raised in uncertainty.

Prudence started by testing the waters, “Ryan tells me you are knowledgeable with regard to the gods.”

“What do you mean, the gods?”

“The spirits of the earth and their appointed demigods.”

Blanca, still confused replied, “There are no gods, no spirits, I’m not sure I know what you’re talking about.”

Ryan knew right then that the memory of the gods had been removed from her and if Blanca’s memory could have been erased, everyone’s had to be.

Prudence also realized what she was up against. “I’m sorry, I had to be sure there were no preconceived notions about a spiritual world before I continued. As council members, we have recently been advised to relocate away from heavily populated areas for safety reasons. Factions of zealots began targeting public figures so, here we are, can you help us get adequate housing?”

“I’ll do what I can. But, if you sit on all the councils, why not assign yourself housing?”

“If our request was on record, our address would become public knowledge, but if it’s your request, fanatics wouldn’t know where we move to.” We’re asking for help as a friend, we don’t want our positions to influence you and will understand if you decide not to help.” Prudence was careful with her words and thought dropping the issue of demigods was wise, convinced that Blanca would have thought her crazy had she exposed the truth.

“I understand your dilemma, yes, I’ll help,” she replied, “I will make a few calls.”



Blanca could not help but notice her sister's beauty and wondered if that had anything to do with Ryan's decision to help, then looked at Colt and wondered if his physique and charm had anything to do with her decision to help. In either way, she felt it was still the right thing to do. Even in her new liberated philosophy without the presence of gods, Blanca couldn't turn a blind eye to people in need.

Ryan looked at Prudence curiously as she responded to Blanca, expecting an explanation of her losing her powers, but Prudence mentally replied to Ryan, 'Now is not the time to reintroduce the concepts of gods. We must be patient.'

Ryan understood and nodded, then said, "Thank you, Prudence, I hate trying to put words in other people's mouths."

Blanca smiled and laughed at Ryan, then turned to Prudence, "He's learning."

Prudence laughed.

Blanca talked with a friend of hers at the housing management committee and managed to get them a house on the other side of the river in her name. It was far from the center of town but not far enough away from the atmosphere of discontent that was growing within the city. From the day the demigods lost their powers, the spirit that filled the hearts of people slowly diminished and primal instinct began overpowering the confidence and emotional security that once flourished.

## Chapter Three

Every passing day brought increased reports of unrepentantly hostile behavior among the citizens within the city. Mischief and disrespect became common among the youth and the seniors showed contempt toward the young. Prudence met with the other demigods at the end of each day, they discussed the day's events and tried to formulate a plan to stop the decline of civilization that they were witnessing.

After only a month since relinquishing their powers, the good nature of people seemed to have been replaced with fear and mistrust. "I am baffled," Prudence said, "I truly am. We were never the purveyors of peace and compassion, why is it now that we have no powers? Have these virtues disappeared? I fail to see signs of them anywhere."

Colt said, "I know what it means. I see it every day as well. People we've known our entire lives barely speak to one another anymore. Perhaps it's not us, maybe the gods have left us all together."

After a brief thought about Colt's remarks, Prudence proposed, "Let's gather around the kitchen table and see if we can invoke the spirits as we use to." They tried for twenty minutes to connect with the spirits, they held their palms up, they held each other's hands, they said all the words that were customary and begged for guidance, but no appearance came. They truly began to feel abandoned and alone.

"I know saying I told you so is not helpful, but there must have been a reason I was also chosen," Fagan interrupted. "Though the people may not consciously believe in the gods, maybe subconsciously they still feel the loss. Maybe, believing is a subconscious control over the conscious. Right now, our conscious is telling us what is real, and without the spark from the spirits, our subconscious is blocking them. I think the people feel it, they just don't understand it."

“Fagan, I am surprised and impressed,” Prudence said, “that may be the most insightful statement I’ve ever heard you say. That’s why Ryan was designated to be the only one left to know the truth and be able to receive our spirits. He will have to be the one to bring out the spirits in the people.”

The next day couldn’t have come fast enough for Prudence. She needed to meet with Ryan. Feeling the urgency to get something started kept her from a restful sleep and the excitement for a solution empowered her. Leaving her council without a tie breaking vote, she did not go into the courthouse that morning. Instead, she visited Ryan at his work to convince him to start a campaign for the truth. Ryan managed to convince his superior to allow him some time off and they returned to his house for the discussions.

“It’s not looking too good in the city,” Prudence started, “people are angry, upset, disappointed, all levels of discontent. Apparently without the gods, anarchy prevails as society collapses.”

“I am sorry, I had no idea,” Ryan said.

“No one is blaming you; these are truths that every civilization must learn, it just so happens, it was our time to experience and relearn it.”

He asked, “So, what can we do?”

“With every spiritual, religious, or political movement, there is a message that requires a charismatic messenger, are that messenger?” she asked while touching his arm in an effort to make it as personal as she could. “Other than the six of us, you are the only one who knows the truth. Even we don’t feel the spirits anymore, but you do. That is why you were chosen from the beginning to set this in motion. The public must be taught, and you must be the teacher.”

“I’m no prophet, I am just a normal man.”

“Ryan, like it or not, you are a prophet. The only prophet, and if our civilization is to succeed, you have to at least try to

bring the spirits back into the lives of the people. The world will eat them up otherwise, and who's to say that what evolves from our ashes won't set civilization back thousands of years. It's happened before, it can happen again. But, if we can hold off this decline, perhaps we can preserve humanity."

Ryan confessed, "I don't know. I fought having the gods in my life for years. I don't understand how I could have been chosen to convince everyone to put them in theirs. I see everyone arguing more, committing crimes that had only been folklore and rumor, trust in fellowship has disappeared. I can't help to feel responsible and want to help, it just seems too much for me."

"We're in this together," Prudence proclaimed, "I still have faith, you must have faith too."

He thought about it for a second, "Ok, how will we do this?"

"You said my spirit came to you, right?" She asked.

"Yeah, I didn't actually see it, but I felt it," Ryan said.

"That's what you need to do. Talk to the spirits, let them tell you what we need to do. The spirits that guided us must now guide you, close your eyes, concentrate, ask them what to do."

Ryan closed his eyes, bowed his head, and sighed deeply. Within seconds he could feel their presence. A vibration deep in the bowels of the earth rumbled within him. He could feel the spirits presence as if he were in a cloud together with them. "What am I to do. One simple man against the world?" he whispered, "what am I to do?" It didn't take him long before he received a vision for a city on fire. "Oh my," Ryan exclaimed, "A small town on the west side of the river will burn down from lightning strikes."

"That's it," Prudence said. "You will become the seer. You must warn them, whether they listen or not, they will know you are for real, which will guarantee that they at least listen the next time. Then, you teach them to focus on seeing and feeling

the spirits themselves. They will follow, they always follow.” She then asked, “How much time do we have?”

Ryan thought carefully, “Two days, but there’s more. I also received images of the recent past, “The earth has been very active lately and, in many areas, people are being challenged by the elements.”

“Let’s take care of one thing at a time.” Prudence had been doing this for many years, no one was more experienced at talking with the gods than she was and now, she had to help teach someone else to master the responsibility. “I am pleased with this plan. It gives me hope,” she said, “you’ve already met your challenge, I will gather the others and we begin tomorrow.”

Prudence returned home and waited for her partners to return from the daily grind of council duties. “I had a very eventful day,” she told them. “Do you remember the feelings you had when the spirits filled our souls. Well, Ryan is experiencing that very feeling.”

Elle looked at Prudence and said, “So, the person that didn’t want the powers in his life, ends up being the only one to have them, and the ones that benevolently served the spirits volunteer to give up the powers. What’s next, up becomes down?”

Prudence replied, “Let’s not fight. We have a solution, it is our duty to support Ryan now, remember, we were messengers, nothing more, now its Ryan who is the messenger and he needs our help.”

Fagan asked, “Ok, what do you suggest?”

“Leave the council but insist to remain advisors to allow us time to work with Ryan. Our first mission will be in a small town on the other side of the river, we must help Ryan get the word out to everyone there to evacuate, that there is a bad storm coming that will light it ablaze.”

Emma and Eave stepped forward, being the more emotional of the six, said, “Poor things, we have to go with you.”

Fagan said, “I must feel a little like Ryan, I didn’t think the commoners were worthy and now I’m fighting to prove they are. How ironic.”

Colt’s only response was short as usual, “He needs us.”

Ryan felt older and wiser. The communications with the spirits no longer felt like a ghost but more like an angel. The storm blew in from across the dry barren planes of Texas and settled above a small town in south Louisiana. It hovered above the town, still and resolute, exploding blasts of lighting all around for minutes. As predicted, building after building was struck by lightning and caught fire. Ryan witnessed the devastation and was heartbroken by the lack of response from the people. His first attempt to help people failed, as no one heeded his warning. He spent the whole day prior telling people a catastrophe was coming and he failed to influence anyone.

“Don’t dwell on it,” Fagan told Ryan, “This won’t be the last time people fail to listen. Remember, the gravest of lessons are learned from the gravest of circumstance.”

Colt joined in, “And I get the feeling there will be much circumstance to learn from.”

“That’s not helping.” Ryan said. He closed his eyes again and thought of the spirits. This time he felt as if he could feel the souls of the people themselves, looking for answers, guidance, and acceptance. Another premonition came to him. “I see terrible assaults on people in town. Vicious attacks using dangerous weapons.”

“What in the world is wrong with these people?” Colt inquired. “We’ve rarely ever had any violence. Yes, there were disputes, but people didn’t settle their differences with violence.”

Fagan sarcastically replied, “Well, apparently, now they do.”

“What’s done is done,” Eave said, “Forget what was and focus on what is,” urging them to think and plan on their next move.

Ryan asked, “Why are they using ancient weapons? How have we regressed so far?”

Fagan answered, “That’s obvious, but allow me to explain anyway, firearms from the middle centuries used blunt force trauma to cause damage, a solid projectile traveling at about 1200 meters per second. It was messy and dramatic. Laser and electromagnetics are a much more efficient means of incapacitation, and it doesn’t leave a mess. Being hit by an eliminator,” referring to a modern weapon of the day, “is like being struck by lightning.”

Colt replied, “That’s why an ancient firearm is stupid.”

“It’s not a competition, it’s a statement.” Fagan insisted, “The psychological damage from the gruesome sight is what they’re looking for. I don’t see much choice here. Sounds like war.”

“It is,” Prudence said. “We’ve read all the historical documents; we’ve been down this road before. And just like then, we have to get it right.”

“So now what?” Ryan asked, looking around at their faces, “we go to war?”

“We are at war; we’ve always been at war. Good versus bad, love versus hate. There has always been an opposite to everything. So, whatever it is, we’ll have to be the opposite,” Emma offered.

Elle and Eave agreed, “We may not feel the spirits right now, but we used to, and I’m sure we know what they would say and do. We have to be positive.”

“I agree, does everyone agree?” Prudence asked.

Fagan was the only one with reservations. “We also learned, sometimes you have to fight fire with fire.”

Ryan suggested, “Can we relax a bit, arrange the furniture and convene our own little council here?”

“Good idea,” Prudence said, “we shouldn’t worry, we’re the ones with help from the spirits, right, Ryan?”

They all agreed and formed a circle in the living room. It became easier for Ryan to feel the presence of the earth pulsing in his veins. "I'm receiving an image; we will get word to the people through the public broadcasting system and ask everyone to stay safe by staying in their homes. Anyone not in their homes should be considered dangerous." Ryan took in a breath quickly, "Fagan, you and Colt should carry an eliminator just in case, as we recon the streets of the city."

Prudence looked at her sisters, "You three evaluate their souls, we need to know if they can be saved. We've not experienced anything like this before, we need all the insight we can get."

For the next two days, thanks to the help of another friend of Blanca's, communication swept the airwaves and everyone in town heard the call to stay indoors. On the second day, the team went to the city as a group, visiting street by street. Across from The Landmark Hotel were a small group of youths, bunched up together, planning their next move. The team walked up to them and asked, "Haven't you heard the warnings? Aren't you afraid to be outside?" Colt asked.

"Afraid? No, you got it all wrong, you're the ones who should be afraid," the older one said.

Fagan pulled his jacket away from his right hip and exposed his eliminator. The boys stepped back but held their ground. "Why should we fear you?" he asked.

"You people have taken all you're going to take from us. We want it back and we're prepared to take it," their leader said.

"You people?" Colt questioned.

"Yeah, people your age, have no idea what we have to deal with, you just continue living your lives as you deserve everything for doing nothing and other people have to do your bidding." Eave stepped forward and faced the young man, using all her telepathic abilities, she tried to show him that giving was more rewarding than taking, but the boy had no intention of



having that discussion, “Sell your crap somewhere else lady, we’re not buying it.”

Prudence then suggested, “Ok boys, have a good evening and stay safe. Come on guys, I’ve learned enough.” The gang walked away and left the boys as they found them, in preparation for mischief. “I’m afraid I don’t know how to fight this fight. What has worked in the past?” she asked, as they left Baker Street and turned onto Hope Avenue.

Fagan replied, “Let’s see, there was a flood, famine, Armageddon, a comet, and nuclear war, but they all ended by cleaning the slate. We’re in uncharted waters. We only started over a few hundred years ago, it can’t be time to do it again.”

Ryan said, “I don’t believe that will be necessary.”

“Why is that?” Prudence asked.

“I see a lot of fighting, a lot of very bad things, but feel we will prevail. I feel the spirits will return and settle the matter,” Ryan said.

“Then why put us through it in the first place?” Colt asked.

“It’s us,” Ryan said, “We’re the ones being tested, and I believe in us. As soon as we can get others to believe in us too, the sooner we end this trepidation.”

“I know I used to have feelings like that, and I want to believe, but if you’re not feeling it, it’s hard to believe,” Fagan said.

“Now you know how I felt. However, I now know, sometimes you have to find peace where you can. Listen to the sound of the fountain when we reach the center of town and tell me what you hear.” They knew what he was referring to, they felt the peace of nature within them before, so they knew it still existed, they just had to find a way to feel it again, then teach others to feel it.”

Suddenly, from behind them, a loud explosive bang rang out, startling Fagan and scaring the others. They turned quickly

to the noise and saw a young boy with a gun in his hand, no older than ten, standing over another boy lying on the ground. The echo of shot still rang in their ears as they witnessed the boy on the ground crying. His shirt filled with blood as he looked up at the other boy and tried to call his name. With the gurgling sound of blood in his throat choking him, he took one last gasp of air before passing. Fagan and Colt both grabbed their eliminators and pointed them at the boy.

“Oh my, what has he done?” Elle shouted.

Ryan stepped in front of the girls and said, “Keep back.”

Colt shouted to the boy, “Put it down, put it down now.”

The boy, standing in shock himself, saw Colt and Fagan pointing eliminators at him and dropped the gun next to the fallen boy.

“Why did you do that!” Fagan yelled.

“He’s not going to hurt me anymore,” he cried.

The smell of gun powder filled the air as a gentle breeze blew down the street. Fagan walked over and picked up the gun, wondering where the little boy would have gotten it from. None of the crew had ever seen one before, they had only seen pictures. Replaced by eliminators long ago, handguns almost became a myth. But Fagan could feel the obsessive power the weapon possessed as he held it tight. No sooner than Fagan picked up the gun than the boy ran off.

The gunshot startled all that heard it. From the windows of any shop on the street, people looked out in time to see Fagan standing with the gun in his hand, a boy lying dead in the street and another running from the scene. It wasn’t long before word began to spread that Fagan had shot the boy. To add insult, the first group of boys the gang came upon claimed Fagan’s threatened them in an attempt for their fifteen minutes of fame.

“What a mess,” Prudence angrily professed.

“What a mess is right. I’m the one being blamed for this. I’m getting less and less enthused about helping these people and more and more inclined to go to battle,” Fagan said.

“We need to go down to the courthouse and put a stop to the rumors before the entire city goes off the rails,” Prudence said.

Fagan wasn’t ready to placate the council or the people, he wanted absolution. “We need to find that boy, is what we need to do, until he’s found and held responsible, this cloud will tear at the fabric of the town’s civility.”

“You are right, but we still need to get in front of the council before they are forced to issue any judgements. They will see the truth in our minds, so we will have to go in person. Take Colt with you while we look for the boy.”

“You’re on the judiciary council, why don’t you address them? Let them read your mind. I’ll go find the boy.”

“Fagan, I understand your frustration, but please, let’s do this calmly and right. We’ll find the boy; you just tell the council what they need to hear before the city begins to burn.”

Ryan suggested advertising on the public information system for the boy, “I think we need the public to get involved looking for the boy, the sooner the better.”

Elle spoke, “I know where he is.”

“Where?” Prudence asked.

“He’s a ten-year-old, he just committed a heinous crime, he would obviously seek protection from the only one he could trust, his mother.”

“That’s great,” Emma said sarcastically, “how are we supposed to find her?”

Elle relied, “The boy that was shot will have people looking for him, the two boys obviously knew each other as evident of his statement when he shot him, the dead boy’s family will lead us to them.”

“That’s pretty good, how did you think of that?” Emma asked.

“It may have been feelings of hate or fear that drove him to it, but it will be terms of love that will bring him back. That may be what everyone is needing.”

Prudence said in quiet reflection, “If only we could give it to them.”

Fagan and Colt went to the courthouse and met with the judiciary. After careful telepathic examination, Fagan was exonerated and a new interest in the city’s safety prompted the council to issue a city-wide curfew after dark and increased security details. Colt admitted to Fagan that he could tell what the council was thinking, but it wasn’t very clear, “I think I’m losing more of my abilities.”

“I didn’t want to say anything, but I know what you mean. This really sucks,” shaking his head in disgust.”

Colt then suggested, “Yeah, let’s go find the girls.”

Meanwhile, word passed through the streets of the boy’s identity and before the girls could locate the dead boy’s family, reports were being passed around town that the boy that shot him was found dead in his house, hanging from the banister at the top of the stairs. The mother came home from her late shift at the hospital and found him.

Prudence and her sisters located the boy’s mother and attempted to console the woman. “That poor woman,” she told her sisters, “her son was going through some tough emotional times, and not only is she experiencing his loss, but she feels responsible for it.”

“We should comfort her,” Eave suggested. For as much compassion and empathy as they could muster, it didn’t appear to help much. She went on to tell the woman, “Within your mind, every good thing about you son still exists. Think of those things and celebrate the love you have for him. He is at peace.”

The woman paid her little mind, “Go away, just leave me alone. You don’t know what it’s like,” and continued softly sobbing in resigned remorse.

The girls left heartbroken, thinking society was breaking down in front of them, and this was just the beginning. “I could see curiosity in the faces of the bystanders, but the compassion and love were absent. I couldn’t tell that anyone cared but us,” Elle said. The others just nodded in acknowledgement as they walked back to their commuter.

The next morning, they all gathered in their living room to listen to the daily broadcasts and an image of chaos and anarchy filled their minds. “We need to meet with Ryan as soon as possible.” Prudence suggested.

Meanwhile, Ryan was waking to the sound of banging and crashing outside his house. He jumped up and ran to the window in time to see his neighbor on the left, ram his commuter, a small aerial vehicle, into the neighbor’s commuter across the street. ‘What the hell is going on?’ he asked himself and made a move to go outside to intervene then stopped himself. He knew what had to be done. Shortly thereafter, the whole gang showed up at Ryan’s house.

“We’ve got to do something. If we can’t get a handle on this, it will destroy us,” Colt said, as they walked through the door.

“People are going crazy,” Prudence said.

“They’re going crazy here too, my neighbors just rammed each other’s commuters out of anger,” Ryan said.

“We need to gather and invoke the spirits,” Prudence said.

Before she finished speaking Ryan received an impulse that they return to the mountain. “I’m feeling that we need to get back to the mountain. The spirits are calling us there.”

Everyone perked up, they saw it as a positive sign. “It’ll be tight, but you can ride with us,” Prudence said.

“No, I’ll meet you there, I’m going to pick up Blanca, I can’t keep this from her.”

Ryan picked up Blanca and met the others at the entrance to the mountain. When they approached the rock together, a

passage opened, and they walked it. Blanca appeared to be in awe of the spectacle; she had received the short version from Ryan as to what was going on and didn't believe any of it. Ryan couldn't help but compare her night and day attitudes of the spiritual recession.

The cabinet containing the robes opened on its own and like an old friend, the team fondly donned them in relief. Prudence took Ryan's hand; Colt took Blanca's and together began their ascent up the shaft to the grand room at the top of the mountain. Ascending to the top took about ten minutes, more than enough time for the team to explain to Blanca the truth of their existence. Ryan knew there was more for her to witness and excitedly cautioned her to be amazed.

The anticipation of sitting around the stalwart sequoia table, in council with the spirits, filled the gang's hearts with excitement. They haven't been removed from the spirits for that long, yet it felt like a lifetime, and reflecting on their time with their powers reminded them of what their gifts were intended, and to themselves, vowed to honor their commitments if given the chance.

Upon reaching the top of the mountain, they filed in position around the table but this time it was Blanca to sit outside the table and look on. Ryan, though never having the powers the demigods had, was still the only one to facilitate the spirit's direction.

Ryan began by addressing the spirits as mother and father and within seconds an aura began to form around the table. Unlike the last few times they gathered; the demigods felt their powers return. In concert with the spirits, they had full access to a world of information and foresight. The earth was out of balance due to dark forces that filled the void created by the people's absence of faith. As the aura increased, a glow could be seen glowing from the mountain top down in the city. People's memories had been erased so seeing the mountain glow from high above the city

alerted them to mystery and intrigue. Blanca, looking on in wonder, could feel a residual spiritual emotion as the room filled with an omnipresent exhilaration, matched only by the peace and confidence they each held dear.

Around the table the spirit flowed, instilling in each the knowledge of their duty and reinstatement of their powers. The connection with the spirits lasted less than two minutes but for all who were present, it felt like two hours. Returning from their trancelike state as the spirit's aura returned to normal brought the team back to the present with renewed hope to combat the crisis. Blanca saw the changes in their faces but was unaware of their soulful transformation. That, she would learn from Prudence's touch, which nearly made her faint. A sedating rush of calm and confidence filled her soul with an inner peace she had never known.

Ryan was sure, after this session, that things would be right in the world once more but would forever question why they had to go through it to begin with.

Prudence reminded everyone that there was much work to be done. "Thank the heavens we've returned, but the people have to learn to love and respect us once more. I'm sure it's easy to feel successful, but the people by no means can feel what we feel. You can't teach faith; you have to experience it."

Fagan noted something no one else picked up on, "Was I the only one to feel an ominous presence as the spirits returned?"

Elle, Emma, and Eave joined in together, "We did."

Fagan continued, "There was a dark force filling the void in our spirit's absence, it has not gone away."

A closer examination allowed them all to feel it, except Blanca. Ryan hadn't any powers but his ability to feel and communicate with the spirits confirmed his role as prophet was secure.

"It looks like we will have dark spirits to battle if we are to win the hearts and minds of the people," Colt offered.

Prudence added, “As with all civilizations past, and all things in the universe, we find the balance by opposing the opposites. I suspect that is why we had to start over. The dark forces laid in repose for centuries and now it is our fate to battle them.”

Ryan asked, “How can we fight something we can’t see. We’d have to wait for something bad to happen to identify it, wouldn’t we?”

Looking at Fagan, Emma said, “Allow me,” then turning to Ryan, “Elle, Eave and I were often ridiculed for being too soft, overly sensitive, or weak because of our belief in the power of love, but that is how we will win. The people have to see the difference between benevolence and malevolence and choose for themselves. I believe given the choice; people will choose to love rather than hate.”

Fagan returned his point, “But hate is a more powerful emotion making simple people do things they would never normally do.”

Prudence said, “Ok, that’s enough. There’s plenty of time and examples to argue with either side, but if the universe has taught us anything, a balance will consist of both. We will probably be fighting the dark forces for all of our days. Pace yourselves.”

Ryan had a better understanding of what he started but felt no better about it.

After the session, Eave went to the pantry and brought out a bottle of Regal Farmer’s Nectar, a honey-based liquor, and invited Blanca to the table for a toast and abbreviated celebration for the spirit’s return. In their session’s trance, they received a synopsis of their responsibilities to combat the dark forces and knew they would have to work out the details as they went along. Just knowing that they had their powers back seemed to make the biggest difference. Their confidence was at an all-time high and felt they could conquer anything.



Prudence saw the dangers of being too confident, but also saw that the people would have to take responsibility for themselves, which would take a tremendous amount of pressure off of them. “I marvel at the blessings the world has to offer, and knowing how vulnerable we are, makes those blessing all the sweeter.” She meant those words in humble acknowledgement and after losing and regaining their powers, the others understood completely. They would be careful not to take them for granted again.

A little too much nectar and Eave was compelled to cozy up to Fagan. Eave was beautiful and kind, but the spark just wasn't there, and Fagan spent the next hour trying to cordially refrain from paying too much attention to her. Although Colt and Prudence weren't related their association was more like brother and sister. The level of duty they shared gave them good chemistry for a working relationship and not much more. Ryan and Blanca seemed to be closer than ever before, spending their time at the table locked in each other's gaze, while Emma sat back and studied everyone's behavior as a case study of relationships.

“We should probably wrap it up here,” Prudence said. With her wisdom returned, she suggested to her other demigods, “We should leave our dwelling in the city and return here. Ryan and Blanca will be our liaison with the people, and if living in the city becomes too dangerous, there is room here for them too.” Being close to the people was important and that option would have to be weighed carefully. “An understanding of the dark powers is coming to me. I feel by this time tomorrow we'll have a better idea of how to deal with it.” She then turned to Ryan and Blanca, “You should consider staying here for the night and we'll return you home in the morning.”

After three glasses of nectar, Ryan was inclined to agree. He tried to concentrate all his attention on Blanca when they finally retired to their room, but Prudence's voice, ‘dark powers,’ rang in his mind like an ominous warning. ‘Dark powers,’ he

thought, ‘even the words are scary.’ What tomorrow would bring and how they would deal with it kept him restless most of the night. He did a fair job of hiding his concerns, but Blanca could feel the separation in his attention.

The sun glared though the eastern terrace and reflected off the chandelier in the great room out the western terrace that looked over the city. The sun wouldn’t rise in the city for another thirty minutes and in that time, the mountain looked like a beacon in the night heralding a new and glorious day. Everyone was up and moving around by seven and not having any provision left in the pantry reminded them to waste little time getting ready to descend the mountain.

Blanca offered, “I have many credits in my account, allow me to provide for a wonderful breakfast in town.”

Fagan wasted no time with a reply, “Heaven’s sake, I am famished, thank you!”

Everyone one else was surprised how quickly he responded but acknowledged the offer with appreciation as well.

“That’s very nice, but you know, now that we have our powers back, we no longer need credits,” Prudence said.

But, Blanca insisted, “I still want to do it, it’ll make me feel good.”

“Very well.”

They descended the mountain, flew to the Humble Kitchen, and discussed their plans to reintegrate into society over breakfast.

Colt suggested, “I think we need to physically get out every day and go to different parts of the city and project our presence. The people need to feel the spirits within us again.”

“Don’t forget, they have no memories of us having powers. The ability to feel a positive message is much more important than them knowing it is being facilitated by us,” Prudence interjected.

“What about the fourteen plus million outside the city?” Emma asked.

“We need to start at the highest concentration of people and work our way out,” she said.

Fagan reminded them, “We’d be wise to keep in mind there are dark forces out there as well.”

“Yes, that reminds me,” Prudence said, “when our memories left the people, so did the memories of the spirits and that void, opened the door for the dark forces to fill in the gaps. I think the only way to rid the people of the darkness, is to fill them with the light.”

“That sounds philosophically religious,” Ryan said.

Prudence replied, “Yeah, in a way, that’s a good way to look at it. The peace and love the spirits offer can only be influential if the person believes they can, and keep in mind, those dark forces may not want to leave.”

“Well, I think at this point we can all agree it’s going to be a war,” Colt said.

Fagan added a safety concern that reminded them of the dangers involved, “We’ve already had a boy killed by another seemingly innocent boy and the city’s security forces are reporting three eliminators missing from the armory. Colt and I can account for two. Folks, we have someone out there with a very dangerous weapon.”

“Why do we have them in the first place?” Elle asked.

“It’s been many years, but they were developed to control the widespread overpopulation of wild bores. I guess you were too young to remember, but a couple children were lost due to attacks, and the council was forced to act.”

As they finished their breakfast and prepared to canvass the city, Elle suggested, “We should stay in constant contact.”

Emma added, “Maybe we should be in pairs.”

“Both are good ideas,” Prudence agreed, “but, I think because of the missing weapons, we should only have two teams,

seeing that we only have two eliminators. Colt, Eave, and I will go west to north, Fagan, you take Elle and Emma east to south.”

Fagan asked, “Why are you assuming to be the decision maker?”

“Ok, what’s your idea?” She asked.

He thought for a second, “No, this is ok, I was just wondering.”

Colt laughed at Fagan, “It’s because she thinks faster than you, dummy.”

“I know.”

## Chapter Four

Prudence, Colt, and Eave left the restaurant first and started walking down Magnolia Drive. Two story buildings lined the street, famous for antiques and all thing nostalgic, the shops had people from all over, visiting New Providence looking for a piece of forgotten history. Prudence herself, spent a lot of time there and knew the shops well. As she passed strangers on the street, one of the first things she noticed was the lack of interaction among the passersby.

“Colt, can you see that woman’s aura?” Prudence asked.

“No, can you?”

“She’s hurting,” Eave said. “I can feel emotional pain.”

“Excuse me ma’am,” Prudence addressed the woman, “I just wanted you to know that there are still people that care.”

The woman stopped, “That’s an odd thing to say,” she said with curiosity.

“Not really, you see I can tell that life is weighing heavy on you and if I can lift your spirits even a little, it is something I must try.”

“You’re a stranger, why would how I feel concern you?” The woman asked.

Prudence replied, “I’m sure you remember happier times. You may not be aware, but we used to see the beauty in things and life seemed much happier. The smell of the flowers, the songs of the birds, the laughter of babies filled our hearts with joy, so what happened?”

The lady looked at her, then looked at Eave and Colt and said, “I don’t know.”

They could tell the woman was confused. Eave put her hand out to the woman. She looked down at her hand and instinctively took it. As soon as their hands touched, Prudence saw the woman’s aura return to soft orange glow. Eave said, “We are spreading a message of Hope. If you have faith in what is

good, if you believe love can concur hate, happiness can fill your heart once more.”

With a more cheerful expression, the woman asked them, “Who are you?”

Prudence replied, “We are simply messengers, will you help us share this message?”

The woman said, “It’s kind of hard not to now. You’ve brightened my day and that’s worth noting to at least my family and friends. It’s not every day you meet a stranger that just makes you feel better. Thank you.”

As they walked further down the road, they talked of how the woman just needed to be reminded she had the joy within her already, she just needed to identify it.

On the other end of the street, Fagan Elle and Emma came to the end of Magnolia and took a right onto Fairview Boulevard where manufacturing and industry employed most of the regular working class. They approached a small group of workers outside the Aviator, the largest manufacturer of the commuter, who were debating whether to walk into work or not. “Good morning fellas,” Fagan said.

“Morning,” one of the men said with little to no concern.

Elle noticed a ghostly haze around the crew that seemed to dissipate as they approached. They passed the men and continued down the street, then Elle mentioned what she saw.

“You saw that too?” Fagan said.

“It looked like it disappeared,” she said.

Emma said, “I don’t think it disappeared, I think it just moved on.”

As they made their way to Tailor Me This, the only textile company in New Providence, the ghostly shadow reappeared. Fagan concentrated on it and learned from it. “That’s evil, pure evil. I could feel nothing but ill will from it. This is proof that there are more spirits in the world than the ones we know.”

He shared what he felt with Emma and Elle to get their impression of the mysterious presence.

“That is definitely evil,” Emma said.

Elle said, “We shouldn’t get too close.”

“I think we need to follow it and find out where it’s going and what it’s doing,” Fagan said. “We see and feel different spirits and can, at times, control them, perhaps these spirits can be controlled as well.”

“Perhaps they are already being controlled by someone else,” Emma said with a warning.

“All the more reason to find out.”

Elle admitted, “I don’t like this.”

They approached the front of the factory and felt the dark force whirl around them and soared down the street away from them. “It’s running,” Fagan said, “I felt it, it felt us, and we scared it.”

“Elle,” Fagan said, “I don’t think you have to worry anymore; I think our powers are greater than it and it knows it.”

“We need to let Prudence know,” Emma mentioned.

“We will, but let’s go back to those guys outside of the Aviator to see what we can learn from their contact with it.”

By the time they got back to the crew, only half of them remained.

“Why are you gather here?” Fagan asked.

“What’s it to you?” One of them said.

Fagan wasn’t one to let commoners disrespect him and projected in a position of strength that he’d be wise to tone down his rhetoric. “A moment ago, there were more of you, and I got the impression you were debating quitting work.”

“Yes sir, that’s right,” the man said.

“Are the conditions that bad?”

“I’m just tired of working I guess.”

Fagan asked, “So, if you quit what will you do?”

“Nothing, absolutely nothing.”

Emma addressed one of the others huddled in the street, “Without employment, how will you get the credits to support yourself?”

That man admitted, “You don’t need credits. We’ll just take what we need, nobody’s going to do anything.”

Fagan looked at Emma confused, then back to the man, “You need to do the right thing. What makes you think being irresponsible and corrupt is the right thing?”

The man looked at Fagan and like a light coming on, the man began to feel the righteousness of Fagan’s inquiry. Elle saw the darkness surrounding him brighten and could feel his soul awaken.

“I apologize,” the man said, “I am a little confused, I feel different than I did a minute ago and am afraid I may have unduly lashed out to you.”

Fagan said, “That’s all right. We’re just trying to help. You have far too many good things going for you to make life this difficult.”

The other crew members seemed to come around at the same time and adopted a positive attitude. They reentered the Aviator and went back to work. Fagan, Elle, and Emma were left outside wondering if the dark spirit’s presence was the bad influence in their situation.

“At least we stopped them from making a mistake,” Elle said.

“The day’s not over, we only addressed one issue and now they’re back to being vulnerable to additional influences.”

Emma told Fagan, “I think we need a bigger, more aggressive means of communicating with the people. If we have to confront each person with each issue, there’s not enough time in the day or days in the year to make a difference.”

“I know.”

Elle thought, “What if we held a concert to bring people together and bombard them with the spirit?”



“That’s a wonderful idea. Run that past Prudence when we meet up,” Emma said.

Meanwhile back on Magnolia Drive, Colt, Prudence, and Eave met person after person, each with their own troubles and each walked away with a renewed feeling of relief.

They communicated and met for lunch to discuss their experiences and the area of the dark force was naturally the item of the most concern.

“Imagine,” Colt said, “If we were giving powers, what would stop someone else from being given dark powers?”

“You are right.” Prudence said, “we have to assume that a balance in the universe would require conflicting powers.”

“Then why have we never had it before?” Eave asked.

Fagan suggested, “Maybe that’s why we were tasked to lose our powers in the first place, so the alternative could come into balance.”

“Once again, Fagan, you surprise me,” Prudence said, “but you also said the dark spirits ran from you indicating that the light may be more powerful than the dark. When we vacated our powers, we may have made room for the evil to proliferate. Now that we have our powers back, I see no reason why we can’t restore the world to peace. It’ll take work of course, but I’m very optimistic.”

Colt insisted, “We have to follow these shadows, if there’s a source or refuge, we have to be able to identify it.”

“I agree, also Elle’s concert idea is good. We need to let as many people know there is Hope in the world and to embrace it.”

Ryan may not have the powers the demigods had, but he could receive messages from them. Prudence asked Ryan if he and Blanca could work on putting together an outdoor concert in the square downtown. Ryan thought, ‘This is right up Blanca alley. She knows everyone.’ “Sure,” he said, “I’ll talk with Blanca and get back with you.”

For the next three days, Colt and Fagan roamed the streets looking for more clues to the dark spirits. As they approached a location where dark forces were present, the bad spirits would dissipate and disburse. Fagan and Colt were all but convinced that their presence would keep the evil at bay and began to feel more confident that the dark spirits were benign until, on day three, they stumbled upon Alex at Ryan's old watering hole of all places. Alex appeared to be a young man who seemed harmless at the onset, but after closer examination, neither Colt or Fagan could read or sense his thoughts.

"I've not seen you here before," Colt addressed Alex.

"That's fine with me, I know who you are."

Fagan got an uneasy feeling, "Yeah, who are we?"

"You're the one's chasing me. So, now that you've found me, what's next?"

Colt and Fagan put two and two together and realized he had a connection to the evil spirits. "What do you think you're doing? You don't belong here," Colt said.

Fagan casually lowered his hand closer to the eliminator on his hip.

"Don't do anything foolish," Alex suggested, as he straightened his back in a defensive posture. "I don't care if these people get hurt, and if the two of you were to get hurt, it will only amuse me."

Upon that threat, Fagan grabbed his eliminator and asked, "what's to stop me from frying you right now?"

"It won't work," he said. "You're not the only ones with powers, and my powers don't involve kissing and making up."

"What do you want?" Colt asked while putting his arm in front of Fagan as if to hold him back.

"You've had a pretty good run, exercising your powers over the people, but now you're just going to have to share. These people have a right to choose their gods and when you failed to

give them what they desire, my gifts became appetizing. It's not up to you, it's up to them."

"Rest assured we will not allow you to harm another one," Colt said.

"Yeah, with the vengeance of all our powers we'll stop you."

"From what? I haven't hurt anyone," Alex said.

"You threatened the people here and us, and there's the matter about the boy who shot his mate and hung himself."

"He did that on his own, what people do with the knowledge I give them is their choice. As for the people here, you're the one putting them in danger. Your weapons are more of a threat to them than I am."

Fagan decided he'd had enough and pulled his eliminator, but as soon as he did, Alex vanished in thin air. "Where did he go?" Fagan excitedly questioned.

"I don't know. Is he a ghost?" Colt replied.

"We need a new game plan," Fagan said while walking through the tavern looking for him. "We need to reconvene the council as soon as possible." They remained vigilant all the way back to the mountain.

Prudence got word to Ryan that they would be consulting the spirits in light of new information. She told him she'd update him, then reminded him to be careful and stay safe.

The team wasted no time connecting with the spirits, but this time was different; this time the team knew the dark spirits existed which enabled them to receive a connection to them. Although it was an unpleasant connection, they were able to better understand what they were up against. This session lasted longer than most and took them on a tour through history. They were enlightened to the beliefs and concepts civilizations for eons wrestled with regarding gods and spirituality. Each of them interpreted the wisdom from the spirits in their own way and it left them all with questions.

When their session ended, they were emotionally drained and physically exhausted. Their minds were bombarded with mythology and history and now they had to try and make sense of it. Before the session, their concept of life was here and now. The present was where they lived and where their responsibilities lay. After the session, it became clear that the present was merely a conduit to the future. Everything that happened in the past is what created the basis for the future and by tomorrow, today will be just part of the past.

“I feel drunk and disoriented,” Elle said.

“I’m tired,” Eave added.

Prudence felt like she needed to step up and be the strong one, but even she had a hard time controlling her thoughts. “Maybe a little rest will do us good.”

“I can use a drink,” Fagan said.

Colt wasted no time agreeing with him, “Me too, you get the bottle, I’ll get the glasses.”

“Get one for me too,” Prudence said.

They spent the next 30 minutes just sitting around the table, sipping their drinks, and looking at each other. No one spoke, they just quietly reflected on what they were shown and tried to make sense of it. Then Colt slid his chair back, stood up and walked to the terrace. Prudence watched him walk away and wondered if everyone was thinking the same thing. Reading their minds right now was difficult, everyone seemed to be thinking of a thousand things at the same time. She got up from the table next and joined Colt on the terrace.

“The dark energy eluded us from the beginning, I don’t know how,” Colt said.

Prudence didn’t have an answer but suggested, “Maybe it’s because our energy kept the people in the light, and it wasn’t until the light was extinguished that allowed the darkness to appear.”

“We were face to face with Alex, and I felt it, he had powers like we do but he has a devious agenda. Fagan went for his eliminator and Alex vanished. I don’t believe we can fight him in the physical world,” Colt said.

“I understood the dark power originates in the people. We have power that originates in the people as well, but we also have the powers of the earth and universe at our disposal.”

“That’s all fine, but I’m inclined to believe the battle will end up being within the people and we’ll just be bystanders. I don’t feel we have a lot of control.”

Prudence understood his fears and didn’t have a lot to offer in encouragement. “You are probably right.”

Elle, Emma, and Eave left Fagan at the table alone and walked out to the terrace as well. They walked to the railing and looked down at the city. “There’s evil down there and we’re up here,” Elle said, implying they were wasting time and should be out fighting for the people.

“Don’t be too hasty,” Prudence said, “that evil’s not going anywhere and without a plan we could end up playing into its hand, and I’m positive it has a plan.”

“What plan do you think it has?” Emma asked.

Fagan could hear their conversation from the table and hollered out, “Alex’s plan is to get in their heads, appeal to their lazy, selfish egos and offer them an easy way to get what they want without consequence until they’ve completely abandoned us and the light.”

Colt agreed, “He spoke the truth when he said the people were the ones who committed the actions, he was simply the messenger. I think I get it; we have said we are messengers, we need to spread the message and let the chips fall where they may.”

Prudence suggested, “All the historical images we just sat through may be a warning and a sign that society as we know it, may not be ready for the future.”

“We still have a concert to put on in a couple days. Is that still a go?” Eave asked.

“Absolutely,” Prudence said, “It’s a great way for us to get in the hearts and minds of the people. I now know why there has always been so much opposition when it comes to people’s beliefs, people appeal to different influences, and I believe we’re going to lose a lot to the darkness. I think we should prepare ourselves for that and not let it distract us from our mission.”

“I don’t know,” Elle said, “too many incidents like that poor boy’s and my broken heart may not recover.”

Her sisters acknowledged her empathy and nodding their heads in agreement.

They stayed on the terrace, looking over the city for close to an hour talking of the experiences with the ghostly shadow and evil spirit. Alex left them most confused because though the dark spirit made its presence left in the council, no one received an indication whether there were others like Alex who may possess the dark powers.

“What I find amazing is that throughout all of time there have been examples of good versus evil, a positive and a negative, a yin and a yang, yet we survived in a copasetic fashion for hundreds of years without this evil.” Colt said.

“It could be that the earth’s population has reached its cohesive social limits. If you think about it, we’d have to comfort and satisfy the spiritual needs of over two million people each if we were to keep the evil away from the people,” Prudence replied.

“Yeah, but what about last month or last year or ten years ago for that matter. We had almost as many people then?”

“You bring up a good question that I can’t answer except maybe, it’s been building in each generation a little at a time until restraint succumbed to action. Quite frankly I’m a little exhausted from thinking about it. I still have to brief Ryan and my sisters still have the concert to finalize. Do you think you and Fagan can

learn more about Alex before he surprises us with an army of his own?”

“Ok, I’ll get with Fagan and see what we can do.”

Prudence walked back inside and asked Emma to accompany her to Ryan’s. She could have easily communicated telepathically but wanted to talk to him and Blanca in person. When they got to Ryan’s house Blanca was also there.

“Hi, it’s good that you’re both here. I wanted to give you an update in person,” Prudence started.

“Thanks, we’ve been nervous since you called last. How bad is it?” Ryan asked.

“There appeared to be an evil spirit near, determined to spread a negative influence. To make matters worse, the spirit has a person, like us, able to possess and control the spirit. We officially have a good versus evil spirit in play.”

“Is that what caused the boy to kill the other boy?”

“I’m afraid so. It will only get worse. Now that we know of him and he of us, we’re sure he will test us with more and more attacks.”

Blanca asked, “If there’s six of you, plus us, can’t you corner and capture him?”

“Colt and Fagan had him cornered once already, but he vanished right in front of them.”

“So, what are we going to do?” Ryan asked.

Prudence suggested, “I think you should come stay with us up on the mountain.”

Emma added, “Yeah, it’s only a matter of time before your existence is known and that would make your stay here very dangerous.”

“We have jobs, commitments, how can we leave?”

“I know it’s not going to be easy,” Prudence said, “but given the circumstance, I think we have to make safety our top priority. We can obtain any resources we need and clear any credit issues you may have. Once we get a handle on this, we can

adapt and make appropriate changes. I just don't think it's fair to leave you here in this position."

Ryan turned and looked at Blanca, "We'll have to talk about it. When do you need to know?"

"Before we return to the mountain. Do you want us to leave you alone and come back in an hour or so?"

Blanca said, "No, that's ok." She looked at Ryan, we should go with them. I'll call my dad and explain, he can clear everything with our boss at the plant."

"Well, if you're ok with it, I'm good," Ryan told Blanca, then addressed Prudence, "I've got to gather a few things and clothes and Blanca's going to have to go home and get hers."

Emma suggested, "I'll go with Blanca, it'll give her a chance to leave her commuter at her house. You and Ryan can come pick us up when you're done here."

"Ok," Prudence agreed, "we'll pick you up."

They gathered everything they would need to stay on the mountain for a couple weeks, to include provisions from the local grocer and arrived at the north side of the mountain well before dark. They hid the commuter in the bushes and ascended the shaft to the top of the mountain. It was a beautiful April day, and though everyone had a positive attitude and enjoyed the warm setting sun over the city, they were well aware of the dangers ahead.

"The concert starts at three tomorrow," Elle said.

Fagan asked, "Who is performing?"

"Four groups and two solo artists agreed to perform. Only two groups declined. Apparently, charity is not profitable," she said.

Eave added, "We dedicated the concert to the two boys who died and found a lot of people still had compassion in their hearts, but we also encountered many we felt were empty souls."

"What about the vendors?" Colt asked.



“That was the best part,” Elle said, “They are dedicating all the proceeds to the families of the boys. We’re expecting forty to fifty booths set up throughout the square.”

“How did you get them to agree to donate?”

Elle said, “We touched them. As we were making our case and explained that love could heal the pain, we noticed that if we physically touched them, they could feel the spirits flow through us. It was quite amazing.”

Fagan said, “Maybe you should have touched the two groups that didn’t want to participate.”

“We did,” Eave said, “that’s when we felt that they didn’t have a soul.”

Prudence said, “I wonder, can people really exist and function without a soul?”

“I can tell you Alex had no problem functioning without a soul,” Fagan said.

Colt added, “Yeah when I looked into his eyes, there was nothing. An empty hole into an empty space. It was creepy.”

“Elle, Eave, you’ve done good. Tomorrow we’ll go together, mingle with the crowd, and touch them,” she pointed out, “I will introduce each act and say a few words of hope and faith in between each one. If someone else wants to say a few words or introduce anyone let me know,” Prudence announced.

Fagan asked again “So, who did you get?”

“Corona’s Desire, Faithful Youth, Too Close for Comfort, The Keepers, Hannibal Cross and Grace,” Elle said.

“Wow, you got heavy, light, and in between. I love Too Close for Comfort,” Colt acknowledged.

“Yeah, Hannibal Cross is hot,” Emma added.

Prudence closed their discussions of the concert by telling them, “Its sound like tomorrow is going to be wonderful, the weather is expected to be beautiful, the talent is amazing, our excitement is up, I just want to remind you that there’s an evil out there trying to take over. Be careful and vigilant. I think if we do

this right and spread love, hope and faith among the people, the dark spirits will not be able to enter.”

“Look for the auras and the shadows,” Fagan said, “if someone has no aura, they may very well be controlled by the shadows.”

“That’s right,” Colt agreed.

Ryan and Blanca remained quiet most of the evening, feeling a bit out of place. They were not gods, though Ryan could feel the spirits, but he had no powers, and Blanca felt like a commoner in the presence of greatness. Emma could sense her reservation and took her aside. She held her hand and walked into the kitchen with her to get a glass of nectar, “You are one of us now, can’t you feel it?”

Just as she spoke, Blanca felt a warm sense of belonging and return a gaze to Emma’s eyes, “Yes I can, oh, my heart feels fluttered.”

“That’s love, darling, don’t be afraid, embrace it.”

Blanca took her glass back out to the terrace where Ryan was standing by himself. “Sweetheart, I just experienced something I wish to share with you tonight.”

Ryan asked, “What’s that?”

She took his hand and without conversation, instinctively knew what she was referring to. All of a sudden, he was ready to retire for the evening and pardoned himself. Ryan and Blanca walked back into the mountain hand in hand, the gang knew what was going on and looked up at Emma, smiling with guilt.

‘What a night,’ Ryan woke feeling empowered and invincible. He wouldn’t know for another two months but fate would have him a family man sooner than planned. Her flowing blonde hair laid across his chest and the sweetest smell made his lips moist. “Wake up sweetheart,” he whispered in her ear. Her eyes slowly opened and seemed to glow, his attraction to her grew overnight. He truly felt as one with her.

“Emma showed me a secret. Learning has never felt so good, so right. When your soul can touch another soul, a magic and marvelous thing happens, we love. I love you, Ryan.”

Her staring into his eyes had him totally within her spell. He knew what she was talking about and whispered back, “Together we will walk through life, together is who we are. I love you too. Now, let’s get this day going. We’ve got a world to save.”

Ryan rose out of bed with a hop. Blanca sat back smiling like she’d just been given a priceless gift.

“What time is it?” Blanca asked.

“Sun’s been up for an hour. I’d like to get out of the house if you know what I mean. I can’t, I won’t, live my life in fear. It’s a beautiful day, we should go out for breakfast.”

Blanca was nearly overwhelmed at his positive attitude and confidence and realized love could be dangerous. “I’m inclined to believe anything you say because I’m under your spell. I accept that my faith in your judgement is unquestionable, so if you say it’s safe and you’ll protect me, I believe it. Let’s get pancakes.”

Blanca was giddy, and that realization took her way back to when she was a young girl. She used to refer to incidents such as these as emotional vacations, but now that she’s experienced it herself, she no longer feels the wiser. “I think I’m rationally lost and uncommonly satisfied. I’m floating through life.”

Ryan closer relationship with Blanca gave him an increase urgency in the pursuit of happiness and a stronger sense of responsibility to protect their future. Knowing the evils of the ghosts, and their powers, helped him realize that fear was the darkness’ real power and the only way to fight fear was with truth and belief. He felt ready to meet people and combat the fear they may encounter.

Ryan and Blanca gathered their things and found Elle, Emma and Eave all waiting at the shaft.

“We’re going into town,” Ryan said.

“We know, we’re going with you,” Emma said.

“Wonderful,” Blanca excitedly said. She then put her hand out to Emma, Emma took it, smiled at her, and asked, “How was your evening?”

Blanca embarrassingly smiled back, leaned in a little and whispered, “magical.”

“And that’s why I love my job,” Emma said. “Now, let’s go meet some people and spread some love.”

Eave and Elle agreed.

Ryan asked, as they were donning their robes, “Why are you three usually doing things together while Prudence is usually on her own?”

Eave replied, “Prudence keeps us all together. Her powers are greater than ours, they were bestowed upon her by the universe, she is much wiser than we are. Our powers come from the collective soul of humanity, that’s why our focus is on love and compassion, hope, and faith.

“How did that happen? He asked.

“We have the same mother, but Prudence’s father was one of the pilots that were lost in the great solar flare. A few years later, mama married our dad.”

“I didn’t want to be rude, but I saw a difference in you and didn’t know how to satisfy my curiosity,” Ryan said.

“That’s alright, we’re proud of each other,” Emma said.

Blanca asked, “If you don’t mind me asking, “How where you all chosen?”

Eave smiled at Blanca as they all stepped into the shaft. “Well, we have a few minutes to kill on the way down,” and preceded to tell her the story and a history lesson on their way down. Elle and Emma could hardly get a word in edgewise.

Meanwhile, Fagan and Colt where on the far side of the grand room watching them leave. “Let’s beat them into town,” Fagan said.

“Good idea. Let’s grab our robes and go straight down the side. They’re parked all the way up on the north side, we’re parked straight down below.”

They raced down the side of the mountain and were in town ten minutes before the girls showed up. They knew they were playing like children, but it made them feel like they won something.

It didn’t take long before they started receiving thoughts and intuitions from the people. Who was happy, who had concerns? All they had to do was pay attention, and they could see and feel the souls of the people in town. The people’s spirits seemed to lift in their presence. Colt stepped back and noticed, “Yeah, I saw both, that fella’s aura brightened just a bit when you got close to him.”

“That’s it,” Fagan said, “we need to look for people with no aura, people swallowed in a cloud of haze.”

Elle wasted no time talking with people when they got there. The first woman they came across enjoyed a conversation with them about the upcoming concert. “I love Grace,” the woman said, “she sounds like an angel and always sings of hope.”

“Yes, she does,” Elle said, smiling as they cordially passed.

Then next they met a woman and her daughter. The woman seemed normal but her daughter of six looked up at Elle, “Do you see them?”

“Who darling?” she asked.

“The shadow people,” the girl replied.

Emma, Elle, and Eave felt a chill. They knew this little girl was aware of the evil and thought that she must be living in fear. “Sweetheart, what shadow people?” Emma asked.

“Well, they’re really not shadows,” she started to say as her mother interrupted.

“Come on Daphne, leave the nice people alone.”

Emma said, “No, that’s alright, ma’am, we’d like to hear what she has to say, please?”

Daphne started again, “Around you there is a glow, you look like you are in the sunshine, but over there, around that man, he looks like he’s standing in the rain.”

The mother apologized. “She’s been acting funny for the past week or so.”

“Your daughter has a gift. Take it from me, we know a gift when we see it,” and reached out and put her left hand on the woman’s right arm above the elbow. The little girl took her mother’s left hand and suddenly the woman’s face became flushed. For a brief moment a total sense of trust befell her, and her daughter’s words all made sense.

“Bad things happen around those people. Bad things happen in the dark.” Daphne said. Her mother tried to remind her that there is nothing there in the dark that isn’t there when the lights were on. “That’s not it. Sometimes the darkness is left by the bad things.”

The group reminded each other to remember this girl, “she will be an asset, we need to find more like her,” Emma said.

Blanca approached a vender setting up his booth and asked if it was too early to purchase a snack. One of her favorites, pineapple on a stick. “Not at all he,” he said. “you can swipe your credits here and pointed at his register, a small statue of a horse, whose eyes were lenses for the scanner. “That’s neat,” she said.

She brought five over to the group, “I love pineapple,” and handed everyone one, “don’t you?”

They were enjoying their time so far and wandered around the other vendors, selling shirts and hats with inspirational slogans in support for the cause. Only when they came across a vender that seemed to be missing an aura, did they feel uncomfortable that darkness would generally dissipate in their presence. That’s how they knew they were being of benefit. But

occasionally someone would not brighten up, those were the ones the group felt were already lost would have to be weary of.

The guys on the other hand, were more combative. When they encountered someone seemingly void of positive spirit, they questioned their motives. Colt and Fagan learned they couldn't persuade someone with guilt of fear if they were already consumed with it. That was their comfort zone. "I don't think we can help this one," Colt said, referring to a man setting up his wares.

Fagan told Colt, "This guy's not going to honor any donations. He's here strictly for profit."

"Yeah, I got that too."

They walked on to another vender offering refreshment and got a totally different impression. The vendor appeared to be reveling in his participation. Wearing his emotions on his sleeve, he handed Colt and Fagan a bottle of juice and asked, "Did you know the boys?"

"Yeah, we knew them all too briefly," Colt replied.

"Such a shame. Their poor mothers have got to be beside themselves," the man said.

They could tell the man was genuinely concerned and gave Colt enough satisfaction that this was a good thing he could walk away eager to meet others.

"That fellow made me feel better," he told Fagan.

"Yeah, I remember when everyone was like him," then they walked toward the center of the square where the concert would be held. The top platform resembled a grinder, a large, paved area used for parades and ceremonies. In the middle, a large stage was set up looking out over the square. The buildings all around the square were being decorated by volunteers and shop owners. There was a lot of goodwill taking place and that gave Fagan and Colt some relief though they regularly reminded each other not to get complacent.

The girls and Ryan bumped into Colt and Fagan near the fountain in the center of the square. “Where did you come from?” Emma asked.

Fagan just laughed.

“Hey, where’s Prudence?” Elle asked.

Everyone started looking around.

Colt said, “I thought she was with you.”

“You left her, didn’t you?” Elle said sharply.

“Yes, they did,” Prudence said from behind her. She had snuck up on them from behind a truck filled with musical equipment.

“Where did you come from?” Fagan asked.

“You left off the mountain so fast,” referring to Colt and Fagan, “that you never looked back once. I’ve been right behind you the whole time. Of course, I had to catch a ride when I came down, thank you very much, but I flagged a ride pretty quick. Look who gave me a ride,” she turned and faced the truck. Walking toward them was the band Faithful Youth.

“That’s the Faithful Youth,” Blanca said, “They gave you a ride?”

“Yeah, I learned they know the mother of the boy that got shot.”

The gang could feel the pain of loss in their voices as they introduced themselves. “Sharon is devastated but when we told her we’d be playing a concert for his benefit, she was elated. So, on her behalf, thank you for putting this together.”

“Thank you, your music is a gift that this city really needs right now, more than you know, we’re grateful for your contribution,” Prudence said.

“I can’t believe you guys left her alone up there,” Emma said to Colt, then turned to Fagan, “You, I can see leaving her,” she said in jest.

Colt looked at Fagan, “Oh.”

“That’s ok,” Fagan said, “she picks on me all the time.”



“No, I don’t,” she replied.

Smiling and nodding his head at the band, “Yeah, she does.”

Prudence felt like she had to break up the children, “Ok, anyways, what are you going to perform this evening?”

The lead singer said, “Save Me a Place at the Table, and No Greater Heart.”

“Oh, I love those songs,” Blanca said.

Prudence wasn’t as familiar with any modern or popular music as Blanca, she was more of a classical buff, but she could tell good music when she heard it regardless of genre. “I can’t wait to hear it,” she said.

“Back to work guys, we’re holding them up,” Colt suggested.

They had five hours before the official start of the concert to kill and spent the entire time roaming through the growing crowd, engaging the people, and monitoring the atmosphere of the event. They were careful not to divulge their true identity or supernatural powers, but their mere presence allowed the people to get a sample of their magnetism. They gained a lot of information conversing with them incognito; How their lives had seemingly been empty for years and now a ray of sunshine was beginning to brighten their day. Many thought it a shame that it took a tragedy to bring people together, and that was the great takeaway Prudence understood. ‘The spiritual loss the people felt, when their powers went away, wasn’t a loss at all, it is merely an empty cup that needed to be filled.’

## Chapter Five

By all accounts, the preparations for the concert were successful. Corona's Desires was first to perform and ready to begin. Prudence, Elle, and Eave stood in the middle of the stage in front of the band and addressed the crowd. "Good afternoon, isn't it a beautiful day?" Prudence excitedly announced. Her voice echoed in the distance from the buildings on the other side of the square, adding to the event's grandeur. "As you know, this is a charity concert dedicated to the two innocent children we lost a week ago, and we still struggle for answers. The concert is free, but the donations from the vendors throughout the square will go to support the families of Farris Kerns and Merit Simmons. So please, enjoy the show and be generous with your purchases. Please give a round of applause to my sisters Elle and Eave, who have worked tirelessly to coordinate this event." She let the applause die down then introduced the first performance, "Let's get this party started," she yelled, "please welcome to the stage, Corona's Desires!"

The band began to play as soon as they were announced, the crowd cheered and whistled, then Prudence and her sisters left the stage to the left. From their angle, looking out over the crowd, they could see all the way back to the end of the square. The music was too loud to hear a conversation, but they could easily communicate telepathically, "There must be forty thousand people here," Elle said.

"Yes, you did an amazing job," Prudence reiterated.

Eave looked out over the crowd and mentioned, "You can see the goodness floating above them. They almost appear illuminated."

"They do," Prudence said, "but not everywhere. Look over by the bank, there's a dead spot. A small gray patch next to the red tent. Do you see it?"

Elle nodded her head.

“Colt,” Prudence called out in thought, “there’s a strange gray shadow hanging around by the bank, can you check it out?”

Colt and Fagan made their way north through the crowd until they saw what Prudence was referring to. “I don’t believe it,” Fagan said, “It’s him.”

Alex couldn’t resist the crowd and the opportunity to cause trouble. His evil spirit was mostly kept at bay by the abundance of goodwill and positive attitudes filling the hearts of the crowd, but he still managed to navigate the crowd without trouble. As Colt and Fagan approached him, they could tell Alex was influencing a man to instigate trouble with one of the vendors. Alex noticed Colt and Fagan just as the two men were getting ready to get physical. Fagan knew Alex may disappear again if he drew his eliminator and thought that, between Colt and himself, they could easily apprehend him. Before they had a chance to grab him, Alex disappeared again.

“We were so close,” Fagan hollered over the loud crowd and music.

“Prudence,” Colt called out, “he disappeared on us again.”

Prudence was watching from the stage and witnessed the entire incident. “Colt,” she said, “There is no one there.”

“I know, he just disappeared.”

“I never saw him,” she said, “he must be playing with you, hypnotized you or something, check over by the fountain.”

Colt and Fagan had to figure out how to block his hypnotic power before they could hope to catch him. “I’m at a loss,” Fagan said, “Maybe we need to hypnotize him before he does it to us?”

Colt said, “All I know to do is the berserking. Do you think that will do it?”

“We’ve got to try.”

“Hold up boys,” Prudence suggested, “if he can hypnotize you and simply disappear, I see no reason he couldn’t hypnotize you and make you shoot each other like Merit. Maybe we should concentrate on spreading positivity throughout the crowd and

pick and choose our point of attack more carefully. There are a lot of people here, if he can hurt a little boy, I don't think he'll have any reservations about hurting people in this crowd."

"Come on Fagan, she's right. We need a better plan." As they made their way back toward the stage Colt asked Prudence, "Can you see him?"

"No, but I see the shadow."

"Don't lose track of him, if we can't catch him, maybe we can at least keep an eye on him."

"It shouldn't be too hard; he's dragging around a dark cloud."

Elle and Eave had a simultaneous thought, "I wonder what would happen if we were able to touch him?"

"I don't know," Prudence said. "Would our righteousness overwhelm him, or would his evil overwhelm us?"

The concert continued for three hours. Grace was the closing act and her voice resonated over the crowd in perfect pitch. The words of a mysterious language rolled past her lips engaging every man and exciting every woman. "The sweetest sound," Blanca would say. The crowd stood still and silence as she finished her tribute to the boys, "there can't be a dry eye in the crowd."

"Look," Ryan said, "even I can see the aura of the crowd now. It's amazing."

The sun was getting ready to set so they decided not to hang around after the show. "We need to have a very important meeting with the spirits," Prudence said, we should get going."

From the top of the mountain, the sun still burned bright on the horizon, but the city was already in the shadow of the mountain. "Looking down over the city in the evenings is different now. I used to look down at night and see peace, as if we were putting our children to bed. Now, I see an infected city, a cancer on society," Colt said.

“Come everyone, gather around the table,” Prudence said. She looked at Blanca, “Everyone, please.”

Their contact with the spirits became a comfortable therapy to their souls. They learned to synchronize their power and communicate with the spirits as one. The twenty-minute trance was the longest in communication with the spirits they’ve experienced yet. “Another major hurricane is coming. This may be the opportunity we need,” Prudence said.

“Alex will definitely be right at the edge of it, where fear would be the highest,” Colt added.

“I have a plan,” Prudence said, “but, it will take a sacrifice from each of us.”

“Blanca asked, “Sacrifice?”

“Not you, dear, our robes.”

“Excuse me?” Fagan quipped.

“You didn’t pay attention to the spirits?” Prudence started, “Allow me to explain. I saw a vision where a geomagnetic storm and the earth’s magnetic field combined and enabled a magnetic pathway off the planet. We can calculate the exact location where the force is strongest and lure Alex there. Once there, we toss him right out into space.”

Fagan laughed, “I love your sense of humor. We’ll just toss him out into space,” he said condescendingly.

“Hear me out. The Truesite in our robes can take him on the ride of his life, attracted to the earth’s magnetic field, the Truesite can take him out into space for us. I’ve seen it.”

“Theoretically, I suppose it could work,” he agreed. “Sorry, I talk before I think sometimes.”

“How are we going to arrange this meeting. And how do we get him to wear a robe?” Emma asked.

“We will have to remove the Truesite threads from the robes and make a rope out of it. Then, Ryan becomes the bait and lures him, wraps the rope around him, we engage our magnetrons, and the magnetic field carries him off into space.”

“Excuse me,” Ryan said, “you lost me at bait.”

“Assuming Alex can read your mind, we’ll hypnotize you so you’re not aware of the plan until the time is right, we distract him, you throw the rope around him, we energize our magnetrons and the Truesite rope will tighten and ultimately bind him to the geomagnetic storm.”

“You have got to be out of your mind,” Fagan said.

“Thank you,” Ryan agreed.

“I know it sounds crazy, but that’s what I saw. No one else saw this?” Prudence asked.

“I did,” Elle said.

“Me, too.” Eave added.

Blanca said, “I’ll do it.”

“Oh, no you don’t,” Ryan said.

“I can do it, the spirits can occupy me, and I can seduce Alex,” she said.

“I don’t like this,” Ryan said.

Prudence reiterated, “I saw Ryan, believe me, Alex is more interested in a common person able to feel the spirits, than he is sexual seduction.”

Ryan suddenly felt snookered. “I can’t believe I’m doing this.”

“The plan is elaborate; it will take a lot of coordination and timing. We must locate the exact spot where the magnetic forces are strongest and get Alex to that location at the right time. A fraction of a second to get his attention, another to throw a rope around him, and another to turn on the magnetrons before he has the chance to resist. It can be done,” Prudence said.

Colt said, “I have to go with Ryan and Fagan on this.”

“Look at it this way, then. The plan is too intricate, we couldn’t possibly execute each step as planned. However, when the future is presented to us, our advantage is knowing the outcome and these are the events that will take place, we just have to believe.”

“What have I got myself into,” Ryan said, then offered his support.

They spent two days, painstakingly removing the Truesite from the robes and wove them into a six-foot rope no more than a half inch in diameter. It was completely weightless and could fit in Ryan’s pocket without notice. “Don’t you think we should test it?” Fagan asked.

“We should,” Colt agreed. He and Ryan took a magnetron each and asked Fagan to wrap the rope around himself.

“Me? I was thinking Ryan.”

“No, it was your idea, you should have the honor,” Ryan said.

Colt laughed, “He’s right.”

“Ok then, I’ll step up.”

He wrapped the rope around him, they turned on their magnetrons and a magnetometer to measure the forces. Fagan quickly hollered for them to turn it off. “Holy smokes, that was intense. It squeezed me like a python.”

Colt watched the magnetometer spike to 60,000 nanoteslas. “That will do it, that will suck him out into the Geostorm if we’re anywhere near a concentrated magnetic field.”

Colt laughed at Fagan “You should have seen your face, it turned red and blue at the same time.” He laughed again.

“I think you should try it,” Fagan begged.

“No need, we’ve seen it work, you’re a true pioneer,” Colt laughed again.

Fagan knew they snookered him, but he couldn’t resist the adventure. “I want to see Alex’s face when this this thing squeezes his stones.”

The next morning, they learned Hurricane 288 will reach the Florida Keys in two days. The team had to wait till the leading edge of the storm was approaching the panhandle, at which time the magnetic forces of the earth would converge at about 30.42

degrees north latitude. “Looks like we’re going to the Florida panhandle tomorrow. Are you ready?” Prudence asked.

“How can you be ready to lasso an evil spirit in the middle of a hurricane?” Ryan asked. “I’m as worried about the hurricane as I am Alex.”

“We’ve got the hurricane under control,” Prudence said, “we just need it to keep Alex’s mind off of what we’re doing so we can surprise him. There’s a bar overlooking the East Bay that will be open till midnight when the evacuation notice goes into effect, which will be the most vulnerable time for Alex’s victims. We’ll disguise ourselves, concentrate on empty thought so as not to bring attention to ourselves and wait for him to come to you.”

“What if he doesn’t show?” Ryan asked.

“Then you don’t have anything to worry about. We get into your commuter and return here, but I’ve seen it all play out in the vision. You’ll be fine. You will sit in a booth by yourself, mumbling and complaining that the spirits let you down and left you there alone and unprotected. The spirits will help mask your wandering thoughts and when he gets there, he’ll approach you with an offer to join him. That’s when you take out the rope and tell him you took it from us, and that it is supposed to have special powers. His curiosity will set up the moment for us to spring the trap.”

“I am glad you have so much confidence in this plan,” Ryan said.

Blanca held Ryan’s hand, “I think that if we went all the way to Pensacola in the middle of an approaching hurricane and Alex managed to show up at the very bar we were at, as Prudence has envisioned, I would also be inclined to believe that the rest of the scenario would play out as planned as well.”

“I suppose you’re right, that would be an awful lot of coincidence otherwise. If all these things came together, I can only assume that it must be fate.”



Elle and Emma admitted it was the craziest plan they'd ever heard, Colt understood the plan, but like Fagan, didn't pay close enough attention in their session to see it coming. Eave on the other hand, never wavered, she didn't see the plan unfold with the spirits, but she felt the confidence in Prudence's vision and knew it had to be true.

Ryan practiced snapping the rope around Colt over and over till he felt he could do it to Alex. The others practiced hiding their identities and powers.

Finally, the time to set this plan in motion arrived. Everyone was nervous and rightly so. They'd never done anything like this before and the whole idea of flirting with a hurricane didn't make it any easier. They flew down to Pensacola and arrived at the bar around ten o'clock. The winds were constant but not to gale strength yet. The outer bands brought waves of heavy rain with the worst of the storm twelve hours away.

Ryan and Blanca sat at a table in the middle of the room while the others sat in surrounding booths disguised as dock workers. "As soon as he gets here, I want you to go to the restroom, I don't want you too close," he said.

"I got it," she acknowledged.

"Ok, let's do this," and Ryan began mumbling, trying to convince himself that he had been used and abandoned in an effort to lure him there.

Prudence mentally projected to him that he was doing fine, "Keep it going, you're doing fine, I have to back out of the picture now to keep from being noticed, just keep doing what you're doing." She then clouded parts of his memory to hinder their plan.

Ten minutes to midnight Alex showed up. Ryan was sitting facing the door and saw him walk in. "Blanca, you need to go to the restroom now," he said softly and pretended not to notice

him entering the bar. He took a sip of his one and only beer as if it were his tenth and continued to gripe about the clan.

Alex walked right up to him as if he knew he'd be there. He pulled a chair from an adjoining table, turned it around and sat in it backwards across from Ryan. "You've been abandoned, haven't you?" He rhetorically asked.

Ryan lifted his head to acknowledge his presence and tried not to make eye contact. "Yeah, I was let down again." Ryan was nervous, but felt his ploy was effective, he honestly felt a bit used at the moment which helped cover his intentions.

"I can help you," Alex said.

"How?" Ryan asked.

"I can help you get back at them."

"I already have," Ryan said. He pulled the rope from his pocket. The whole crew was secretly paying close attention as Ryan explained to Alex, "I stole this from them and apparently it is very important, it has special properties, and it will devastate them if something happens to it."

Right then the group rose from their booths which caught Alex's attention, Prudence released Ryan's hypnotic state and he sprang into action to throw the rope around Alex. The gang immediately moved to switch on their magnetrons and entrap him. Unbeknownst to the gang, Alex knew of the plan all along and grabbed the rope from Ryan and threw it out the open door. The crew was stunned, everything happened so fast. By the time anyone could get to the door the rope had vanished out into the sky, lost forever to the Geostorm, swept away like a feather in the wind, the rope ascended out of sight as it rode the magnetic field deep out into space.

"What the hell just happened," Fagan yelled and pulled out his eliminator.

"You can put that away," Alex said, "we both know you're not going to use it."

"Oh yeah, I think I will."

“Go ahead, join the team. My spirit will just go into someone else, maybe him or her, pointing to Ryan or Prudence, and you will officially become mine.”

Fagan may not have been the brightest crayon in the box, but he knew what he was talking about. There were boundaries you just shouldn't cross, and murder was one of them.

“You know you can't kill anyone,” Alex said.

“Yeah, but we were prepared and tried to send you out into space anyway,” Fagan said.

“Yeah, and I saved you from that sin, so I guess you owe me.”

Prudence said, “We owe you nothing, we are here to rid the world of you.”

“You silly people. How do you think I knew of your plan?” He waited a moment before continuing, to give them a little more time to be confused. “I was the one who planted the idea in your head in the first place. While you were conversing with the spirits, with whom I converse with as well, I suggested this idea.”

“Why?” Prudence asked, “what do you have to gain?”

“Your robes, with unnatural powers, were symbols that could give you a lot of influence and control over the simple minds of people and I needed to level the playing field. To set the record straight, I did not specifically encourage that boy to shoot his friend or kill himself. I just made him feel unworthy so he would be more susceptible to future influences and his own fears made him act.”

“What is your purpose?”

“I'm glad you asked,” he said. “Now that we're having a conversation, I'd like a drink,” and walked past them toward the bar.

Fagan looked at Colt, “Can you believe this guy?”

He stood at the bar and without saying a word the bartender brought him a beer. He took it without paying and

walked back to the table. “Take a seat guys, you might want to get a drink yourself.”

Prudence was beside herself. She couldn't believe she let herself be influenced to give up her powers, then again to give up the Truesite. From the very first day of receiving her powers she had always been the wisest, the one that couldn't be fooled and here she was getting everything wrong.

“Don't be too hard on yourself,” he told Prudence, “there was nothing you could do. This is how it was supposed to be. You yourself can't deny a balance in the universe and for hundreds of years, the earth has been spinning just fine without me.”

“Whose fault is that?” Fagan said.

“It's no one's fault, it's just the way things worked out. It took a lot of power to wipe out billions of people, and the dark powers absence was necessary to bring civilization back. But now that civilization is thriving again, all the spirits of the world are back together.”

Elle asked, “Are you evil or just mean?”

Alex laughed, “Neither he said. “Just look at me as a free choice. If you offer someone hope, I'm not going to condemn you, but be aware that they deserve an alternative if they are to truly be free. When you initially decided that they could handle being free, surely you thought of the consequences if they made bad choices in life. I am merely the bad choice messenger.”

“I feel so much like a child right now,” Elle said.

Prudence was beginning to understand a little better but that wouldn't stop her from beating herself up over her bad decisions.

Alex then gulped down his beer and suggested, “You kids should get back home, we'll have plenty of time to discuss things in the future. Right now, there's a small group of adolescents considering going door to door after people evacuate and relieve them of their precious material belongings; I need to be there to

assure them that they are masters of their own destiny. You're welcome to stay and talk them out of it."

"He's still playing with us," Fagan said. "Maybe we should go."

Blanca watched everything from a distance and slowly made her way by Ryan's side. "Let's go," she said, "I don't want to be here anymore."

Prudence agreed, "Let's go, we have to figure a new way up the mountain or find a new place to live."

Fagan started saying something about her vision, but she stopped him cold, "Don't you say a word, not one word," she snapped.

They estimated that the only people left behind were probably up to no good and decided to return home. Having relinquished their house when they returned to the mountain left them in a pickle. They had no house and could not rise up the shaft in the mountain without their robes. "Can we hang out at your house tonight until we can rig up something to make it up the mountain?" Prudence asked.

"Sure, how about Colt and Fagan staying with me, you and your sisters can stay with Blanca," Ryan offered.

"Thank you."

Colt spoke up about the mountain. "Tomorrow, I'll go down to Union Engineering and get all the supplies needed to balloon up the shaft and rig a pulley system. We'll create a makeshift temporary elevator until we can modernize and do it right."

"That's interesting. How long will it take?" Ryan asked.

"A couple hours to get the pulley system set up, another three or four hours to build a basket and winch. We'll be riding up and down by dinner. Modernizing an elevator will take considerably longer. Why do you ask?"

Ryan explained, "I turned in my vacancy notice for the end of the month."

“Me too,” Blanca said.

“No problem,” Colt said, “We’ll get something temporarily set up that will work until we get something permanently installed.”

Blanca mentioned to Prudence that she felt bad about what happened to their robes. Prudence’s reply was a sign to Blanca of how deeply she felt responsible, “Yeah, it is a shame. We’ve had them passed down to us by ancestry, the only one like it in the world. The element that gave them their powers isn’t found here on earth. It came from another galaxy, and I doubt we’ll ever see the likes of it again.”

Upon finishing her statement, Blanca watched the expression on Prudence’s face change with the tightening of her brow as she dropped her head slightly and sighed. “I suppose, if trusting the spirits is this difficult for us, I can only imagine how difficult it must be for you,” she said.

Blanca wanted to say something that could ease her sense of guilt but questioned herself, ‘Who am I to advise Prudence of anything. I am just a mortal, and she is a god.’ But, ultimately realized that emotion was a human concept, and she was definitely feeling pain. “You did everything the way the spirits advised, no one can blame you and you shouldn’t blame yourself. I have faith in you, and I know you have faith in the spirits.”

Prudence looked at her face to face, “I’m impressed, you have wisdom beyond normal. Yes, I feel responsible because I am responsible, I just assumed that the results were negative, perhaps they are not.” She smiled and thanked her for caring.

Colt reminded everyone they still had a hurricane to deal with, “If we can’t get up the mountain by tomorrow evening, we’ll have to convene a council meeting with the spirits from here to push the hurricane back out to sea.”

Blanca looked puzzled, “How do you push a hurricane?”

Colt smiled, “The spirits of the earth are much more powerful than those of people. The earth is alive with molten lava,

winds and currents, the crust cools, and floats about and life grows all upon it. We are blessed with the time the earth gives us and if we are worthy, the earth allows us to make requests. We will ask the spirits to form a high-pressure system ahead of the storm to push it back out to sea.”

“But we had a storm about thirty years ago that killed hundreds of people. You couldn’t have done it then?” she questioned.

“We tried, but sometimes people become sacrifices for the benefit of humanity as a whole,” Prudence said, “sometimes bad things happen to remind us that we are not in control and must rely on faith.”

Ryan questioned, “Giving the recent circumstances with Alex, wouldn’t it seem more likely that this could be one of those times?”

“That may be, we won’t know until that time comes,” she said.

“You shouldn’t worry,” Colt said, “we’ll be safe up in the mountain.”

“I wasn’t worried about us.”

“I know,” he said, “I’m concerned as well.”

It was a restless night for everyone. As soon as Union Engineering opened, Colt, Fagan, and Ryan were there gathering the equipment and supplies needed to balloon up the shaft. 1500 feet is a long way to winch a cable, pulling a personnel basket up the shaft.

While Elle and Emma fabricated the balloon that would carry them up the shaft, Fagan built the personnel basket. Colt and Ryan installed the winch at the base of the shaft and hooked up the power to it. Fagan completed the basket, placed it on top of heavy canvas balloon, then the girls filled it with helium. With the basket tied down, they loaded the pulley system and rope into the basket, connected the cable to the basket to be hauled up the shaft when the basket rises.

Colt explained, “Good news everyone, we’re ready. Bad news, Ryan, you’ve got to make the trip up in the balloon alone.”

“What?”

“I’m sorry, but you’re the lightest of us that’s still strong enough to secure the pully system. Between the basket, you, the pully system, rope and cable, there’s just too much weight for anyone else to fit.”

“Ok, I’ll do my best.”

Colt continued with instructions, “When you get to the top, there is a huge girder running across the ceiling over the shaft, cut a hole in the girder for this shackle,” he handed him a large shackle, “secure the pully firmly to the girder. Once the pully is in place thread the rope through the pully and attach the cable to the other end. Lower the rope down the shaft, we’ll run it through the winch and pull the cable back down to us. You connect the other end of the cable to the top of the basket. After everything is tightly connected, step back and open the petcock valve on the balloon. The balloon should float back down the shaft. Listen, you must make sure the pully, the basket and the cable are firmly secured because if the basket separates from the pully, you’ll be stuck up there alone.”

Fagan added, “You’ll be fine. You’ve worked on aircraft, there’s no doubt you have the mechanical chops to do this, but keep in mind how much weight is involved. You’ll have to manhandle the rope, the pully, and the cable to some extent. Use this leader to tie the rope and cable off while you’re threading it through the pully and please, be safe.”

“Now you have me worried,” Ryan said. “Just kidding, I got this.”

“Alright, let’s get this show on the road,” Fagan said.

It was a slow and careful process and by the time everything was hooked up, tied off, and operational, they were all amazed at its success. All in all, it took just over six hours, and the basket was operational. It was able to lift all eight of them in



a single trip and would only take about five minutes to make the trip up or down.

Shortly after everyone made it to the top, they grabbed a quick bite to eat and sat around the table in an attempt to ask the spirits to blow the hurricane away from land.

Neither Ryan nor Blanca sat in on the session, they would not have influence with the spirits and the concentration needed would have been hindered by their involvement. The team concentrated on increasing the barometric pressure over land but the best they could do was cause the hurricane to stall its forward movement. The winds remained battering the coast, while the system itself failed to advance. Finally, to keep it from sustaining heavy damage to the same area for an indefinite time, they had to abandon the quest to drive it out to sea. “We have to let it run its course. If we keep fighting it, everything will get destroyed.”

They broke from their session knowing they couldn’t stop it and had to accept that Ryan’s questioning fear was warranted.

“I think the spirits are allowing the darkness to succeed so people will be forced to choose between good and evil as they deal with the aftermath,” Prudence said, “and that’s assuming I know what the spirits are doing. I’ve been fooled before.”

“In that case,” Elle suggested, “we should be there when it’s over to help them recover get back their faith in us.”

“Yes, you are right, we’ll have to be there,” Prudence said.

“It looks like this may be the war we will have to fight,” Colt said, “and if it is, we’d be fools to think we could save everyone. We may have to learn how to lose.”

“I don’t want to think about losing,” Elle said.

“If it makes you feel better, technically it wouldn’t be us losing, it would be the people,” Fagan said.

She replied, “No, that doesn’t make me feel any better.”

The next morning, they looked to the south from the eastern terrace, and saw the dark sky rolling in. Knowing the storm had grown was alarming, but they also knew the buildings

in town were built to withstand much more than this hurricane could deliver. Unfortunately, that was of no consequence if they were to have flooding, which is always a concern for cities on the river.

The upper-level winds were fierce and whistled through the castle's architecture like a siren. They were safely imbedding in their manmade mountain but couldn't help to worry for the people below. Every time a natural disaster occurred, they tried to avert it or at least minimize the damage to animals and people, but occasionally the earth let everyone know who was boss. This hurricane would take only few lives, for that, they were grateful.

After the storm had passed, they scuttled down the shaft to find their commuter still intact within the bushes. "We are going to have to build a garage down here," Colt said.

"Why can't we modify the electromagnetic security device to allow only us to fly up the mountain," Fagan asked.

"We would have to cut through the granite blocks and open up a parking space, something I'd feel more comfortable about if we had an architectural engineer. Maybe we should look into it, it'll make coming and going so much easier. Let's talk some more about it when we get back."

'Fagan came up with another good idea,' Prudence sarcastically thought, 'what is going on?'

Prudence, Fagan, and Colt left the others behind to help coordinate emergency supplies while they flew down to the panhandle. They surveyed the damage and consoled the people in need. Much to their surprise, they witnessed minimal property damage, even though the winds hit 130 miles per hour. Three deaths were attributed to the storm, all due to careless acts by looters. Prudence began to feel a sense of relief and believed the spirits had mercy on them. "It's hard to believe we fared so well in the storm," she told Colt.

"I don't think the physical aspects of the storm is our main concern. Sure, I think it's great that we didn't have a lot of people

hurt, but considering most people evacuated, I'm not that surprised."

"So, what is our main concern?" Prudence asked.

"Look," he pointed across the street at a home on the corner, "I doubt seriously if those people are removing their own furniture from that house."

Fagan said, "I'll bet Alex is nearby."

"Hold on, I'm going to try something," Colt said.

Fagan read his mind, "I'm going with you," and they walked briskly across the street and confronted the thieves with a healthy dose of berserking. They pounded an energy burst into their brains which caused them to set the furniture they were carrying down and took off walking down the street like they were drunk.

Prudence asked, "Is that safe?"

"As much as we gave them, probably not," Fagan said.

"They're probably going to forget their names for a week," Colt said with a snicker.

"I don't know if we should be risking the potential harm. Couldn't you have simply amplified their sense of guilt or something?" Prudence asked.

Right then, Fagan caught a glimpse of a figure from the corner of his eye. "Alex, I knew you'd be around here somewhere."

"Where did you come from?" Prudence asked. She noticed right away that he seemed to appear out of nowhere.

Colt picked up on her assessment and realized the same thing. "How are you coming and going out of thin air?"

"You can't escape me. I am already in your head."

All of a sudden it clicked; Prudence figured it out. "Guys, he's not here."

"Oh, I'm here all right," Alex said.

“No, he’s not,” she addressed Colt and Fagan, “he’s in our heads, he’s not real. He only show’s up when our emotions become negative.”

As she spoke, Fagan and Colt considered her declaration and as quickly as Alex appeared, he vanished again.

“Holy cow, I think you’re on to something. Now what?” Colt said.

Prudence suggested, “Let’s make sure all sectors down here have power then let’s go home. We’re in much better shape to understand what we’re up against and another session with the spirits could give us the answers we need.”

“Why wouldn’t the spirits have given us this information already?” Fagan asked.

She looked at him, “Because we’re damaged. We didn’t ask the right questions and when we relinquished our powers, we must have opened an ugly door. I think Alex is just a manifestation of the dark forces and we need to examine ourselves more closely.”

“Damn it,” Fagan said, “more head games.”

They concluded their visit to the coast and returned to New Providence with a renewed mission to understand the spirits, good and bad.

## Chapter Six

Upon their return to the mountain, Prudence, Colt, and Fagan briefed the others and held another session with the spirits. This time, armed with more information, they were able address the right questions and learned enough to find a more comfortable acceptance of their spiritual connection. They had assumed the spirits were all benevolent and learned they were not. Some of the oldest spirits in the universe were born around chaos and destruction and their manifestation on earth was a necessary balance for humanity's will.

"It appears to be a long time coming," Prudence remarked. "These spirits have always been here; I suppose we should be grateful we had so many years without their influence."

"Maybe they're why I've always been so critical," Fagan said.

"No doubt."

"So," Colt started, "the sense of urgency to save the world is not great, how do you want to proceed?"

"I have an idea," Elle said. "Why not let the people handle their lives on the own with the exception of an occasional visit from one of us to reinforce our commitment to their welfare."

"Yeah," Eave agreed and added, "if the only time they see or hear from us, we bring good news, they may associate us with something good and be more inclined to revere us."

"That is a wonderful idea. If we periodically take turns and walk among them projecting positive attitudes and emotions, if we tap into their psyche and assure them, we are caring, when they fall unto harder times, maybe it will help them cope and give them hope rather than resorting to anger or despair, which may invoke the sins of the dark spirits."

The concept had been around for thousands of years, but since the reconstruction of humanity, following the pestilence of the Comet Providence, people took the spiritual presence of the

gods for granted and had not known a time where faith was not certain.

“People have always known and loved us,” Prudence said, “it wasn’t until recently that people began to question us, and when we vacated our power it erased the god’s memories, so, here we are, at the beginning. I like Elle’s suggestion, what do you all think?”

Without decent, everyone agreed. “Ok, we limit our physical presence and whenever we are around the people, we consciously project positive attitudes and emotions,” Colt stated.

“Agreed, but we’re going to have to monitor them as well. It would go a long way if we were to actually address and comfort someone in need. They would be inclined to advocate for us,” Eave added.

Ryan said, “Far be it for me to disagree, I can say for certain as living proof, seeing is believing. You have shown me a path to righteousness, I have no doubt, other people will see it too. I only question the amount of people that you can reach.”

Blanca said, “We reached a lot at the concert, couldn’t we do something like that again, it was fun.”

“Ryan’s right, we’re going to have to go big or it’ll take a lifetime to get everyone to acknowledge the spirits,” Prudence admitted.

Fagan nudged Colt, “Let them finish that conversation, how about you and I figure how to blow a hole in the mountain and build a sky port? We should grab Ryan while we’re at it.”

“I know what you’re doing, Fagan,” Prudence quipped, “I know you think building the garage is a man thing but saving the people’s souls is not a woman thing, it’s an everyone thing. We’ll need everyone’s input.”

“My input is, that I trust your input and you can count us for whatever you come up with,” Fagan said.

Prudence laughed, “Ok, girls, you heard him, whatever we come up with, they’re ok with.”

“Damn it, Fagan,” Colt slapped him on the arm, “you did it again.”

“What?”

“If I have to explain it, I might as well slap you again. Come on, we need to find an engineer for the elevator and the garage.”

Ryan said, “We had some really smart engineers at the Aviator, I’ll bet we could get a couple of them to collaborate with us on it.”

“Great,” Colt said, “let’s go.”

The boys were off on a mission and left the girls at the mountain to plan a crusade to capture the hearts of the people. Prudence told her sisters, “I don’t mind them running off, we need the elevator and garage too, besides, I trust our judgement more than theirs with regard to the important decisions. They’re not going to escape their participation anyway.”

They ended up employing six people, not including the engineers or themselves for the design and installation of the elevator and an additional ten people for the construction of the sky port. The computer integration for the commuter’s transponder was the easiest of tasks. That was Ryan’s secondary passion behind his robotics vocation.

The engineers had to increase the power output of the mountain’s main generators to provide enough power for the elevator. In order to do that, they had to install five additional crystal core capacitors to the power plant’s neutron cell. The engineers warned them, “If the cell is damaged, a meltdown could result in a possible implosion.”

“What could cause that?” Fagan asked.

“Only two things, a subterranean electromagnetic field reversal from the earth’s poles shifting or sabotage. Seeing where we’re not due for another pole reversal for another eighteen thousand years, I’d keep the generator room under close and secured protection.”

“That’s good to know. Thanks, you guys are awesome.”

After all the construction was complete and everything was working, Ryan had a few burning questions he couldn’t stop thinking about and finally got the nerve to ask. “Excuse me Prudence,” he plead, “I have a question that’s been bothering me.”

“All right, what is it?”

“As demigods, given all your powers and knowledge, why did we need to solicit the help of engineers to design the sky port and elevator?”

She smiled, “I’m glad you think so highly of us, but to tell you the truth, we’re just regular people like you that have been given additional powers, not all-encompassing powers. We have a connection to the spirits which gives us insight, but knowledge is a learned attribute.” She continued, “You know, counselors of the past were much smarter than we are now. Over time, our human DNA diluted our gene pool and the ultrahuman DNA was left for mainly spiritual communication. There was a time, about seven or eight hundred years ago, that our ancestors could see the future, had telekinetic powers, and could navigate time space dimensions. A lot has changed since then.”

“So, the human aspect of your DNA is overtaking the ultrahuman aspect? Excuse me, but that sounds illogical.”

Prudence laughed, “Yeah, we are illogical. Perhaps evolution will correct that one day, or not.”

“Well, that does answer my question.”

“Now, I have a question for you,” she said.

Ryan asked, “What’s that?”

“What are you going to name your baby?”

“How do you know Blanca’s pregnant?”

She looked at him funny, “Hello, I still have powers,” she laughed.

“We haven’t talked about it yet,” he said. “But you’ll be the first we tell.”



After two months of construction, Colt and Fagan were finally out of excuses for participating in the goodwill tour. Prudence cornered them as they stood at the entrance to the sky port admiring their work, “Ok, fellas, I hope you enjoyed a vacation from socializing with the people, but it’s time you honor your commitment and go spread some good will and confidence among them.”

Colt and Fagan knew this time was coming, “Ok, what do you want us to do?”

“You need to physically go out and associate with people and as you do, concentrate on encouraging them to trust you, that you have their best interest at heart, and you will fight for them. If you can share the embodiment of the spirit with the people, they will want to believe in them and you. That is what we need, to give them a chance to believe that their lives have been blessed. Can you do that?”

Colt said, “I think we can.”

Prudence asked, “How about, Fagan, can you make people love you?”

“I can only hope, maybe I’ll need the spirits to help me out.”

“That’s what I’m talking about.” Prudence wasn’t sure Fagan understood her sarcasm but knew Colt did it by the funny look and raised brow he gave Fagan. She further instructed them that they needed to cover areas from the bottling company on Hill Street to the river and all the way down to Sumpter Port Shipping.

“That’s too much ground to cover in a day,” Colt said.

“I know, it should you take you about six days, or three days if you split up,” she said.

Fagan suggested, “You’re taking advantage of us.”

“Yes, I am, but it’s not unfair or out of spite. Elle, Emma, Eave, and I have all spent two weeks each doing this and have covered the entire eastern side of the city all the way down to Baker Reservoir.”

After Colt and Fagan left, Ryan realized the influence they had over him and reflected on his apprehension to engage Elle, Emma, and Eave. The fact that they were very attractive may have played a part, but now, as the only male on the mountain, he knew his trepidation would be too obvious and forced himself to cordially associate.

“That must have been hard on you to lose your powers?” he asked Emma.

“It was, we had become so use to feeling the spirit, when we could no longer feel them, we were lost.”

“I can’t even begin to imagine,” he said. “What is it like, to have your powers, I mean?”

Before she could answer, Blanca walked into the room, “Oh, don’t leave me out, this conversation sounds interesting.”

Emma said, “I have an idea.” She walked out of the room and to the entrance of the elevator shaft. Blanca and Ryan could see her through the doorway. Emma opened the elevator door and whistled, within a few seconds a bird flew out of the shaft and landed on her shoulder. She then walked to the kitchen and returned with the bird still on her shoulder and a few grapes in her hand.

Blanca said, “That’s a cockatiel, where did he come from?”

“He flew in from a vent in the shaft about eight months ago and made a home in the girders. I’m surprised Ryan didn’t see him when he worked on the elevator. Anyway, you asked what it felt like. Here,” she handed them a grape, then put her finger to her shoulder and the bird jumped on it. Then she lowered the bird down and said, “this is Sammy, offer him a grape.” Ryan opened his hand exposing the grape and asked the bird, “do you want a grape?”

Sammy jumped off Emma’s finger onto Ryan’s hand and grabbed the grape by its little stem and flew a couple feet away to a flat surface and began to peel the grape.

“Now, imagine being Sammy,” Emma said, “he’s among huge creatures and by all rights, he should be afraid, yet he feels safe. What a glorious blessing to feel safe among such greatness. Granted, he is only a bird and doesn’t have the cognizant ability we do, none the less, he is comforted by our presence. His faith in us negated any potential fears, which is the power of the spirits. People used to feel that way about us.”

“Maybe he doesn’t know he’s supposed to be afraid,” Blanca said.

“If Ryan had bad intentions, I could guarantee, Sammy would have known it, and would not have sat upon his hand. He was not afraid because he could sense his kindness, just as the people need to sense ours. So, you asked what it was like to have my powers; How did you feel when Sammy trusted you enough to land on your hand?”

“Empowering,” he said.

“Blanca, hold your hand out an offer him your grape.”

She did and the bird abandoned his first grape and retrieved the second. Blanca got a kick out of the bird’s inhibition and realized the metaphor Emma referred to. “We’re the bird.”

“Almost,” Emma said, “that would be our goal, right now, there are too many people fighting to keep from being the bird. Our task is to allow them to trust us enough so they may become the bird.”

While Prudence and her team planned new events and means of getting the word out that spirits, good and bad, existed and people’s choices would have consequences. Colt and Fagan were trying to stay on schedule in their campaign. After learning that their personal attitudes had an effect on Alex’s ability to materialize, they were very careful not to exhibit any form of ire or discontent. The dark spirits were still circulating among the people and would vacate the vicinity when they came around.

“Over there,” Fagan pointed to the barber shop across the street, “do you see that? Do those guys look like they have a dark aura?”

Colt observed, “Yeah, I think you found one,” referring to the shadow as an evil entity.

They hurried across the street, and as soon as they contacted the gentlemen, huddled outside the shop, the stranger’s mood seemed to change from agitated to cordial. “How’s it going fellas?” Colt asked.

“It’s a fine day, don’t you think?” One man said.

“Do you mind if I ask, did you feel a strange presence just prior to meeting us?”

One of the other three offered, “It’s funny you should ask. This may sound strange, but I was just thinking about going in and chewing out my barber.”

“For what,” Colt asked.

“I don’t know,” the man said.

The first man asked, “You look familiar,” referring to Colt.

“I’m sorry, my name is Colt, you may know me because of my position on the council.”

“Yeah, that’s it. It’s an honor to meet you,” the man said.

“Fella’s, we need your help,” Colt said. “There are things happening throughout the city and elsewhere, we’d like to talk with you about.”

Under Colt and Fagan’s spiritual confidence, the men had no apprehension to be agreeable, “Sure,” they said.

Colt and Fagan touched their arms as they explained, “There are good and bad spirits inhabiting the world alongside us, and your choice to embrace the good could protect you from the bad.” They then went on to say, “we need your help letting others know about these spirits.”

The men felt the spirits within Colt and Fagan and knew there was something to it though they didn't know exactly what it was. "What can we do?"

"If you find yourself feeling down, upset or confused, think of someone you love and let that feeling calm you down before acting on anything," Colt said.

When Colt and Fagan walked away, the men felt better, but not entirely sure why.

"That was pretty good," Fagan told Colt.

"I think this is what Prudence was talking about," we need these people to help us, we can't do it all ourselves."

They returned to the mountain with reservations and concerns. They also brought back a sample of hope. Though their task was great, Colt and Fagan felt that they were close to an answer.

Between all the demigods, a common theme emerged. The malevolent spirits filled the void of their absence. People needed spiritual guidance and if they couldn't feel the positive spirits, the negative ones were attracted. They learned from their sessions with the spirits in their council, that the negative forces were always around, but because of their positive influence always being present, the people were shielded from the bad. Their mission to save and protect the people would now and forever be a matter of attrition. With fifteen million people from Texas to Florida, they had their work cut out for them.

The team migrated to the great room, refreshments in hand and sat at the grand table. Blanca and Ryan talked Prudence into soft relaxing music in the background. Prudence started with a question, "So, did you feel the connection?"

We did," Colt said, "it made me feel good to cheer those boys up. Wouldn't you say so Fagan?"

"For sure, it was like a light switch. I was unhappy that I lost my powers, unhappy that we no longer had control, but when

I felt the weight of the world come off that fella's shoulders, I knew we were doing something right.”

“We have a lot of work ahead of us,” Prudence said.

“But there are only six of us, we couldn't possibly cover and protect everyone,” Emma said.

Prudence replied, “You're right, the people will have to step up and assume responsibility for themselves.”

“We have six, but as far as we know, the darkness has but one,” Colt added.

“It's not Alex, and it's not us, doing the actual influencing,” Prudence reminded them, “it's the spirits. We are just the messengers. The people will have to choose between good and evil, right, and wrong, and we'll just have to keep promoting the goodness.”

“We've done quite a bit discovery while you boys experienced what is happening,” Emma said, and looked at Prudence, “can I tell them?”

“Absolutely, Elle and Eave, join the conversation with Emma,” Prudence suggested.

Emma, happy to get a little authority for a change started with, “We have found ourselves in a battle for humanities soul and ultimately, it will be the people's desires that drive their conscious and subconscious beliefs.”

“Yeah,” Elle took her turn, “We offer them hope, peace, and love. Concluding that beauty is more appealing than hideous.”

Not to be left out, Eave added, “We shall start a campaign of joy. Billboards, signs, ambient music where people gather, advertisements and education. We will become the hope for humanity team.”

To close her beginning remarks, Prudence suggested, “Most of all, we should get together every day for ten minutes or so, and just concentrate together, like our ancestors did, getting a message to all the people of good things; a beautiful sky, a babies

laugh, the smell of roses or a kiss, anything good and everything beautiful. With these visions and feelings, we will let the people know that life is good. This will be major campaign.”

Ryan suddenly understood. He had been sitting back the past couple days, hearing little snippets of conversations, parts of an idea, but their presentation put the spiritual context of life into perspective. He spent many skeptical years unable to see it, but now he can't unsee it. “I wish you could feel what I feel,” looking into Blanca's eye, “my love has never felt stronger.”

She returned his gaze and said, “Why not hold me tight and transfer some to me.”

“That's the spirit girl,” Elle joked.

“Calm down,” Prudence said, “let's save some of that for the people.”

Colt seemed quite interested in their proposal, Fagan not so much.

“I don't want to be the bad guy here, but there's still an evil force out there and I would feel a fool to ignore it and put all my stock into one plan.”

Eave had always fancied Fagan, even though she knew he fancied Elle, and now she knew why. His aggressiveness and physical confidence made her feel safe and protected. She then realized, the comfort in safety required vigilance, and Fagan was vigilant if anything. “I would feel better knowing Fagan had our back. We can handle the love parade, let them handle the security detail.”

Prudence tried to read Eave, whether she was being logical or emotional, but she couldn't quite figure it out. ‘Maybe it was a fifty, fifty,’ she resigned.

Blanca asked Ryan to get her another beer, while he was off in the kitchen, she asked Prudence, “How are we going to afford all this advertisement and marketing?”

“We will simply ask people to donate or provide, they will be happy to help.”

“I have an idea.”

Prudence said, “Ok, I’d love to hear it.”

“As you know, my dad is well off. He’s acquired enough credits to live three lifetimes, we should have dinner sometime and enlighten him and my mother. He can get businesses all over, on board to help us.”

“Is this a secret from Ryan?” Prudence asked.

“No, I just shared it with you first.”

“This doesn’t have anything to do with your dad getting him a job at the Aviator, does it?”

“Maybe, I don’t want Ryan to feel like I have to protect him.”

“Elle said, “He doesn’t strike me prideful.”

“I want him to feel that when he succeeds, it was because of him and not someone else.”

“That is admirable,” Prudence said, “I won’t tell him, in fact I’ll suggest the dinner.”

“Thanks.”

Prudence turned back to Fagan, “Ok, I agree, we do need to focus on defense so take charge of it as you will.”

Ryan returned with a handful of beers. “What did I miss?”

“We looked at all your baby pictures,” Prudence said.

“What?” he Replied.

“Just kidding,” she laughed, “you should have seen the look on your face.”

He laughed.

“Blanca,” Prudence asked, “I would like to meet your parents, would you like to invite them here for dinner or offer them to host us for dinner?”

Ryan thought it odd. They never asked to meet his parents. ‘Maybe they know I don’t know who my parents are,’ he thought. ‘Sure, they would, they can read my mind.’

“Can we have them here?” Ryan asked, not to have to be within his control.



“Sure,” Blanca said, “I’ll ask them tonight and shoot for Tuesday.”

It’s not that Ryan didn’t like her parents; he didn’t like the idea of anyone having control over him. That was the negative emotion that caused him to distrust the demigods in the first place. He felt that it took someone else to get him a job and if he hadn’t been in a relationship with Blanca, her father wouldn’t have given him a second look.

Two days later the Demigods hosted Blanca’s parents for dinner up on the mountain, which took much persuasion. At the dinner, Prudence pitched her position about being a messenger of the spirits, some hypnotic suggestions may have been employed, but in the end, her parents were eager to help in any way possible. They needed funding and volunteers to support their massive PR campaign. Ryan realized Prudence’s influence over them which made him feel more comfortable about using them. He might have said it was like watching a bully get bullied.

Little were the demigods aware that while they were feeling good about what they were doing and the successes they anticipated, the dark energy in the city and surrounding areas grew rapidly. They had never known a time without order and self-discipline and now the world was in chaos and turned upside down. They were in uncharted territory.

All six councils sought their advice frequently. The team felt questions and concerns coming to them at all hours of the day and responded telepathically before the questions could be asked. The problems the people were having were becoming more and more complex. In communication with the judiciary council, Prudence was asked to advise them on the imposition of penalties upon people who seek to destroy their standards. “Make them perform a number of good deeds for each bad deed, providing the infraction was not too severe. If it was life threatening,” she said, “take nothing off the table.”

“We are not prepared to parent all of society,” they admitted.

“Unfortunately, your options are limited. A disciplined society is a requirement for civility. You will have to develop guidelines and standards and be willing to enforce them. The protection of the innocent depends on it.”

Before they knew it, cases of misconduct were overwhelming the council, claims of abuse and reports of crimes, the city had no choice but to reinstitute a curfew and scrambled desperately to find volunteers to enforce it. All public events were cancelled or postponed until further notice. Holding areas were designated to contain and control people that committed more serious offenses.

The curfew lasted two months. By then, the team had completed seventy-five daily prayer sessions to which they became much more familiar with the darker spirits; fear, insecurity, and guilt fueled bad behavior, and when coupled with anger, became dangerous. In their sessions, all the spirits gathered including the dark ones. The group hated that their once joyous sessions were adulterated by the uncertainty of doubt and ill will, which accompanied the bad spirits. However, there was a glimmer of hope to arise from the dedicated prayers. More and more people became aware of the gods and the spirits.

Slowly they could sense more and more people asking them for guidance in thought. Emma told Prudence, “It’s hard to get rest, I feel people asking for help all the time.”

“I know it’s hard, but that’s actually a good sign. It means more people are aware of the spirits. We have to stay the course until everyone has the chance to believe. At some point, they will have to decide for themselves, but they must first receive our message.”

“How long do you think it will take?”

Prudence’s reply wasn’t what she’d hoped for, “A few years I’m afraid.”

“I’ll need to sleep before then,” Emma said sarcastically.

“Try resting with some music in the background, it’s easier to tune out the voices.”

## Chapter Seven

Five more months of constant fighting among the people ensued until a time that people began to form a connection with one of the demigods. Prudence recognized it first and tried to stop the trend, but the forces were too strong. “We are messengers,” she told her sisters, “we are not gods and goddesses.” Then she turned to Fagan, “I understand your need for attention and approval, but the people are not supposed to be worshipping us, they are supposed to be enjoying life with the comfort of knowing peace and love is a good thing and the spirits are all around them.”

“I did not ask people to follow me. If they see something in me that they admire, that’s their psyche, not mind,” Fagan insisted.

“Fagan, I’m smarter than that. Your word games may work with someone who can’t see into your soul. You’ve been putting out energy, from the day you received your powers, that you were superior. That chip on your shoulder has become a divisive wedge among the people.”

Colt agreed with her assessment for the most part, but added, “When I communicate with people, I can feel them looking up to me for guidance with faith, I thought that was a good thing.”

“It is a good thing,” she reassured him, “but not to the extent of worship. It’s one thing to have admirers, and another to have zealots.”

Elle and Eave shied away from that discussion; they were quite happy being worshiped. Their hearts have always been the strongest with regard to love and Prudence knew that, but to allow them a following, she’d have to allow Fagan’s his, and that bothered her.

Prudence tried to appeal to his greater ego. On the surface, Fagan enjoyed the people’s attention and the superior feeling he got of being in control of them, but deep down, he desired

eternity, his place in history. “Your infamy lies in the outcome, Fagan. If the world is divided, so shall your legacy.”

“Still,” Fagan started, “I am not purposely recruiting their loyalty, so if they gather around me and appreciate my protection, far be it from me to turn by back on them.”

Prudence thought to herself that he got better at arguing with her. “Just remember, even we have something to answer to. How quick you forgot what being without the spirits felt like.”

It was a stark warning that upset him every time he thought about it.

In the midst of people gathering into groups, picking and choosing their favorite god, like it a team sport, Elle and Eave walked through the square in their beautiful silk jackets. Their golden hair waved from their shoulders as every graceful step exuded confidence. Men and women alike admired their poise beauty. They walked past the people in town, acknowledging them with a smile and a gentle gaze. The people froze in awe of their effervescence. With uncontrollable desire, people followed them through the streets.

Blanca admitted to Prudence, “I can feel subtle differences between all you and I too am drawn more toward some than others. If I can feel it, I can see how others would too.”

Normally, Prudence wouldn’t have discussed her thoughts about the other demigods to anyone, but her frustration was beginning to wear at her patience. “Yes, I understand, but if Fagan gets approval to collect followers, I fear the effects on the spirits, and that would not be good. People can and probably should have their favorite messenger, everyone needs someone they can trust to look up to, but favorite shouldn’t mean exclusive. I see Fagan as wanting to be a general, rather than a coach. We have a duty to serve humanity, not dictate it.”

The gang felt attachments from the people growing and for the most part, thought it was a good thing. Of course, Prudence was concerned about people becoming loyal to their favorite and

hadn't realized, she too, had a loyal following. People gathered around her while she went into town for supplies, it was then she noticed what everyone else was dealing with. She took a chance and addressed her crowd, "It is the spirit of our souls and the spirits of the earth that guide us," she preached, "I am merely a messenger, do not worship me or my ilk, we all serve a higher power." She thought she had said all the right things, but it had no effect, the people continued to praise her as she continued with her errands. After they returned to the mountain for the evening, they gathered in council once again, to seek guidance. She believed, worshiping individual gods was counterproductive, and she saw only conflict in it. She needed advice.

"Mother and father, faithful keepers of the spirits, bear witness," she started with her traditional address, "we seek your guidance. The people have chosen to worship us rather than your benevolence, we request your assistance in redirecting their devotion." The spirits didn't speak, they didn't advise, they absorbed the human consciousness and returned an emotional response within their level of understanding. This time was different, perhaps because a new spirit, the dark spirit was now a regular part of their sessions. Ryan, being a commoner, but with the power to receive the spirits, became a conduit for their communication. In a trance, Ryan's voice transmitted a message from the spirits. In a calm and monotoned oration, he began, "A time of judgement has come to humankind once again." The demigods were also engulfed in a trance and subconsciously understood the message. Meanwhile, Blanca heard nothing but unrecognizable mumbling. "The choices we provide them shall determine the direction of their civilization. Your powers shall soon be neutral, and the people will be released from their belief in you and left to find themselves. In twelve moon's time, you shall be given the option to join the spirits or join the people."

They broke from their trances with a subconscious knowledge of the session, but Prudence would have to explain in

detail what the spirits meant. She did not include Ryan. One take away was that, not only were the people being tested, but the demigods were also being tested. She couldn't stop wondering if this was going to be the outcome all alone, why did the spirits give them their powers back. Her only guess was that it had to have something to do with the integration of the dark spirits.

Neither Ryan nor Blanca knew of the ominous warning from the spirits and Prudence advised her fellow demigods to spare them that knowledge. In the upcoming weeks, Prudence noticed during her associations with people that light and dark forces, like auras, surrounded them. Good and bad thoughts were simultaneously introduced, and they had to choose between them. That's when she began to understand the larger picture. Even within her inner circle, she could sense the decision process causing confusion.

Elle was the least affected. "Doesn't this whole thing bother you?" Emma asked her.

"No, why would it?"

"Within a year, we're going to have to decide whether to join the spirits or lose our powers and join the people."

Elle replied, "I don't have to wait a year, I've already decided."

"You have?"

"I'm joining the spirits."

Emma asked, "You realize that you have to die in order to join the spirits, don't you?"

"So, we all die. This way, I get to enjoy all the love without the hate and fear common people will have to deal with every day."

Emma could see her philosophy; there was a child's innocence to it, but she wasn't sure a fast track to the end was right for her. She had wanted to be a mother some day and share a relationship with someone. That dream would never come to pass if she followed Elle.

Each of the demigods had to wrestle with the idea and the urgency of having only a year in which to decide, made it all the more difficult. They spend more and more time with the people drawing comparisons between the people's view of the world and their own. The more they associated with the people, the more they understood the choices they faced regarding the good and bad spirits.

Colt said to Fagan, "A couple months ago, I could not understand how someone could consciously decide to fly off with someone else's commuter or walk out of the exchange without scanning their provisions. Honor was understood and accepted as a granted truth, but now the struggles they endure, courtesy of the dark forces, have allowed dishonesty to be an acceptable alternative. I don't agree with it, but I understand it a little better now."

"I'll deny it if you tell anyone," Fagan said, "I too have seen a difference in me. Alex has shown me that we all have a little dark side to us. At one point, I truly wanted to shoot and kill him, that wasn't the loving spirits in me working in mysterious ways, I believe it was the evil ones. Now they're here to stay and we have to accept it."

"I know what you mean."

Ryan and Blanca were left in the dark with regard to the future of their powers and association with the spirits. In addition, Ryan's ability to feel and sense the spirits has also begun to wane. He didn't know why, but he could feel the subtle differences. He used to feel a particular joy when he saw a child smile, or a dog wag its tail. He knows he's supposed to feel joy but doesn't. "I don't know what's going on, and I don't like it," he told Blanca, "I don't feel the spirits as I used to. Occasionally I will feel happiness and joy throughout the day as I witness the wonders of life and love, but lately, everything seems darker, more confusing."



“Don’t give up,” Blanca said, “there’s plenty of good to be found, maybe you just need to embrace the blessings in front of you and the rest will fall into place.”

He knew she was referring to her and the baby. “That’s the one thing I can always count on, being grateful for you.”

With so much time being spent with the people, the team spent less and less time in counsel with the spirits. They weren’t losing their faith but were trying more and more not to rely on it in preparation for their fate.

A new test challenged their commitment to the spirits, the missing eliminator surfaced and was used in multiple attacks throughout the city. Panic and fear filled the streets, which helped mask the location of the perpetrator. The group got together and tried to canvas the city for an evil force, but the dark forces of fear clouded their visions. Colt and Fagan knew they would have to hit the streets and locate the threat firsthand. Alex returned in Fagan’s mind, but this time, Fagan knew it was just in his mind and was able to control. As they walked through the streets, they were surprised at how quiet everything was. Fagan quietly mentioned to Colt, “If we find this guy, you know we’re going to have to kill him.”

“Yes, I know. I’m not looking forward to it,” Colt said.

“Alex popped up in my head again, he’s looking forward to it.”

“That’s because he will be able to claim victory over our loss of control. If we show any satisfaction in it, his efforts will be vindicated, and will embolden him to continue his crusade. If we must eliminate this threat, we will have to do so with compassion, as if we are saving him from damnation.”

Fagan replied, “I’ll try, but regardless, removing the threat is the priority. One in which I will take pride in knowing that I did what had to be done to protect the people.”

“I’m just saying, we need to try not to let this affect us personally.”

As they walked through the streets, they could feel the forces all around. Fear darkened the doorsteps of the houses, inside and outside the city limits. Shops and restaurants closed early, and late-night establishments increased their security. Only a few authorized security forces were issued an eliminator, and those patrols walked the streets in pairs.

Witnesses came forward with conflicting accounts of the person's description. The locations reported were also conflicted. Colt and Fagan began to think they were dealing with a ghost. "We need to try something," Fagan told Colt.

"What's that?"

"Let's find a quiet, isolated space, perhaps a new empty bar, and put our minds together with the spirits. The dark spirits have become part of this world, we should be able to read them as we do the good ones."

"You know, I think you're on to something, I'm going to ask Prudence to get with her sisters and do the same." He concentrated on the message to Prudence, and she concurred.

Fagan's suggestion about an empty bar to occupy settled well with Colt who thought a beer would help him relax. They sat in a bar and invoked the spirits, specifically the evil ones trying to locate the source of the violence, and just like the reports from the people, more than one identity materialized.

No sooner than Fagan and Colt realized the situation, than Prudence contacted Colt. "Theirs is more than one."

"Yeah, we got that too. But only one eliminator is missing," Colt said.

"Obviously, there's two," Fagan insisted.

"Ok, regardless of the inventory, we know there is more than one of them, we know what sectors have had incidents, and the dark forces seem strongest to the south of Samuel Road, the weaker is east of Gavel Boulevard." Colt then asked Fagan, "Do you want to split up and grab a couple security forces or do you want to do this together?"

He replied, “Together, if one of us has to eliminate this threat, I’d rather we support each other.”

They got word to a security team of the potential vicinity of one of the criminals and set out for Samuel Road, for the stronger of the two. Ever aware of the evil presence, Fagan taunted Alex and challenged him to show his hand, “We’re closing in, soon we’ll have your guy.”

Fagan could feel the evil around each corner and knew that they were close. The hairs on the back of his neck rose as the spirits drew them into a tavern, on the corner across from an antique shop. The light at the entrance was out, which increased the suspense. Colt stretched his hand out to grab the handle and Fagan stopped him. “He’s here, I can feel him,” he said telepathically.

“I feel him too,” Colt replied.

“He knows we’re coming.”

“I’ll grab the door, and pull it open, you focus left, I’ll focus right.”

Colt pulled the door open quickly, aiming his eliminator to the right, while Fagan rushed into the tavern toward the left with his eliminator still in its holster, he spotted the man with an eliminator in his hand, pointing it at the door. His charge was so quick and unpredicted, the man didn’t have time to react by the time Fagan could tackle him. The force at which he hit the man winded him and made him drop the weapon. Fagan’s adrenaline had him jacked and uncommonly powerful. He had the man subdued, pinned to the floor, while Colt was left speechless with his heart racing a hundred miles an hour. It confused Colt, “Are you crazy? Why didn’t you just shoot him? You could have been killed.”

“I thought that. Yeah, I wanted to shoot him because I felt he didn’t deserve to live, then realized it’s not my call. Who am I to say someone should live or die? That’s something for the council to decide. Besides, I didn’t want to give Alex a win.”

Never in Colt's mind would he have predicted Fagan's actions; it profoundly increased his respect for him. "You never cease to amaze me."

On the other side of town, the security detail was experiencing a totally different scenario. They unsuspectingly walked within feet of the perpetrator, who teased the guards with questions, "You guys look like you're looking for someone. He must be important. What're you going to do if you catch him?" The guards got irritated with the man's questions and walked away from him.

After reports that the other team was unsuccessful, Colt knew they would have to go and find the other one as well. "Let's not get in a hurry," Colt said. "Thanks to Fagan's quick thinking and courage, we now have the ability to question this person. Who knows, maybe these two are directly connected."

Fagan wasn't used to Colt being so generous with complements, which made him feel important and appreciated. In response to Colt's suggestion he said, "Yeah, I'd love to get into his head, something has to be broken in a person that could do what he has done. How many people did he shoot?"

"A handful, but there were two shooters, I guess we'll find out who was responsible for which ones in short order." Colt then suggested, "I think Prudence and Fagan should be the ones to question him. Prudence because she's the wisest and most powerful, and Fagan because he earned it." No one objected.

Prudence and Fagan wasted no time questioning the man. They had him secured to a chair in the middle of an open room and surrounded by windows. On the other side of the windows, galleries of spectators gathered to watch the inquest. Prudence started, "What is your name?" The man was reluctant to speak. Prudence applied some mental persuasion and the man replied, "Wilson Simmons."

She asked a series of other routine questions like his address, age, and vocation. Then Fagan asked, "Did you act

alone?” The man wanted to lie, but the pressure from Prudence to be honest was too strong and admitted he did not act alone. His older brother was his accomplice. They gained all the information they needed to find him, which was recorded, and a security team was dispatched to locate and retrieve him.

Prudence continued, “how did you acquire the weapons?”

He said, “My brother works for the Parks Department and has access. He checked out an eliminator but did not return it, though he recorded that he did. It took three weeks to reverse engineer it and another two weeks to duplicate it.”

“So, he definitely has an eliminator on him?”

“Yes, but it doesn’t look like one. It looks like a box.” That information was passed to the team that had already been deployed.

“Ok, then,” Prudence asked. “Why would you hurt innocent people? What could you have gained?”

“I don’t know,” the man started to cry, “I don’t know. It just happened.”

“What do you mean, it just happened?” Fagan said.

“I just came out of the Fancy Bakery, they have the best Fluffy Cakes, and a man stepped out of his commuter and bumped into me, and I dropped my cake. I was upset and when he failed to apologize, I cursed him, he threatened me, so I shot him. It just happened so fast I didn’t think about it.”

Prudence then asked, “After you shot him, why didn’t you report it?” She realized she wasted that question. She could feel he had no remorse for his actions, his tears were shame for getting caught.

Fagan asked, “Why did your brother duplicate the eliminator?”

“He didn’t, I did.”

Irritated, Fagan asked, “Why did you duplicate it?”

“Grant has plans and needed it.” Wilson said.

“Needs it for what?”

“He’s going into business and needs protection.”

Prudence replied, “Talking to you is like talking to a child, one simple answer at a time. I’m going to give you one chance to tell me everything you know about your brother, these plans, and anything that has anything to do with your crimes or I’m going to give you a headache that will make you cry like a baby.”

He wasn’t sure if she could but suspected as much, seeing that she was able to prevent him from lying. “Grant was unhappy that another fella that got promoted at the Parks Department instead of him and decided he could start his own department. He needed at least eight people, armed of course, to be able to oust the department from the other side of the river. Policy won’t allow anyone other than the parks department to have an eliminator but knew my physics background could reengineer one, so he stole one. He planned on returning it.”

“So, you killed a man for bumping into you. What about the other one that was shot a couple streets away?” Prudence asked.

“By the time I got a couple streets away, I realized I might be in trouble and had to hurry back home before someone reported me. I saw a guy getting into his commuter and told him I needed his vehicle; he didn’t take me seriously and laughed. I know I shouldn’t have, but I needed his ride, so I shot him too.”

Fagan said, “You are damaged goods, fella. Is your brother as messed up as you?”

“Grant wouldn’t make these mistakes; he has a lot more control than I do.”

Prudence pulled Fagan aside, “This brother of his is scary. This guy looks up to him and knowing there are twice as many cases on the other side of town, I’m getting the feeling that they were not victims of circumstance, but targets.”

“I’m getting the same thing. We need to warn that detail.”

Colt was watching with the other spectators, but unlike the spectators, he could read the entire conversation. “Fagan,” he

whispered telepathically, “We’re going to have to go and find him.”

Fagan agreed.

While a security team maintained a presence in the area where Grant had last been reported, Colt and Fagan paid a visit to his house. “It’s possible that fella could have communicated with his brother and warned him, there’s still a chance he was too preoccupied with his own situation. Wouldn’t it be sweet to find this guy at home?” Fagan asked.

“I think they probably communicated a lot. I doubt he’d be there, but there’s got to be some clues there. Just in case, do me a favor.” Colt said.

“What’s that.”

“Don’t be a hero. This guy’s the real threat, he’s the one with a plan and calling the shots. There’s no doubt he thought about the possibility of getting caught and may have a backup plan.”

Fagan thought about it for a second, “Ok, this time, you get to tackle him,” he said with a snicker.

“Smart ass.”

“I’ll play it safe. You’re probably right, and if he knows we have his brother, he may be looking for revenge.”

“For someone who has already shot at least four people, I can’t imagine he would give himself up,” Colt said, “so, I don’t think shooting him in self-defense would send our soul to the dark side.”

“Ok, I got it.”

They arrived at Grant’s house as the sun was setting and noticing that porch light was left on making them believe he hadn’t been at home all day. They walked from behind one tree to another as they approached the front of his house. “Fagan,” Colt whispered, “go around the back and see if you can see anything through the windows, let me know when you get to the back.”

“What are you going to do?”

“When you’re in place, knock on the back door, a second later, I’ll bust through the front, a second after that, you bust through the back. By the way, if he’s in there, don’t shoot me in a crossfire.”

They timed it perfectly and busted in the doors. Room by room they carefully went through the house anticipating an ambush, but the house was clear.

“This guy is a slob, and what the hell is that smell,” Fagan said.

The house was filthy and in disarray. Cloths strewn all over the furniture, the sink was full of dirty dishes and food containers littered the counters and floor of the kitchen.

“It doesn’t look like anyone been here in weeks,” Colt said.

“I’m sure they have been,” Fagan said, “a com screen was left on in the back bedroom.” A com screen was a portable translucent sheet that could be unrolled and attached to a flat surface to project electronic transmissions. “Someone’s definitely been here within the past day, a half-eaten sandwich on the nightstand isn’t hard yet.”

Colt said, “Let’s get a security team to keep an eye on this place and get out of here. I don’t see anything here that will help us find him,” but as they were fixing to walk out the door Colt noticed a tree stand laying in the corner under some clothes. “I have an idea; this guy spends time in the woods. That’s a tree stand commonly used for deer hunting, I’ll bet he has a go to place out in the woods.”

“How are we going to find him in the woods?” Fagan asked.

“Drones. Infrared signature.”

“With all the animals in the woods, how would we identify a man.”



Colt said, “We don’t look for a man, we look for his signatures. He has to cook, which means a fire. An abandoned commuter might give us a starting point. If he uses his homemade eliminator the IR signature would be visible from space. I’m sure, if he’s in the woods, we’ll find him.”

“What if he’s not?” Fagan asked.

“I hope that he is, otherwise, there are a lot of people in harm’s way and he’s already proving more deceptive than his brother, and dirtier,” Colt curled his nose.

A security guard combed Grants house from top to bottom. Further interrogation of Wilson provided no additional clues. A squadron of the newest drones were dispatched to scour the woods within a thirty-mile radius. Without success, then they got a report of a commuter abandoned about five miles outside of a small community up north. It was covered with brush and by the number of ants covering the area, it had to have been there a couple days.

“I can’t imagine that he would risk hanging around where people would notice him. He’s got to be holed up in someone’s barn or shed somewhere,” Colt then suggested diverting all the drones at their disposal to snoop through the community. After combing every shed or structure within the vicinity with no results Colts realized that the only option left had to be home invasion.

“He’s got to be in one of these homes.”

Fagan pulled Colt aside. “I have an idea; you’re not going to like it.”

“Then why tell me?”

“Because I like it.”

“What is it?”

Fagan went on, “What if we plant a plan in his brother’s head to escape to a safe place, then allow him to escape by stealing one of our commuters. We follow him of course. He contacts his brother and meets up with him. They get back into

our commuter to get away, we shut it down securing both of them without harming any innocent people.”

Colt said, “You’re right, I don’t like it. Too many things can go wrong. I think this guy is in one of these three houses and may have already hurt somebody. I know you’re normally the hot shot and wants to go in shooting, but in this case, that’s my inclination.”

“Colt, you said it yourself, this guy’s dangerous, if we can get him away from people, we’d be better off.”

Colt had to think about it. His initial instinct was to discount Fagan’s suggestion as nonsense, but he had come up with some good ideas lately. He thought about it hard. “I’ll tell you what, let’s find this guy first, evaluate the situation, then decide. I promise not to discount it until we have more info, Ok?”

“Deal,” Fagan said. “Now, let’s get some drones around these farmhouses.”

On their second pass around a farmhouse surrounded by a long white fence, Grant was spotted through the window. At the table in the kitchen, a man and a woman could be seen tied back-to-back, with Grant standing over them.

“We got him,” Colt said. “He’s in the kitchen and has two hostages.”

“What do you think about my plan?” Fagan asked.

“I’m sorry Fagan, I think there are too many moving parts. We are here right now, he is in reach, I think we need to act now.”

“Ok then, do you want to do what we did at his house and distract him at the back door?”

Colt said, “No, I think we can sneak in unnoticed from upstairs. If we get the jump on him, I think we should play it safe and just take him out. If we get cute and try to capture him, I’m afraid those people will end up paying the price.”

“Ok, I’ll go around back and sneak in through an upstairs window,” Fagan said.

“Before you go, do you by chance feel any evil spirits?” Colt asked.

“Yes, but it only seems from him, not to him.”

“Good,” Colt said, “I wouldn’t put it past Alex to warn him. Remember his brother knew we were coming.”

“I’m sure Grant knows we’re coming too, that’s why he’s got them tied up together in the kitchen, so he can hide behind them.”

“As soon as you’re inside and in place, I’ll knock on the kitchen door. He’ll instinctively look at the door and during that very short window, you step around the corner and take your shot. If you don’t want to be the one to shoot, I’ll sneak in the house and do it.”

“No,” Fagan said, “I’ll do it.”

While Fagan was making his way around the back of the house, Colt reflected on the situation. He thought to himself, ‘We’re acting judge, jury, and executioner. This isn’t how civilized societies act, but then again, we quit being civilized when these jokers went crazy. Damn you Alex, this violence is on you. Why did you have to come, why did you ruin everything.’ Colt knew there would be no turning back, if they go through with this plan, he would not be able to retain his spiritual glory and would end up having to join the ranks of the commoners when the spirits leave. ‘I’m sorry to put you in this position Fagan.’ Colt didn’t think about Fagan possibly reading his thoughts as he deliberated with himself, then he subconsciously heard Fagan say, “It’s ok, I know what I’m doing, it’s my choice.”

Fagan used his eliminator to heat the glass and remove it from its frame without making any noise. He climbed through the window and gave Colt the signal that he was in place. Colt took a deep breath, told himself, ‘this is it,’ and pounded on the kitchen door. As soon as he did, Grant turned his attention to the door with his eliminator pointer at the door, Fagan came around the corner as planned, Grants heard his feet shuffle behind him,

turned around and Fagan shot him square in the chest. Grant dropped to the ground, smoke came seeping out of the cauterized hole in his chest and the woman's muffled screams signaled unsettled relief as Fagan entered the kitchen. He went to the door and let Colt in, then attempted to calm the old couple down.

"It's ok, it's over, you're safe now," Fagan said. He pulled the tape from their face and cut the ties loose that had them bound to the chairs. The woman was facing Fagan as he shot, and the vision would have stayed burned in her memory as a haunting reminder of the incident. Thinking in terms of compassion for the woman, Colt decided to relieve her of that traumatic experience by removing the memory. On the surface, he thought he was doing a good thing, but would later have to justify why he would alter the events in the face of investigation.

Grant's brother knew, as soon as his brother was shot, that he had passed. He felt the loss immediately, compliments of the dark forces and realization caused him much pain and sadness. In the windowed room where he was being kept, the guards witnessed his face turn pale and tears formed in his eyes. He didn't say a word, but he knew he was now alone in the world and sunk into his chair in retreat.

When Colt and Fagan got back to the courthouse to provide an official report of the ordeal, they were questioned like suspects. "Wait just a minute," Fagan exclaimed, "the man was a menace. He had already shot a handful of people, two of which have died, he had hostages bound and gagged and a weapon in his hand. If there were any other outcome to come from this, it would have involved innocent people being harmed. Don't stand there and tell us we were the bad guys."

"We're not suggesting that, we just don't know how to deal with this. People just don't go around shooting each other. We still have one more in custody that we don't know what to do with."

Colt suggested, “Let me have a little time with him to find out if there are any other threats, people, or weapons, we have to be concerned about.”

After the scolding Fagan just gave them, Colt’s calm voice was a relief, “Sure go ahead, you can help us figure out what to do with him while you’re at it.”

While in the room with Wilson, Colt felt the presence of the evil spirits and could tell that the man was consumed with hate and fear. His brother was dead, and he blamed everyone. He wanted revenge, he wanted to make people pay. Colt tried breaking his collaborated association with the spirits, but the dark spirits were feeding off of his anger and his anger was strengthened by the spirits. Then a calm resignation of defeat set in, and Wilson subconsciously felt he just wanted to die. Colt calmly, and using the dark powers present, subliminally suggested that he take his shoelace and the pen Colt left on the table and make a tourniquet to tighten around his neck. Praying on the man’s grief and guilt, Colt exhibited his willingness to use the dark powers.

Fagan was the only one to realize what was going on, but he said nothing. He knew what it meant and after being the one to pull the trigger on Grant, he couldn’t fault him. Colt left the man alone in the room with his pen and declared, “He has nothing left to offer.” He then walked out of the room with Fagan right behind him.

“It’s ok,” Fagan said, “just like Alex said, they make their own choices.” Colt just kept walking without acknowledgement.

The next morning, they found Wilson curled in the fetal position on the cot in the room with a ligature around his neck. His face was blue and swollen, he had been dead for an hour. Word got out the next morning that Wilson committed suicide in the night. On the mountain, Colt and Fagan were eating breakfast together when they heard the news. Colt felt relieved but at the same time, he assumed the guilt. He knew there was no turning

back and now he would choose a life among his people rather than one with the spirits. Fagan would be the only person he could turn to for an understanding of his plight. Though he realized when the time came, he would become a commoner and lose his powers, he told himself it was for the better, that he made the right choice.

Fagan was in his head now. “We did what had to be done.”

“Look, Fagan, this is between us. No one else knows, nor do they need to,” Colt insisted.

“Agreed,” he replied. “Far be it for me to judge you, I wish I’d have come up with the idea.”

It was bothering Colt because he knew it was the influence of the dark force at play in his mind to wish that end to Wilson. “We lost this one Fagan, Alex won.”

“How many times have you heard Prudence say that things are the way they are because that’s the way they are supposed to be.”

“I don’t even know what that means,” Colt said, shaking his head.

“Yes, you do, it’s fate. Long before this incident, our destiny was decided. We were meant to sacrifice ourselves for the greater good. Right or wrong are perceptions, the outcome is what’s important.”

“I know you’re just trying to cheer me up and I appreciate your effort, but what was lost last night was my soul,” Colt sighed.

Fagan disagreed, “You didn’t lose your soul, you gained your freedom. You knew of the dark forces, and you knew right from wrong, good from bad, and ultimately made a choice. You weren’t a zombie acting indiscriminately, you were free to choose and in your best judgement you thought it was the best thing to do.”

“You have a twisted way of looking at things.”

“I know, but I’m right, and you saved an innocent society the trouble of dealing with a dangerous and quite possibly, a possessed individual. Remember what Alex said about the boy, he may have planted the seed, but it was the boy who acted. That man made the choice to harm others, then to strangle himself.”

Colt said quietly with shame, “Have we become Alex?”

“No,” Fagan said, “I think we became human.”

Prudence entered the dining room where Colt and Fagan sat and asked, “Did you hear about that man committing suicide?”

“Really?” Fagan said with a questioning tone.

Prudence knew right away that they knew something. She didn’t want them to feel she was a mother or inquisitor, so she played along. “Yeah, turns out he tied a shoelace around his neck and strangled himself.”

“Wow, those dark forces are unpredictable,” Fagan said, “Who would have thought he would do that?”

Prudence looked at Colt, his head was tilted lower than normal, she could feel his inner turmoil and said, “In the world of love, hate has no home, but in the world, we now live in, love and hate are competing for room.” She knew he felt responsible, she could feel it, and said to him with empathy, “You need not absorb the negative emotions that come from difficult choices, have faith that whatever it is that bothers you, was meant to be.”

Colt asked, “What is it you think is bothering me?”

“I’m not judging you, and I don’t want to know the details, but I can tell you feel like you’ve betrayed your services to the spirits and our trust in you. I can assure you, you have not. We’re entering a new world, a new beginning. Our days of peace, good order and discipline are ending. The new world has additional spirits the people have to deal with and will need strong and dedicated people to fight for what is right. I can tell you’ve already made up your mind that you will not go with the spirits when that day comes, you need to stay strong.”

Colt felt a weight off his shoulder. She worded her statements to appeal to his sense of honor, to protect the people and be the hero, something that he had always felt was his duty. She made him feel important again. “Thank you, Prudence.”

She replied, “Ok, let’s say that we do not discuss this again and get back to work on preparing our new world for the future?”

“I’m for that,” Fagan said.



## Chapter Eight

The team met daily for months, having sessions and prayers for the people. Inspirational slogans and bulletins, billboards, signs, and songs flooded the city and surrounding areas in an attempt to saturate the people's minds with the wonders of life, knowing they would need all the help they could get to combat the evil competing for their souls.

While the councils filled with case after case of seemingly unresolvable issues, the lead counselors begged the team to return to their posts and help settle their disputes. Prudence and Colt returned to the city and met with all the counselors, "We have only a few months left before our powers leave this world. We will not be available; we will not be here for you. You will be on your own." It was quite a blunt and dire warning, but Colt had never been one to parse words.

They questioned his statements, "What are you saying?"

Prudence explained, "Our spirits are being recalled, humanity will be in charge of itself soon and we will be gone. I'm sorry, but you will have to figure out who you are, what you stand for, and govern as you must, in order to persevere in your way of life. It is time you stop relying on us and look to the real powers of the earth. The spirits are all around us, talk to them daily and if you are true in faith, they may give you peace and solace that your efforts shall not be in vain. We will continue to fight and protect you as long as we are here, but that time will soon come to an end."

Colt stood beside her with nothing else to say. His tall and strong posture helped give her words credence and the counsellors found it easier to accept.

It was a devastating blow to the councils. They felt abandoned, yet knew it was their responsibility to address their issues the best they could. They considered pulling the economic support they had been providing them in retribution for

abandonment but realized the people had been voluntarily supporting them anyway and decided to reluctantly let it go.

Meanwhile on the mountain, Ryan raced into the grand room where Emma and Eave were playing a game, “Come quick, I think Blanca’s having the baby!”

They jumped up from the sofa and ran back to her room. They called out to Elle and Prudence that Blanca was in labor. Elle showed up within seconds, Prudence and Colt were hurrying back to the mountain as fast as their commuter could fly.

Elle and Emma have helped with childbirths before, this was Eave’s first birth. Blanca laid back with several pillows under her head in obvious painful discomfort, while Ryan stepped back trying not to hyperventilate. Emma put her hand on Blanca’s head and calmed her pain while Elle put both her hands on her belly. “It’s a girl, she is healthy and will be ready in about a half hour,” she said. “Till then, we will keep you comfortable and when it’s time, I’m afraid we will have to let you do what must be done.”

Ryan said, “What are you talking about?”

“We’ll keep her mind from feeling the pain until her body is ready to act, then she will need the pain to force her body to push. Believe me, most people don’t get this lucky.”

Elle was ecstatic, her entire life was dedicated to life, and nothing gave her greater joy than its creation. She had never felt more like a god than she did in this moment and feeling that as soon as this child is born, she could pass to the spirit world complete.

Prudence and Colt showed up in time while Fagan was celebrating with a tall glass of nectar in the other room. Although the demigods were in their fifties, they were still young in the grand scheme of things and none of them had a spouse or child yet. To them, Ryan and Blanca were family, and this baby would be the living soul that would bind them together. Everyone was excited.

Prudence saw a glow in Elle's face she'd never seen, the nervousness of the father, the pride in Colt's face and a tear in Eave's eye. For herself, she was joyful, but subconsciously knew that the baby would be born to a world harsher and crueler than what should have been.

The baby's time had come, and Emma released Blanca from her protection. No one had to convince Blanca that childbirth was painful, she screamed and cried but in short order, the baby arrived safe and in loving hands. That's when Prudence stepped behind Blanca and put her hands to her face and whisper, "Think of us when you need love, think of us when you need strength, we will always be with you." Until now, neither Blanca nor Ryan was aware that the demigod's fate had been delivered. They did not know their powers would fade or they would leave the earth with them. And even now, with Blanca being in a state of recuperation and confusion, she wouldn't think too much of her statement. This was Prudence's way of saying goodbye. Elle, Emma, and Eave felt Prudence's gesture and quietly kept it to themselves as each shared a tear on their cheek.

"Congratulations," Colt and Fagan said together as they entered the room. Ryan was a proud father, holding the baby as Elle and Emma helped Blanca get comfortable. "Even in life's challenging times, we can hope and find happiness," Colt said.

"What will you name her?" Fagan asked.

Ryan hadn't thought about it and looked at Blanca in shameful surprise.

"Amoura," Blanca said. "I want to call her Amoura," she looked at Ryan.

"Amoura it is."

"Love, what a beautiful name," Prudence said. "May we all aspire to live up to her standard."

"Amen," Colt said.

Ryan, still in the dark about the fate of the demigods, felt as if everything in the world was good and getting better. He

handed the baby to Blanca and left for the kitchen to get a glass of that nectar Fagan seemed to be enjoying so much.

When Ryan left the room, Colt told Fagan, “Poor guy, he doesn’t have a clue what the future will bring.”

Fagan replied, “I feel we don’t either. What’s going to happen if we decide to stay here and relinquish the powers, but our memories go with it?”

“What do you mean?”

“We’ve already seen it. When we lost our powers the first time, it was like a light switch, all of the sudden no one knew we had powers. What if this time, no one knows us at all, or we don’t know anyone or ourselves?”

Colt said, “I think you worry too much.” Inside, in the back of his mind, he had similar fears, but tried desperately not to let it show.

Prudence made her rounds with the family and ended with Colt. “Can we talk privately?”

“Sure, is something wrong?”

She took his hand and walked him out to the terrace. “It’s beautiful, don’t you think?”

“Yes,” he said, with his brow in a curl, “Something’s definitely on your mind.”

She turned back to him. “The spirits gave me a vision of the future.”

He stepped forward, “Tell me there’s a happy ending.”

“Let’s sit at the edge here. Do you remember our old teacher? She told us the story of the dinosaur that saved a bird from a crocodile. At the moment the dinosaur committed to saving the bird, his nature changed, and he evolved emotionally. The same thing happened three-hundred-fifty years ago, and our species adapted to a new environment. Well, I have seen that it will be happening again.”

Colt was intrigued, “What will happen? When? Is it good?”

She looked into his eyes, “I was going to leave with my sisters and take my place with the spirits, then I realized the circle of life surrounding the dinosaur, bird, and crock. We are forever growing. Our new emotional evolution will come with a twist. Much like the octopus may be the cleverest of creatures, yet it is not from this earth. Contained in a meteorite, a new organism will visit the earth and alter our DNA in the not-too-distant future.”

“You’re not making a lot of sense. Are you saying we’re going to be bred out by octopi?” Colt appeared confused.

“No, but imagine a new species, like us but smarter, stronger, able to camouflage itself, plan and think faster, and by all accounts, a superior being. We have but one lifetime to live and give, Amoura will need all the help she can get once we’re gone. I’ve decided I’m going to stay here rather than going with my sisters.”

“That’s great,” he said. “Oh, I mean I’m happy to have your company, not that I’m glad you’re abandoning the spirits.”

“You need help with your compassion skills, fella, but I know what you mean.”

Colt suddenly felt that emotional evolution concept sink into him. He’s known Prudence all his life, and her sisters. He sought Elle, Eave sought him, he hadn’t envisioned Prudence or Emma. He and Fagan were destined to stay, but with Prudence staying he realized he had an opportunity to be a happy, as a couple with a family of his own. His commitment to ‘the people’ was his top priority while he had his powers, but if he weren’t to have those powers anymore, he would be free. A lump grew in his throat. “Won’t you miss your sisters?”

“Of course,” she said, “but every time life changes here on earth, some things get better, and some things get worse. The part that gets better is worth dealing with the part that doesn’t. I’ve decided to live and change with life rather than watching from a distance. If I were to stay here with you, would you stay with me?”

He thought of Elle. “Tell me Prudence, do you know for sure that Elle is going to go with the spirits?”

“Yes, she made her position clear.”

He looked into Prudence’s eyes, more lovely than he remembered, “I would be honored to live the rest of my life with you.”

“Since you had a fantasy with my sister, if you wish to think of her while we are intimate, I’ll understand. Because if you truly had a love for her, and you saw her in me, I would at least know what it felt like to be loved, and if it were just sexual, it would make it more exciting.”

Colt didn’t know what to think. He had never experienced Prudence with such candor. “Do you want a drink?” Colt asked, to keep from having to reply.

She smiled, knowing his uneasiness, “Sure, in a tall glass please.”

‘I wonder what changes she’s talking about,’ he said to himself as he entered the kitchen.

Prudence’s vision was merely history repeating itself. She now understood what her teacher meant by, “the more things change, the more they stay the same.”

Amoura was an angel. For every moment, Elle and Eave’s hands were on her in the womb, a spirit filled each beat of her heart. Amoura received a supernatural blessing and Prudence wants that in her life again. This would be her only shot at maternity. Her sisters may not need it, but she felt she did. Even if Colt rejected her, she could put all of herself into Amoura.

Colt returned with two tall glasses of nectar, and she saw his aura glow a light greenish yellow and knew he was excited. “Thank you for the drink, I’ll get the next one,” she looked up at him.

He slowly bent over, placing the drink on end table to her right. She could smell his lightly sprayed cologne and realized she

was seeing him differently than she'd done so before. He sensed her curiosity and asked, "How long do we have?"

"For what?" she replied.

"How long before the visitors arrive? How long will we live together? When will we begin?"

"Well, let me see; a new species won't develop for quite some time, we will live happily for as long as we are together, and we can begin immediately."

"Hum," he said with his finger and thumb on his chin, "I'm glad you said that before you drank this nectar. I want to honor you faithfully; I pledge myself to you but want to wait until Elle is officially out of the picture, so you know my feelings are for you."

"You're an honorable man. If Elle were to come out here and say she was ok with it, would that help?"

"Don't take this wrong," Colt said, "it seems like you're in a hurry."

"I am, I know it, but I also know how many minutes we have left, and I don't want to waste a single one. I've admired you for a long time, but our responsibilities were always a priority and didn't think of relationships at all. Things are different. I want to be happy; I want my life to mean something, something real. I want to leave a living legacy, not another myth to be told to children."

"I understand." He looked at her and projected a thought, 'Elle, will you see us on the terrace.'

Prudence asked him, "Do you want me to ask her?"

"No, that's ok, I have to find closure for myself."

Elle came out to the terrace as requested. "What's up?"

Colt stood and offered her his seat. "As you know, we have a decision to make, and I understand you are going to join the spirits."

"Is that a question?"

"Yeah, I guess it is."

“Yes, I plan to join the spirits when the time comes.”

“I have decided that I will stay and would like to ask for your blessing to be with your sister.”

“You don’t need my permission,” Elle said.

“I know, but it would mean a lot for me to know that you would be happy for us.”

Elle looked at Prudence confused.

“He has always had a crush on you and didn’t want to dishonor himself by cheating,” Prudence said.

Colt said, “Yeah, it’s a matter of honor.”

“That’s sweet. I knew you wanted me, and you knew Eave wanted you. It’s not my permission you seek, though I’m happy for you, can you make Eave understand?”

Eave was just inside the grand room. She couldn’t hear the conversation, but she knew what was said. She thought she’d go ahead and get this conversation over with. She walked out onto the terrace, “What’s going on?”

“Chilling with a cold one,” Colt raised his glass.

“I want you to know it’s ok for you and Prudence to get together.”

Prudence knew she was eaves dropping. “Tell him, Eave.”

“Tell me what?” Colt asked.

Eave began, “I’ve always expressed an interest in Fagan publicly, all be it subtle, however, I had a secret crush on you too.”

Colt said, “Really? I’m an idiot, you are right, I didn’t see this coming.”

“As a matter of fact, you, and Fagan, both had an interest in Elle, I had an interest in both of you. It is fate, that Prudence is with you. Don’t worry about me, I have decided to go with Elle and be with the spirits.”

It was Ryan’s turn to eaves drop. He stepped out onto the terrace just in time to her Eave admission. “Excuse me, am I interrupting?”



“No Ryan” Prudence said, “my sisters were just expressing their approval of Colt and I getting together.”

It was a lot for Colt to accept at such short notice, but he did feel quite relieved. “So, Ryan, what do you think?”

“I’m happy for you, but sad for your sisters,” talking to Colt and Prudence.

Thinking Ryan may understand more than just their relationship choices, “Sadness for Elle and Eave?” Colt asked.

“Yeah, I don’t know what I’d do if Blanca had turned me away.”

‘He doesn’t know about us leaving,’ Prudence relayed to the others telepathically.

“Well, they’re big girls,” Prudence said.

“Yeah, don’t worry about us,” Elle said, “we just want them to be happy.”

“Who is with Blanca?” Prudence asked.

“Fagan is making faces at the baby, Blanca’s trying not to laugh in his face. Who would have thought of Fagan as an Uncle?” Ryan laughed.

Colt and Prudence shared a glance and a secret emotional connection. He couldn’t wait for them to be alone together. He wanted to find out more about her vision and the thought of holding her began to occupy his attention. “I need another drink,” he proclaimed.

“I said I’d get the next one,” Prudence said, “take my seat,” and away she went to the kitchen with the glasses.

“Wow,” Ryan said, “I’d say you’re a lucky man.”

Colt said, “I think we’re both lucky men,” and left it there.

Fagan returned to the terrace, “Ryan, Blanca’s asking for you.”

Ryan left, “Duty calls.”

“What did I miss?” Fagan asked.

“Just talking,” Colt said.

“About what? I can see a change in you,” he then looked at Prudence as she returned with their drinks, “you’re different too. Spit it out.”

“Ok, Prudence decided she was going to stay here with us when the spirits recall our powers.” Colt said.

Prudence watched his face in amusement.

Fagan replied, “That’s great, but why the change of heart. I’d never thought you would give up the spirits.”

“The spirits without life, or life without spirits, it’s a very difficult choice, very complicated. I’ve decided to pursue life.”

“Why do I feel there’s more to this story?” Fagan asked.

Colt began to say something, but Prudence grabbed his arm and interrupted, “Amoura’s birth opened my eyes and my heart to something greater. I’m going to stay and start a family with Colt.”

That woke Fagan up like a punch to the face, “Wow, I didn’t see that coming. I’m happy for you, I think.”

Prudence told Fagan as she looked at Colt, “So, there you have it, the whole story.” She didn’t want to share her vision with him, and her look told Colt as much.

Fagan said, “We have just a few months left. At what point are we going to establish ourselves in the community? Naturally, I don’t see us remaining on the mountain.”

“No, I do plan on staying here,” she said. “The spirits are no longer needed for us to maintain our presence here; except now we need a new front door. The mountain won’t open on its own anymore. I suppose you can establish yourself anywhere at any time, or you can stay here with us.”

“Having Ryan and Blanca here as a couple is one thing, but I can’t see being an odd man out in a group home. I’ll take my chances out there,” Fagan said. He then turned toward Elle and Eave, “What do you think of all this?”

“We happy for them.” Eave said.

“Are you,” addressing both of them, “still leaving with the spirits?”

“Yes, we are,” Elle said.

Until now, Fagan didn't give much thought about a relationship for the exception of his fantasy with Elle, but now, as the conversation turned more toward becoming a commoner, he began to have those thoughts and Emma was left undecided. He spent the remainder of the evening thinking about Colt and Prudence, wondering if they would be happy, and contemplated testing Emma's waters. With his powers, he had always felt invincible, but realizing those powers would soon be gone forever, he knew life would force him to adapt. Fagan finished his drink and retired for the evening, leaving himself much to ponder.

It might have been the birth of his daughter, or time distorted his reality, but Ryan's ability to feel the spirits began to fade. The changes were so subtle he hardly noticed. He found himself spending so much time with Blanca and Amoura, the world seemed to stop for him. Now he sees the spirits differently, less obvious, and harder to get close to.

Blanca talked Ryan into accepting her parents' offer to come home and live with them. “They've asked me again,” she said, “My father asked for us to come live with them. They want to help us give Amoura a better life.”

“Maybe we should,” he said. “the gods have so much work to do, with all the craziness going on, I feel we are in the way anyway. We should tell Prudence of our plan.”

“I agree, let's tell her this evening.”

With the event less than a month away, Prudence and Colt spent most of their time together. They realized they had their cart before the horse and had to learn to love each other. As they sat together on the sofa that evening, Blanca, and Ryan joined them. “We have news,” Blanca announced, “Ryan and I will be moving in with my parents. They've offered to support us, and we've

accepted. I just had to tell you right away that we love you and thank you for being great to us.”

Ryan said, “I know we started off on the wrong foot,” looking at Colt, “I’ve come to admire you, thank you for helping me see how much we do need you.” He continued with a statement, “Things are changing within me, I can feel it, but I don’t know what it is. Lately I haven’t felt the cries of the city or pain in the air. Neither have I smelled a rose in weeks. Do you know why I feel this way?”

Prudence didn’t want to tell him that his spiritual ties would soon disappear, or that they would become commoners or ghosts. “It’s called fatherhood. It changes your perceptions and priorities,” Prudence considered telling him the truth about the spirits releasing them but chose to spare them the worry. She knew this was goodbye and wanted them to start a new life with a clean slate. Everyone would soon be starting with a clean slate.

Elle and Eave absorbed as much spirit as they could so they could shower the baby with love. Blanca and Ryan’s departure would prove to be a game changer. Emma, usually the quiet one, came into the room. “I could feel you saying goodbye from the other room. You have been a joy to us, and we wish you the best. Remember us.”

“Of course, we’re going to remember you,” Blanca seemed confused.

Prudence was standing behind Blanca shaking her head no to Emma, ‘they don’t know’ she projected.

Emma went on to say, “I just want you to think of us every day, as we will be thinking of you.”

“That’s so sweet,” Blanca said, “we will.”

Prudence dodged another one. Emma would later tell Prudence she decided to stay with her, Colt, and Fagan.

Every day that passed brought more news of trouble throughout the city, but the shock and disbelief that these things happened subsided. It became common and people began to

accept it. Prudence was first to notice and mentioned to Elle, “I tried to visualize and connect with Blanca this morning and could not find her.”

Elle said, “Come to think of it, I can’t feel them now either.”

Prudence realized her powers were going and feared that they already had left. ‘Can you hear me, Colt?’ she concentrated.

Colt came around the corner, “Yeah I hear you.”

“The spirits seem different today, distant, we can’t communicate with Blanca or Ryan.”

“It’s probably beginning. We should pay attention to what happens. Elle, you’re still here so I can assume the spirits haven’t taken you,” Colt said.

“I don’t think that came out too well,” Prudence said.

“Sorry, I mean Elle and Eave are the telltale. If they go to the spirits, we’ll know without a doubt, the event has taken place.”

“Stop, you’re not making it better,” Prudence said.

“That’s ok,” Elle said, “we know what he means.”

Eave joined in the conversation with concerns of her own, “I’m glad I’m not the only one,” she said, “I have been trying to get myself ready for the spirits to take me, but I haven’t received any notice or clue as to how or when. As a matter of fact, I feel the spirits may have quit talking to me. Can you feel them?”

“No,” Prudence replied. She then concentrated on Emma and asked, “Emma, can you feel the spirits?”

“No,” Emma replied.

“At least we can still connect with each other,” she told Elle and Eave.

They were confused and that was a feeling they rarely encountered. Being so close to the spirits was always an intellectual benefit, knowledge and wisdom were only a thought away. Their questions are no longer being answered and it scared them.

“If we’ve lost touch with the spirits the event must be happening now,” Elle said. Looking at Eave, she continued, “We need to prepare ourselves.” She then turned to Prudence, “The time must be near, I wish we were all going together, I will miss you and will look after you.”

“You know I will too,” Eave said.

Prudence didn’t feel the same urgency to say goodbye. “Are you in a hurry to leave?”

“No, I just don’t want to leave without telling you how much we love you,” Elle said.

Eave concurred.

“I know, I love you too, I’m just not feeling a loss and thought for sure the spirits would guide us through this event. Maybe we should all get together and try to talk with the spirits?”

It didn’t take long for the six of them to get ready themselves at the table in the grand room. Each with a curious and worrisome sense of anticipation, took their places and plead to receive their spirits. They sat still and tall in their chairs for five minutes, steadily concentrating and desperately trying to communicate with the spirits to no avail. Ultimately, they terminated their attempt and realized they were no longer connected with the spirits. They had left without notice, vanished from their lives without a final prayer. To make things even more confusing, Elle and Eave wondered why they were still there.

“We were supposed to join the spirits,” Elle said. “Have they abandoned us? Will you wake tomorrow and find my lifeless body? Surely, if I were to join the spirits, I would feel their presence.” A tear formed on her cheek. Her attachment to the spirits was stronger than any of theirs. Prudence felt her sadness as if it were her own and realized the spirits were still there, they just couldn’t feel them anymore.

“I’m sorry,” Prudence told her, and gave her a hug. “Can you feel my sorrow?” She whispered.

Elle looked at her, “I can.”

“Then you should know that the spirits are still here. Even though we can’t feel them, they allow us to feel our emotions, which indicates to me that they are still here.”

Fagan said, “Why would the spirits have given us a choice to stay or go if they weren’t going to take us?”

“Yeah,” Colt said, “and why would they take our powers just to give them back and then take them again?”

Prudence said, “Guys, I wish I had the answers. Perhaps it is a final lesson that we should question them. Maybe losing our powers was inevitable, and the first time was just a little taste of what we would have to choose from. I just don’t know.”

“Well,” Emma said, “I can’t say one way or another if I’m happy or sad. I’m happy we are all together, I’m sad that we will struggle with the unexpected, and if the spirits are truly still here, we can still seek their guidance.”

“Emma’s right,” Prudence said, “the spirits answering our prayers has always been an exclusive benefit of being chosen. The people didn’t have that benefit but that didn’t make the spirits any less real. We will just have to adapt.” It was Prudence’s nature to be the voice of reason, to nurture and promote a positive attitude. She may have felt the sadness of loss, but she desperately tried to hide it.

It took the team a couple weeks to fully understand and accept the outcome of losing their connection with the spirits and during that time they spent many hours assessing their plans and responsibilities.

After their short period of adjustment Colt and Fagan decided to get their feet wet and joined the masses in town as common people. For anyone that knew them, they were just Colt and Fagan, nothing special, no demigod status and no memory of a spiritual connection. For new people they met, they were just one of the guys. Colt told Fagan, “This isn’t so bad, at least I don’t have to pretend to be nice.”

Fagan replied, “I know what you mean. Do you want to get a drink?”

“Yeah, let’s enjoy a little life for a change.”

Meanwhile, Prudence, Emma, Elle, and Eave all flew up to Blanca’s parent’s house to see the baby. When they got there, her parents weren’t going to let them in the gate. Blanca had to intervene to let them in. “I’m sorry,” Blanca said, “they’re just trying to protect us.”

“I’d say so,” Emma said, “protecting you from friends is pretty extreme.”

“They’re paranoid. Dad’s been getting a lot of threats at work. They had to lay a lot of people off and they didn’t take it too well.”

“So, let’s see that baby,” Elle said.

Prudence could tell the emotional attachment Blanca had with them on the mountain was different than it is now. She tried to search Blanca’s soul for a connection, but it just wasn’t there. She could tell Blanca’s attachment was now that of a friend, the sisterhood was gone. Prudence spent the remainder of her time there quietly reflecting on the past. Feeling the loss of another emotional attachment was difficult, but she didn’t want to show it. After they left, the girls shared their thoughts and emotions and silently reflected on their sorrow.

While the girls were feeling the distance between Blanca and them grow, the guys were in a tavern across town losing their inhibitions over a few pints of beer. Without the pressures of their piety, they found that common people enjoy the moment and don’t dwell too much on what may or may not be. Before the evening ended, they would have joined in singing three drinking songs, drank five pints of beer and got into two tussles with some locals. They managed to make it back to the mountain without crashing their commuter and left the girls with a shameful impression of their behavior upon their return.



Colt and Fagan tried talking to Prudence at the same time, but she shut them down. “There’s nothing you can say that could be considered comprehensible. I’m glad you enjoyed yourself, and if you remember what it is you want to say in the morning, I’ll listen then, but I’m not having a conversation with you in this state.” Colt tried to continue; Prudence just walked away.

“How rude,” Fagan laughed, “she needs to lighten up.”

Colt understood he was not himself and mumbled with a snicker, “No, she’s right, I’m going to bed.”

They slept in the next morning and would have stayed in bed if the smell of bacon hadn’t woken them. They got up and poured a cup of coffee. Beside the coffee pot was a note that Prudence left for them. ‘Went for groceries, we ate all the bacon, but left you some coffee. Hope your mind is right by the time we return.’

“I was looking forward to that bacon,” Colt said.

Fagan said, “I had a pretty good time last night. Do you think enjoying it was a bad thing?”

“No, why would enjoying yourself be bad?”

“I don’t know, it just feels like we did and said things that we would have never said or done. Were we influenced by Alex’s spirits?”

“Maybe,” Colt said, “but I don’t see where anyone got hurt so it can’t be that bad.”

“I guess you’re right.”

They didn’t have a lot of time to reminisce before the girls returned.

“While we were in town, we felt a couple very small tremors. “Did you feel anything?”

Colt replied, “No, just the rumble of my stomach, the smell of bacon made me hungry.”

She didn’t think too much of it and continued to put her groceries away.

Elle and Eave started talking about Ryan and Blanca which caught Colt's attention. "They seemed different?" Colt asked, "how so?"

"Distant, like we were acquaintances more so than friends. It made us sad. We felt like we lost them too."

"Well," Fagan said, "we did just separate from the powers and spirits that bound us together, it makes a little sense that the attachment might be different."

Emma interjected, "Yeah, but we still have our close associations."

Prudence reminded her, "Of course we do, we're sisters, and we've known Colt and Fagan our whole life. Ryan and Blanca were new to our clan."

"But we had a close attachment, we all felt it, did the spirits really take that away?" she asked.

"More and more I believe we are being tested," Elle said. "The more we encounter adversity, the harder we are supposed to fight for what's right."

"If you are right, we have a lot of hard work to do," Prudence said.

Colt said, "I don't want to sound mean, but Elle, you are too innocent for this new world. I don't think we can wish for things to get better and expect it."

"Well, I for one, refuse to give up on what I know is right," she turned and walked away.

Colt told Prudence, "You have to give it to her, she bears true faith."

"Yes, she does," Prudence replied, "Now, about last night?"

He did the only thing he could think of, he put his arms around her and said, "I love you," and looked at her with a long face and puppy eyes.

## Chapter Nine

The morning sun shining through the eastern terrace welcomed a new day. Colt and Prudence stood on the terrace enjoying the sun's warm glow upon their faces and suddenly, the mountain appeared to shake. "That's it, I told you I felt tremors," then the shaking got stronger, "it's an earthquake!" she shouted.

"Get away from the rail, come inside," Colt said as he reached for her hand.

"Wait," she said, looking out over the land to the north, "it looks like the earth is breathing."

"Come inside," he demanded.

Everyone came running to the grand room while the mountain shook, dishes in the cabinets were clinking together, pictures came off the walls and chairs vibrated across the room. The grand table even came off its pedestal before the shaking finally quit.

"That was horrifying," Emma said.

Prudence excitedly said, "I saw the earth buckle and wave, it felt like it was right underneath of us."

Colt said, "I'll bet it shook for forty seconds, there will probably be aftershocks. Everyone should be careful."

"We need to go check out the city," Fagan said.

"Yeah, you're right, I'll go with you," Colt said.

"While you are doing that, I'm going to fly north and see what I can see. I have a feeling that's where the epicenter was, the ground down there looked like a green lake with waves."

"I want to go with you," Emma said.

"Me too," Eave and Elle added.

"Let's keep in touch, I don't have a good feeling," Prudence said.

"Yeah, I miss our powers now," Colt said, "we would have had a warning."

"I hope no one's hurt," Elle said.

“Get your stuff, let’s go,” Prudence said on her way to the sky port.

Prudence and her sisters set out and travelled north, where she felt the epicenter may have been. The population up north was minimal compared to the south. Colt and Fagan flew down into the city to evaluate any damage and by the time they arrived, crowds of people had already begun to gather in the streets on the west side of town lining the riverbank. “Oh my,” Colt said, “what’s going on with the river?”

“Wow, this is freaky,” Fagan said.

“Prudence,” he called out, “can you hear me?”

“What’s up?” she said.

“Check out the river. The water’s flowing north, and the level has dropped a few feet.”

She veered left to the river and followed it north. “I had to stop and hover, but you’re right, it’s slowly flowing north.”

Prudence followed the river for two hours and in that time the river had dropped some twelve to fifteen feet in New Providence. Destruction from the quake was much more evident up around Memphis. Few buildings remained standing, and Prudence thought to herself how glad she was that people chose not to settle farther north than they had. Memphis was the farthest settlement north and only had a few hundred people. They could see people below, out and about, clearing debris and assessing their own damage. Prudence wanted to stop and see if they needed help, but the curiosity of the river kept her on course.

“Why aren’t we stopping?” Elle asked.

“Because they still have their commuters and if they haven’t tried to fly south for help, they probably feel they can handle it themselves. Besides, if we felt the mountain shake that bad from three hundred miles away, it’s got to be massive. Massive enough to make the river run north.

They kept flying upriver till they finally saw it. “Holy cow,” Prudence said, and pulled her steering wheel toward her to

increase altitude. They looked down at the river from a thousand feet to see a brand-new lake in the middle of the river.

“Colt,” Prudence called out. “We’re about a hundred miles north of Memphis. We found the epicenter. The New Madrid fault must have opened again. It looks like the ground split by about two miles, right at the bend in the river, there’s no telling how deep it is, but it’s draining the river from both sides.”

Colt replied back, “The river is all but dried up down here. You would not believe the amount of trash and dead things there are here. The smell is awful.”

“We passed the community in Memphis; they look to have survived but all the buildings are down,” Prudence said, “We’re coming home.”

Prudence pressed the commuter as hard as she could to make it back in an hour and a half.

By the time she returned, Colt and Fagan were already back from their survey of the city. “It was a little chaotic, with everyone running around and all, but we had no major damage,” Colt said.

“That river was something, wasn’t it?” Fagan exclaimed.

“We can see a big difference now, not being able to predict these things, or get advice from the spirits really puts our situation in perspective, and I can’t say it’s pretty,” Prudence said.

Elle asked, “Do the people in town need anything? No one got hurt?”

“Nobody’s hurt as far as we know and there was limited damage,” Colt replied.

Emma added, “The people up north, around Memphis weren’t as lucky. We saw a lot of buildings that had fallen over, crumbled, or twisted.”

“Maybe we should get some volunteers and go help them rebuild or relocate?” Eave said.

Fagan said, “That is what we should do. If we still had our powers that’s exactly what we would do. We’ve still got a few

hours of daylight; I'll go back down in the city after I grab a bite to eat and spread the word that we need help."

"I'll go with you," Eave said, "I've seen the damage, I can be pretty persuasive."

"Anyone else want to go?" Fagan asked.

Everyone agreed. "It may have been a natural disaster to get us to think like a team again, but it's not our powers doing it. This time it's us," Prudence said, "and that's a good thing."

Within thirty minutes they were back on the ground and canvassing the town folk for volunteers. The first few people they approached gave them a cold brush off as if to say it wasn't their problem, and that was a concept they had never experienced prior to the dark powers. Then people slowly started to come around, concerned about the reports and rumors that were circulating through the streets. "I'll help," a man said, another said, "I have a generator." Within twenty minutes, they had a crowd of thirty to forty people gathered around with promises to help supply provisions, tools, and manpower.

"We'll meet here at sunup and head out. For anyone staying behind, can you ask around for volunteers to offer room and board to stranded families?" Colt asked.

During their mingling with the people of town, Elle and Eave drew special attention from a small handful of people. It may have been their beauty, it may have been their sincerity and obvious empathy for the suffering of their fellow neighbors, but they had acquired a following. For a short moment, they felt special again. Hardship and disappointment had hammered their sense of duty and devotion. The loss of their powers and the broken promise of eternally with the spirits, nearly crushed their souls, but the love that filled their hearts while recruiting for this noble cause may have been just what they needed to find a place in this new and crazy world.

Elle and Eave's group decided to prepare meals to take to the people affected by the quake. "I feel so terrible for the people

up there and am so happy that so many of you can find it in your heart to help,” Elle told the group.

One lady said, “That could be any one of us needing help, what kind of people would we be if we did not come together?”

Eave and Elle both saw a glimpse of the spirits in her words and for the first time since becoming a commoner, realized they were not alone. Eave said, “We should meet with these people when this ordeal is over and form a social group. There is so much work to be done if we’re to keep the dark spirits away.”

Commuters started their trek north just after six the following morning, taking with them tools, people, food, water, blankets, and clothes. They didn’t know what to expect but knew they could get word back for additional supplies if needed. Upon arriving, they found groups of people clearing debris from the streets around the few homes that withstood the quake. Most of the homes and buildings shook so violently the walls ripped from their corners and fell. Of the two-hundred-twenty people living near or around Memphis, only seventeen sustained injury and by the grace of the spirits, they had no fatalities. Fourteen of the seventeen were taken right away back to New Providence for treatment, the other three insisted they were fine and wanted to stay and help with the cleanup.

Colt had an idea and gathered a small group of local residents. “We have some really good builders and contractors down in New Providence, I’d like to propose that your families come down to New Providence as our guests while we bring a few crews up here to rebuild.”

One of the men said, “Thanks but we can make do.”

“We’re going to be up here to help you, just think of your families. They don’t need to suffer and struggle with this. Let them enjoy a little comfort while we get your community put back together,” Colt said.

“That is very nice of you,” the man choked up a bit, “we can’t afford to pay you.”

Colt smiled, “We wouldn’t think of charging you. It’s hard enough to make it in this world, to have to make it alone would be a crying shame. We’re all brothers here.”

The man didn’t know what to say or think. The concepts in life and love that the spirits were once a common practice and way of life, but now they have to relearn and accept life on different terms. In addition to good deeds and kindness, the darker side of humanity was making itself prevalent and the former demigods were beginning to understand that the fight for the soul of humankind could not be taken for granted.

Breakfast showed up just in time. Prudence’s group and Elle’s group arrived with six grills and began making pancakes, stovetop biscuits and gravy, scrambled eggs, and bacon. As Fagan would say, “The greatest breakfast known to man.” Volunteers flew around the county picking up people and bringing them to the site to feed them and to inform them of the plans to rebuild.

The crew began to feel more comfortable in their new role as normal citizens but still found it hard to accept the abuses being reported as a result of the bad spirits. Even in Memphis, dark spirits made their influence known. In the hearts of good people, the dark spirits created doubt and frustration. The lack of faith found many ways to get people to lash out at each other but for the grace of the good spirits, people usually reconciled their differences before it turned to action.

It took ten days for the New Madrid Lake to finally fill and start the river to flow south again. Thousands of dead fish littering the riverbed and tons of debris and trash left in the mud washed downstream to the delta. The cleanup efforts were extensive but, in the end, the people were happy to get their livelihood back.

Things slowly got back to normal in New Providence as well. Colt and Fagan continued to canvass the city daily, learning and getting used to the routines that normal people experience. One day, while out and about, they dropped in on Ryan who had



gone back to work at the Aviator. “I hope we’re not intruding,” Colt said.

“No, not at all,” Ryan replied, “Let me show you to our cafeteria, I’ll buy you a cup of coffee.”

“So, why did you come back to work?” Fagan asked.

“I just couldn’t sit around and let Blanca’s dad pay my way through life.”

“I understand,” Colt said, “Why didn’t you start your own company?”

“I’m doing ok here, moving up the ladder. But I get the feeling you’re here for something other than to catch up on what I’m doing.”

Colt replied, “Not really. We were in the neighborhood and were curious to how you’re doing.”

“Yeah,” Fagan added, “The girls stopped in and saw Blanca and the baby a while ago and said they thought things felt different, we just thought we’d check it out from a guy’s perspective.”

“I guess that’s fair, to be honest, I have noticed things.”

“What kind of things?” Colt asked.

“Do you remember when Alex took the rope and threw it out the door and into the vortex? I’ve had flashbacks of that incident and Alex has faded out of the picture. Did he really throw the rope out the door?”

“No, I’m sorry to say your memory is coming back. Alex was all in our head, and the image of Alex throwing the rope out the door was an illusion.”

“So, I threw the rope into the vortex?” Ryan asked remorsefully.

Fagan said, “Hey, you can’t blame yourself, we all saw the same thing and it wasn’t until the spirits left us before we could see the truth.”

“That’s another thing, I don’t remember the spirits, but I’ve had dreams about it. I’m not sure what is real anymore,” he said.

“We have all undergone a traumatic event. We understand your reservations and confusion, that’s why we stopped in to see you. We’re concerned and wanted to find out for ourselves how you are getting along.”

“Thanks, it has been a little confusing, Blanca has been up and down and argues with me when I asked questions. She doesn’t remember a lot which I wondered about.”

Colt reassured him, “You’re fine, maybe we should all get together again and set the record straight. You could come to the mountain, and we could have a reunion.”

“I would love that, but I think Prudence had better be the one to ask Blanca. I’m afraid she will resist my recommendation,” Ryan said.

“You got it; we’ll ask Prudence to do just that.”

Colt and Fagan left feeling a little better about why their relationship had faltered.

“I’ll tell you,” Colt said, “losing the spirits has changed so much. Of course, the world keeps turning, but everyone, including us, sees things differently. Personally, I’m not sure there’s a right way to look at it.”

“I know what you mean, I think the gods are messing with us. A test or something. How can they just go away? Gods don’t go away.”

Colt asked Fagan, “Do you remember our teacher saying there is nothing new, just things that have changed, everything is recycled?”

“Yeah, what does that have to do with anything?”

“I think we should reexamine the old texts and stories of previous gods and civilizations. Maybe we are experiencing one of those changes. If so, maybe we can understand the next steps to take.”

Fagan wasn't typically a deep thinker, but he thought Colt may be on to something, "I see where you're going with this. It's interesting but I think maybe you and Prudence are better equipped to study that."

"I'm sure, but I don't think it will hurt any of us to examine it."

"On another note," Fagan asked, "how's it going between you and Prudence?"

Colt embarrassingly laughed, "It appears I still have a lot to learn about love. I want to make her happy, but she tells me I have to learn to speak from the heart. What the hell is that about?"

"Yeah, I can see that."

"What do you mean?" Colt asked. "I tell her all the time that I love her, and she looks pretty and all that stuff."

"You overanalyze when your head tells you what to say, but when you talk with your heart, it's like magic, the moment just happens, and you have no control."

"How do you do that?"

Fagan replied, "I don't know, you'll have to figure it out. Maybe you could cook her dinner, not because you think she'll appreciate it, but because you genuinely want to do something nice for her."

Colt curled his brow in thought, "Maybe I will."

They returned to the mountain with news about their meeting with Ryan. Colt told Prudence, "Ryan recommended you invite Blanca up here. He said, she would be more inclined to accept if it came from you."

Elle butted in, "I'll ask her."

"No," Prudence said, "I'll ask her, but you can come with me."

"Make sure she brings the baby," Eave said.

Two days later, Blanca, Ryan and the baby flew up into the sky port around six in the evening, Ryan worried that his transponder may no longer be accepted by the anti-flight sensor

at the top of the mountain and had forgotten to ask about it in advance. He was happy he didn't have to deal with his engine shutting down midflight. Prudence and Colt met them upon their arrival and their greeting was reminiscent of family or old friends meeting after an extended separation.

"You look marvelous," Prudence told Blanca.

Blanca blushed; motherhood had given her a different outlook on her physical appearance. Not that it was no longer important, but she didn't feel the need to obsess about appearance as she might have before getting married and having Amoura. "You're too kind," she said.

Prudence put her hands out to accept the baby and fawned over her all the way through the sky port and into the grand room. "Ryan tells me you helped him understand some of his dreams," Blanca told Colt.

"Yes, we were all confused following the spirits departure," he said, "but we're gaining a better understanding every day."

"So, what are these spirits?"

Looking at Colt, Prudence said, "Allow me," then proceeded to give Blanca the short version. "The earth is a living planet and just like us, it has a soul. The spirits are embodiment of earth's emotions, similar to our feelings of happiness, sadness, love, faith, and hope."

"How does that even work?" She asked.

"Have you ever looked at Amoura and felt overwhelmed with the need to protect and love her?"

"Of course."

"That's the spirit inside you reaching out to Amoura. Well, the world used to do that to us. We shared a connection with the earth for thousands of years but recently the spirits have dissipated requiring us to figure things out for ourselves. That's why, as a little girl you were always happy and felt safe, but lately things don't seem the same, do they?"

“No, they don’t. I thought something was wrong with me,” Blanca said.

“Sweetheart, you’re the same beautiful person you’ve always been, we all just need to relearn how to reconnect with the spirits again, is all.” Prudence handed the baby to Ryan, “Let me show you,” she gave Blanca a hug. For just a moment, a single moment, Blanca felt accepted and loved. “That’s what’s missing, that’s what we need more of.”

Blanca was relieved, she didn’t want to feel distant and alone like the last time they met, she was just too confused to acknowledge their closeness. A warm feeling came upon her face and suddenly she felt like they were sisters again. Ryan saw her mood change and at that moment she looked happier than she had since Amoura’s birth.

“How about a drink?” Colt belted out.

Blanca asked Prudence, “Tell me more about these spirits, I’m curious.”

“A little at a time, but first, let me tell you about our trip up the river last month when the earthquake hit.” They walked through the grand room on their way to the living room while the guys detoured through the kitchen to make drinks.

“You look like a good papa,” Colt told Ryan, as he carried Amoura, “may I?” Colt asked, extending his hands to hold the baby. He wanted to sample what he might expect as a father himself someday.

Emma, Elle, and Eave followed Prudence and Blanca into the living room and waited for an opportunity to talk. Growing up, they always had each other, but until Blanca, they had rarely had a friend outside of family. Not because they weren’t friendly, but their devotion to serving the will of the spirits was always their priority. With the spirits in retirement, their social needs had grown. They made separate and individual friends down in town due to their charity work and now they have Blanca back. They were eager to get involved.

“Look,” Elle said to Emma, “Colt’s holding Amoura. Doesn’t he look awkward?”

She looked at him, then looked at Prudence, turned back to Elle, “Yeah, I think it’s a sign.”

“So, you and Colt are together now?” Blanca asked Prudence.

“Yes, when the spirits left, I realized I no longer had a reason for chastity. We’re still getting to know each other if you know what I mean.”

“What’s the deal with the spirits that you are talking about?”

“It may be a little confusing or hard to believe so bear with me. There are powers in the universe that affect all living things. Every three hundred years these powers would choose a host to act as mediator with beings of higher intelligence, such as humans. Shortly after we were born, Colt, Fagan, me, and my sisters were chosen by the spirits to act as prophets to the spirits. Over the course of history, we have been named many things, angels, prophets, gods, demigods, demons, sages, the list goes on, but the bottom line is, we had a close relationship with the spirits. Now, they have broken their ties with us. They are still here; we just don’t have the connection we used to have.”

“That is an amazing story, and I can see how it would be so difficult to believe, but something inside me wants to believe it. It makes sense, it puts a lot of confusing things into perspective.” Blanca never had the connection with the demigods that Ryan had, but always had instinct and intuition on her side. She wanted to believe and that made it easier for her.

“Now, it all comes down to individuals believing or not, we don’t have the power to persuade them anymore, that’s why the world seems like it’s going crazy, people are unwittingly being influenced by powers they don’t even know exist.” Prudence admitted.

“I’m glad we’re talking. I was starting to think that Ryan was losing it. He tried telling me about dreams of spirits and such, but I really didn’t know what to think.”

“I can see that,” Prudence said, “our minds are very complex and can create its own reality, or discount it.”

Blanca asked, “If we are to be left to our own devices, do you think we will make the right decisions?”

Prudence laughed, “No way, we’re bound to fall on our face, but being able to get up and brush ourselves off is what we’re hoping for. Did Ryan even tell you how this all got started?”

“He did, but I forgot or became confused and didn’t pay it much attention.”

“It’s funny, and don’t joke with him about it because he still feels bad, but rest assured it was all part of the master plan.” She then went on to put her spin on Ryan’s initial quest for independence and his first encounters with Colt and Fagan.

Blanca and Prudence laughed and bonded as they made fun of their men.

Elle and Eave fought over who would hold the baby. Neither had immediate plans for a relationship of their own but the more they gushed over Amoura, the more they dreamt of their own. They stayed away from the rest of the group for most of the evening and shared their own dreams with each other. “I know Fagan fancies you,” Eave told Elle.

“And I know, you fancy him,” Elle replied.

“It confused me,” Eave said, “we look alike, we’re both loving and caring, why were Colt and Fagan both attracted to you and not me?”

Elle looked at her, feeling her disappointment and said, “I don’t know but I suspect it’s the forbidden fruit theory. I never gave them a second look, I was not interested, my love has always been reserved for the innocence of life. I think they could sense that you had an interest in them which removed the challenge.”

“I never thought of that. In either case, I don’t think it would work, I think I’m going to look for an honest, handsome man in the city, someone who can devote himself to me rather to himself.”

Elle said, “Good for you. I will join you.”

“There’s no need. You can pursue Fagan if you wish, you know he has his eye on you.”

“No, if I haven’t felt that way for him by now, tomorrow’s not going to be any different.”

Eave asked, “So, what was Prudence thinking when she and Colt got together? I had no idea she was even into having a relationship.”

“I’m sure it was her maternal instincts. She always had to be the boss, the mother to everyone. Without the responsibilities of being a goddess, I’m sure her loneliness influenced her.”

“You’re probably right.” She looked down at Amoura, “Isn’t she the most adorable thing?”

In the grand room, Emma set the table for dinner. Quiet in her activities, she stayed mainly in the shadows unnoticed. As the middle sister, she was often looked over for attention, that’s not to say she liked or preferred it. She could feel everyone’s conversations and began to feel that she didn’t belong. Fagan came from the kitchen carrying a bowl of mashed potatoes and set it on the table. “Do you need some help?” he asked.

She thought it a little strange, he had never paid her any attention before, “Yes, actually I could use a little help. There’s a pitcher of tea in the refrigerator, if you could bring it out, I’d appreciate it.”

Blanca and Prudence heard the activity in the grand room and migrated in that direction to lend their help as well. It felt like a celebration with everyone gathered around the table, enjoying each other’s company; they felt like family.

After dinner, Fagan struck up a conversation with Ryan, “Because we have been filtered by the benevolent forces of good



spirits our entire lives, I would like to get your advice on a matter I find difficult to fully understand.”

Ryan was honored to have enough respect from Fagan that his opinion was valued yet a little confused as to why someone who had access to any information would request his. “I’m honored,” he said, “how can I help?”

“As you know, we’ve had the spirits within us guiding us and giving us knowledge. You too, have had a sample of that exchange, I’m having a hard time figuring out how to combat the dark spirits.”

“I don’t know how I can help,” Ryan replied.

“You were once a common person, no disrespect intended, but as a common person you thought and felt a certain way. Isn’t that what convinced you that you needed your independence from us?”

“I’m still foggy with regard to the spirits. I know for a brief time I could feel them, but what was in my head and what the spirits may have put there is questionable. I feel like my head has been scrambled and now I have to sort things out. I don’t know how I could be of help.”

Fagan replied, “I’m betting that’s because you were originally normal, your thought process was normal. In comparison, my thought process had always been influenced by something that is no longer influencing me. Therefore, you are better equipped to look into the minds of common people, than I.”

“I guess, if you put it that way, I can see what you’re talking about.”

“So,” Fagan said, “what are the bad spirits offering that make it so appealing to common folk that they would go against their instincts?”

“You’re assuming their instincts are good.”

“Aren’t they?”

“I think their instincts are self-preservation, I think the ‘good’ is just something that makes them feel better about themselves.”

“I took the gun from the first crime scene thinking it had a more dramatic and frightening effect and envisioned having to use it for the same reason someday. I now understand that the dark spirits influenced that thought, I would have never thought that way prior to the incident. If I could be influenced to think that way, I can only imagine the influence on common people must be experiencing.”

Ryan said, “Maybe you were actually easier to influence because you have a closer attachment to the spirits, maybe it’s harder for common people to feel it. Maybe that’s why we had to try harder to influence the people with the good spirits.”

“I never thought of it that way,” Fagan said, “Thanks, I’m glad we talked. I still don’t know what I’m going to do with the gun. I thought about destroying it.”

“That may be the good thing to do, but if we’re still taking about dealing with the bad things, you might need to rethink how we deal with our new life.”

“You think I should keep it?” Fagan asked.

“I don’t think we should do anything in haste now days.” Ryan thought the whole conversation was a little weird but could see how Fagan might have his doubts.

## Chapter Ten

Life for the gang had settled into patterns, some days better than others. Prudence and Colt took the emotional plunge and learned what intimacy was. For Elle and Eave, love and intimacy were their power source, but for Prudence, she had to logically analyze what her emotions were telling her until one day she was suddenly overwhelmed with an uncontrollable desire. Colt and Prudence developed a relationship that continued to grow and near the end of their first year together, they were expecting a child. After the birth of Sierra, life made more sense and dedicated all their free time to enjoy watching Sierra grow.

Parenthood was an undescribed term for wonder, the feeling that something was stronger than you and you had to bend to its will. Time flew by quickly and before they knew it then years had passed. Amoura just turned Eleven and Sierra was preparing for her tenth birthday, Elle and Eave were preparing for the opening ceremony of their first house of worship and Sierra asked her mother, “What’s a house of worship?” Prudence decided it was time to have ‘the talk’ with her daughter. Colt told her he didn’t think she was old enough.

“Nonsense, she’s much smarter and mature than you give her credit for.”

“I know she’s smart, I just don’t want to cheat her out of being a child.”

She’ll be fine, trust me, I received ‘the talk’ when I was eight. She needs this.”

Prudence sat with Sierra on the sofa, “In all your years of study and research,” she said, “you will receive a lot of information, but something you won’t learn about, anywhere but here, is the one thing that the mothers in our family pass down to our daughters. This is the story of our faith. People have always worshiped something. From planets and stars, and moons and

comets, to animals, people, and material things. People have always worshipped something.”

“Is that a bad thing?” Sierra asked.

“No honey, but sometime people take things too far.”

“What do you mean?”

“Throughout all of history, prior civilization had gods to worship. Children today learn of the old gods in school as myths, legends, and fairy tales. Some prior civilizations preformed sacrifices to the gods, others started wars in the name of their name, and some just rotted in corruption and use the power of spirits for their own benefit. There are many stories in the historical records of societies doing brutal and violent acts in the names of their gods because they failed to understand them or chose to defy them. As a result, civilizations were recycled. As of late, we’ve learned to honor and respect the gods. The women in our family come from a long line of wisdom, passed down from generation to generation. Aunt Elle and Aunt Eave will open the door for people to come from all over and join together in search for peace, love, and hope. The spirits of the world are real, but the people stopped embracing them. Elle and Eave’s house of worship will help people come together and find the grace and blessings of the spirits once more.”

“What happened, why did they stop?”

“The last time the world changed, happened because people began worshipping each other instead of the gods. Society doomed itself and our alien ancestors had to biologically altered our DNA to save us.”

“We have alien ancestors?”

Prudence continued, “Yes, we sure do. You won’t find this information in school, but a more advanced species came to our rescue a few hundred years ago, and if it had not been for them, we wouldn’t be here today.

“Why don’t they teach it in school?”

“Because we used to be an inferior race and the identity of the more superior species is a mystery, it’s easier for people to understand that we just evolved naturally with the help of the gods.”

Sierra asked, “Aren’t the aliens the gods?”

“No honey, they just gave us the powers to communicate with them and increased our natural abilities. That is what our family passes down from generation to generation and because of that, we are tasked with helping people to search for peace, love, and hope.”

“Peace, love and hopes are concepts, how do you search for a concept?”

“You’re too smart, baby,” Prudence said, “sometimes you have to think with your heart.”

“Don’t you want to know why you are so much smarter than your friends?”

“I’m not smarter, I just think differently,” Sierra said.

“That right. It’s because our mothers and fathers, and their mothers and fathers had direct connection with the gods. I even had this connection until recently. Someday in the future, you may have this connection and need to know what it is and what it means. It is a responsibility above all, that is why Elle and Eave built the church.”

“Are we going to go and worship?” she intriguingly asked.

Looking down at her with a smile, “Yes, we most certainly will.”

“What will we be worshipping?”

“Well, sweetheart, we are going to go there and wish for things. We’ll wish for good things, like Lucky’s hurt paw to get better,” referring to her puppy, “or Amoura doing well at her recital, we’ll share our wishes with the other people there and sometimes you can feel the spirits enter your heart.”

“That sounds fun,” Sierra said, “but if it is so nice, why did it go away?”

“Because people started to only wish for themselves,” Prudence concluded.

Prudence got down to detail in much of her story, especially her favorite parts, and just knew in her heart, that Sierra would one day know the spirits as she had. She felt that if this were all there was and ever would be, the feeling she got when she picked Sierra up and gave her a hug, was enough to sustain her.

The next morning was Elle and Eave’s big day. “What a beautiful day,” Sierra said as she woke her mother. “We have to get ready, don’t be lazybones.”

“Your daughter’s becoming a smarty pants,” Prudence told Colt.”

“Your daughter’s using your own words against you.”

“Come on,” Prudence said, “she’s right, we need to get there early. I’m excited.” She then sprang to her feet.

Elle and Eave had already left, Fagan and Emma decided to ride together leaving Prudence, Colt, and Sierra on the mountain. It was a simple church, one giant room under a sturdy roof with walls. A long table lined walls to the left and another on the right. The table on the left was filled with pastries, sandwiches and other snacks and beverages, on the right, the table was covered with flowers.

Before the dedication, Elle stood in the center of the stage as people wandered in from the crisp morning air. “This house is filled with love,” she said aloud and turned gracefully like a ballet dancer, “this is a place of magic.” She twirled around and looked out at the growing crowd. Prudence and Colt just arrived in time to see Elle’s pirouette, “She looks so happy,” Prudence said with inspiration. “It does feel nice in here, doesn’t it?”

Colt had to agree, “Happiness and love must be contagious, just seeing Elle so joyful is rubbing off on us. It’s been a long time since we’ve felt this.”

“I agree, this was a good idea, I’m proud of my sisters.”

The opening filled all 160 seats and people where gathered out in the street vying for a closer position. “I had no idea we would have this many people,” Elle said.

“I have an idea, it’s nice outside, let’s all take it outside so everyone can join in. We’ll need to have more churches built.”

“So, this is what they did in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?” Sierra asked.

“Almost,” Prudence said, “theirs was not true, they stopped believing.”

Sierra stood in front of Prudence in her beautiful spring dress and said, “that’s too bad,” and shook her head.

She amused Colt and he snickered. It had to be the atmosphere of so many joyful spirits that made Prudence turn around to share a loving emotion with Colt. She could tell he was so happy and proud of his little girl, it made everything seem right. Prudence smiled.

It was at the same moment Fagan, sitting in an aisle seat, watched Elle, Eave and Emma all on the stage together and saw Emma, for the first time, in a zone of her own. Standing between Elle and Eave, Emma shined like a beacon in the night. The sound of pots and pans falling to the floor couldn’t break his concentration. In an instant, his switch was triggered, and he realized his true desire, it was Emma. He couldn’t believe that he’d overlooked her beauty all these years. Suddenly, he could see the forest through the trees.

He rose from his seat and went to the stage, when he got there, he waved Emma to approach him, “I owe you an apology, Emma,” Fagan told her.

“Oh yeah, for what?”

“I’ve spent so long looking somewhere else, I failed to see what was right in front of me.”

“What’s that?” she wondered.

“You, It’s you. I failed to recognize you. You were right here in front of me the whole time and like a fool, I didn’t notice. I notice now. You are beautiful and kind, you are giving and compassionate. I’m sure you’re much smarter than I, and I am sorry it took this long for me to see it.”

“That is so sweet, Fagan,” Emma said.

“It’s true.”

“I have lived in the shadow of my sisters my entire life. My parents spent a lot of time with Prudence till Eave and Elle came along to steal their attention. I pretty much learned everything on my own. I’ve seen you change since all this began too; you have nothing to be sorry about. I guess we all struggle with what’s in front of us.”

Emma said, “I can’t complain about my sisters being little love dolls, if it meant us finding us together, but do you have what it takes to be with me?”

Fagan said, “I hope so. Granted, love is a new concept for me so I can’t be sure about what I’m feeling. However, I’m pretty sure that when my heart beats faster just thinking of you, when your smell attracts me from across the room, and I hear you whisper my name, I begin to think it may be real.”

“What have you had to drink?” she asked him jokingly.

“You can make fun of me if you wish, I will laugh with you, but that won’t change the joy you give me.”

Emma thought, ‘maybe he’s serious, he does sound quite charming.’

A popular singer took to the stage and sang a song of love written by a mother before losing her child. Her voice was clear and crisp and perfectly tuned, like trumpeting angels and people stopped to absorb as much love as they could from her emotional performance. Sierra told her mother, “I want to sing like that.”



“Yeah, don’t we all, baby. How can you hear that voice and not want to cry? She is so good.”

“But, remember mama, we’re not supposed to worship other people.”

Prudence laughed out loud, “I’m sorry honey, that’s funny. You’re a funny girl. Why don’t we just agree to like her?”

“Ok,” Sierra agreed.

Her song touched Emma in a way she’d never experienced and thought that the atmosphere of this gathering had to have something to do with her emotions. She began to feel a little of what Fagan was spilling. She asked him, “Is this what Prudence feels when she looks at Colt?”

“I don’t know, what are you feeling?” Fagan asked.

“I know you’re emotionally messed up now, you just asked a woman how she feels.”

“Holy cow, your right,” he slapped his forehead. They both laughed.

“It was a huge success,” Elle told Prudence.

“I knew it would be,” Eave joined in.

“Well,” Prudence announced, “It was too successful. Now we have to build another.”

“And another,” Emma said.

“Yeah, it was a day to remember. We should gather and do this every week.”

“That’s a good idea,” Emma said, “Can I set up the next one? Next week we’ll set up some tents and speakers.”

This was an exciting time for the gang. Their lives had been turned upside down twice and they finally settled into a routine that appeared to be working. They were involved in relationships, something they rarely if ever thought about just a few short years ago. They made friends with common people, there was no longer an elite class of humans, everyone had to learn to live together with the good and the bad spirits.

Weeks went by without major conflict or trouble. Elle and Eave both found someone special, and they anticipated elevating their relationship to a more personal level. Emma and Fagan spent more and more time together. Colt and Prudence enjoyed raising Sierra, and Ryan and Blanca considered finally leaving her parents' house for a cottage of their own. By all accounts, life was good and New Providence was a happy city.

That all changed by the end of summer. A new wing was added to Elle and Eave house of worship to accommodate a growing following and in the second week of September, while singing in their church, a man walked down the center aisle toward the stage, pulled a handgun and shot four people on the stage. Elle and Eave were two of them. The other two were a mother and daughter. Nearby members of the congregation tackled the man before he could fire a fifth time. In that short moment, he put the world on notice.

Elle and Eave were the first to be targeted and suffered the worst wounds. Fagan and Emma were in attendance that day, making small talk with people coming and going at the door when the gunman opened fire. Fagan heard that sound before and knew exactly what was going on. He turned quickly toward the stage in time to see Elle and Eave fall to the floor, two more shots and the mother and daughter fell. He ran down the aisle in time to see others subdue the man, so he continued toward the stage. His heart was racing, his anger burned as he passed the man and reached Elle and Eave, who laid beside each other still holding hands on the stage wet with blood.

Without as much as a breath from her mouth or a tear in her eye, Elle looked up at Fagan and softly spoke, "The light is beautiful," then took in a final gasp of air, "we'll look after you." Fagan was a strong and disciplined man, but the subconscious love of his life just said goodbye to him forever and his heart was torn in two. He wept as he held Elle and Eave's hand. Emma came running up behind him hysterically calling their names.

“Why?” she yelled. “How could someone do this to the most loving people on the planet. This is pure evil.” She continued with her rant then burst into tears. She looked at Fagan and asked, “Why?”

The look on her face was all that was needed, he knew what he had to do. Right or wrong, this person had no right to do this, and society must punish him harshly.

The city’s security forces came and took the man away. They would keep him locked up in the courthouse until the judiciary council could convene. The city adopted new punitive measures to accommodate the various crimes that surfaced since the spirits departure but still only broke it down into two classes. Crimes against people and crimes against property and procedure. Crimes against people were mainly dealt with through rehabilitation; crimes against property or procedure were dealt with through restitution. In Fagan’s mind, neither of these were sufficient to atone for such an evil act.

Ryan’s words of not acting hastily returned as he was thankful that he hadn’t destroyed the handgun. In that moment, he knew without a doubt that Alex was up to his old tricks but this time he felt that Alex may be right this time. Fagan felt the rage and anger within him and believed that if these feelings manifested in him, it must be for good reason. Fagan remained quiet, he didn’t even share his thoughts with Emma or Colt. He had a lot of thinking and planning to do, determined not to allow this injustice to go without proper retribution.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of September, Elle and Eave’s bodies were cremated and their ashes taken to the mountain. A small farewell from the gang, Ryan and Blanca included as well as the two gentlemen callers Elle and Eave had, witnessed their ashes dedicated to the wind off the western terrace looking out over the city. With the wind blowing slightly from the east the crew knew inclement weather was coming. Prudence spoke, as Emma and Fagan shook the urns out over the rail. “My sisters were the

kindest souls in the living world, their love of animals and people sustained humanity's privilege with the spirits. They dedicated their lives to all things good and to all things good, they gave their life back. Their desire to be with the spirits has come to pass, all be it too soon, and too violent, they are now where they had longed to be. Goodbye my dear sisters, may you enjoy eternal peace and watch over us as we wait our turn to join you."

There wasn't a dry eye on the terrace. One by one they took turns saying a little prayer for them as they tossed a rose off the balcony in their honor. Prudence's feelings began to overcome her, and she excused herself to go to the kitchen for a drink. She had just lost two sisters and those feelings reminded her of losing her parents when she was young. Emma is her only remaining family left other than her new family with Colt. She thought Emma had to be all torn up as well. Her concern for Emma was probably the only thing keeping her together at this point. She filled a glass with tea, drank half of it, then refilled the glass with nectar.

Emma was devastated but hid it very well. How tight she held Fagan hand was the only indication she would show. Fagan knew her pain and vowed to himself that he would make it right. The rest of the afternoon was somber and quiet. For as much as they wanted to celebrate the love Elle and Eave shared, the loss overpowered their hearts. Colt watched as he observed the dark powers capture more victims.

"It is such a shame," Colt said to Prudence, "If Elle and Eave were here, and we were saying goodbye to someone else, they would be able to extract the love from our hearts and rejoice in the goodness of their departed souls, but without them, we find it hard to celebrate their loving spirit."

"They were definitely special," she said, "I miss them so. Can you tell our guests goodbye for me? I need to go lay down for a while."

Colt didn't want to let her just go hide away to feel sorry for herself but knew she needed to find peace and acceptance within herself. "I'll come with you after everyone leaves." He knew she needed someone to hold her, so he wasted little time excusing himself as well.

It took a couple of weeks, but Fagan came up with a plan, a plan for justice, a plan of vengeance. Fagan began to get in close with the two fellas the girls were seeing. Dallas and Seth knew each other fairly well being that they spent so much time together with Elle and Eave at the church, so as Fagan worked a mental angle with Seth, he would in turn transfer that frustration. "It's not right that the council will try to rehabilitate a person that was capable of that heinous crime," Fagan suggested to Seth. "What this situation called for is someone with courage to do what must be done and a plan to minimize the consequence."

Seth replied, "That piece of human waste should never be allowed to enjoy another breath while they still live."

"I like the way you think," Fagan said, widening his eyes, "I know how we can handle this," he paused waiting for a response.

"How?"

'That didn't take long,' Fagan thought. I have an antique handgun. It's twice as powerful as the one, that shithead used on our beloved sweet Elle."

"We couldn't get away with using it."

Fagan went on to lay the foundation for his deception. "All the council is going to do is to put him in a controlled environment, work on his mind to make him a better person. I'm sorry, but his mind had already been worked on and it is broken. What if, and this is hypothetical, Dallas shot this man in the face, and was acquitted by the council and required just basic therapy for the actions."

"How does that work," Seth said, seemingly interested or at least was intrigued.

When the council sentences him, they will have to transport him to the hospital or facility that will take him, we interrupt them and Dallas takes this gun,” Fagan shows Seth the weapon, “and shoots the man. He has five shots to get the job done.”

Seth got nervous, he realized he was actually talking about killing someone. “Normal people don’t go around killing people, do they?”

“That’s why I said Dallas. I think Dallas has what it takes and would risk the chance to make things right. Especially when he’d get off of the charges and most people would think he was a hero.”

“I’ve seen the dark spirits work face to face. Your mind is yours, the influences you follow are choices. I don’t want you to do anything you don’t want to. It is your choice. Handing Dallas, the gun is all I ask, you don’t have to say anything, I will offer him the scenario.”

“How can you be so certain Dallas, or we, will not be crucified?” Seth asked.

“I have influence with the judicial council, Prudence still advises them and has already given them advice. When Dallas appears before the council for shooting that mad man, the council will recommend minimal service and rehabilitation due to his emotional trauma.”

“Wait a minute, I get it now,” Seth responded. “Let me think about it for a minute.”

Fagan could hear his gears grinding. “Don’t hurt yourself.”

“Ok, all I have to do is give Dallas the gun?”

“That’s right.”

“Ok, I’ll do it.”

“Alright, take it,” he handed him the gun, “just walk this over and give it to Dallas, tell him I have important information about the coward who shot Eave,” say nothing more.

As he predicted, Dallas wanted to know what Fagan had to say.

“That’s a tool of justice. The bastard that murdered our dear sweet Eave will be taken to the East Providence Medical Center in the morning. If you were to use the weapon on the devil that took your everything, my influence on the judicial council will ensure you are not convicted.” Fagan turned and walked away.

Dallas stood there looking down in his hands at the pistol with the infamous thousand-yard stare.

Seth looked on as Dallas put the gun up under his arm to hide it from view. Seth instinctively knew Dallas was seriously considering it at that point and it excited him. He felt that he was part of the justice without having the accountability.

It was a very restless night for Dallas, but Fagan felt peace when he slept for the first time since the event. He kept this secret from Emma, but it was even harder to keep the secret from Colt. They had battled these dark demons together before, but this was too personal to even share with him.

The next morning, city recorders announced the movement of the prisoner to clear way for his transporter. Dallas and Seth were both in attendance at the courthouse. Dallas thought about it all night and halfway through the night he knew he would be taking the shot. The other half was spent deciding where. He opted for the exit of the courthouse as the most convenient, he just had to get close. Fagan watched via video in the comfort of the mountain, surrounded by his alibi.

The back door of the courthouse opened, a security guard stepped out, took a look around and nodded back at the door. Another guard had his hand on the man’s arm and led him out the door. That’s when Dallas took two steps forward and wedged himself in front of a lady yelling evil claims at the man. Three steps closer and Dallas raised the gun and shot, striking the man square in the chest.

A loud bang, people screamed, Dallas dropped the gun and slowly walked backwards till the guards rushed to grab him. Dallas was calm and docile; the guards didn't feel threatened or afraid. Some in the crowd cheered but most stood quietly resigned to feeling vindicated in their persecution. To most of the people present, the ones that knew Elle and Eave, the whole sad affair could now be closed.

Up on the mountain, they never watched the morning broadcasts, but today the screen was turned on promptly at six. That was Colt's first indication of Fagan's involvement. "You had something to do with this?" he asked him, making sure no one else was around."

Fagan said, "there's an ancient saying, in for a penny, in for a pound." I've tainted my soul with the trigger on Grant and you've got some soul searching for Wilson to do yourself. Don't think that Eave's boyfriend putting a bullet into that monster's chest will make me feel guilty about justice for Elle and Eave."

"I'm not saying I disagree; I just don't know how you're involved."

Fagan said, "I could use some help now."

"How so?"

If Prudence could use her influence with the judicial council and have Dallas charges dropped due to psychological trauma, Dallas could get rehabilitative help to cope with the loss of Eave and justice could fair."

Colt suddenly realized why he didn't tell him anything. If he knew all along, he wouldn't be able to keep it from Prudence or ask for her help after, because he would have been part of the conspiracy. This way, he could genuinely ask Prudence to help Dallas as a service to grieving fiancé.

Colt told Fagan "Your cleverness scares me."

"Boo!"

"Actually, I'm kind of impressed, but don't tell anyone."



Fagan snickered at Colt's response then said, "I do feel bad for Dallas though. I know what it's like to pull the trigger, and that's something we have to live with. I feel mine was necessary for self-protection and justified, but he will have to carry the weight of my judgments."

Colt and Fagan looked at each other with an acknowledgement that it was their duty and things turned out the way they were supposed to be. They nodded at each other and went about their day.

At the scene, people scattered everywhere. It was chaotic and confusing for anyone in the nearby vicinity. In all the commotion, the gun was kicked through the crowd. A young boy watching from across the street saw the gun sliding across the crosswalk and picked it up. The boy was small, and his actions were ignored. He walked through the crowd with the murder weapon unnoticed and left the vicinity. The security guards were left questioning their own judgement and competency while they scoured the scene for a weapon.

Seth stood back and watched it all play out. It played out just as Fagan suggested, Dallas and Seth made their choices and might tell people that Elle and Eave could finally rest in peace, but they knew Elle and Eave were already resting in peace, this action was so they could find some peace. He suddenly felt guilty that Dallas would bear the consequences alone.

Colt talked with Prudence about making a recommendation on Dallas's behalf, it didn't do much to convince her to get involved. She could make her recommendations for leniency under the same guideline's that their society has already established for crimes against people in general, and with the psychological defense, the council was sure to agree.

Everyone in town seemed to be ok with a good guy shooting the bad guy, but no one was ok with the bad guy shooting a good one. Prudence had to think about that concept

after making her recommendations and it made her question her own philosophy. “Everyone seems so judgmental, we’ve managed to justify the unjustifiable,” she told Colt.

“I wonder if this is how dark spirits plan to influence us,” he said.

Prudence replied, “I haven’t seen a need for spiritual guidance as much as we need it now. We are like lost sheep in the field, wandering away from what protects us. This is not what Elle and Eave imagined for us I can assure you.”

“It is a most troubling time,” he admitted. “We should reopen the church as soon as possible, people need to know that peace and love cannot be defeated, that Elle and Eave would want them to continue the good work they started,”

“I agree,” Prudence said, “we all have some healing to do.”

Colt wasn’t sure how much Prudence knew but he knew the origin of the handgun used would come to light. His official story would be that Fagan gave it to Seth for self-defense, in case the mad man had other followers.

As expected, the council convened, and Dallas found himself at their mercy. Prudence’s recommendation for leniency was understood. Everyone knew Elle and Eave were Prudence’s sisters, they also knew Elle and Eave were earthbound angels. No one could fault Dallas for being overwhelmed with grief and the lack of corporal punishment in their system left few options for the council to consider. They were sympathetic to his situation and with Prudence’s recommendation they found him not guilty by reason of mental impairment and remanded him to the Psychology ward of the East Providence Hospital for evaluation and treatment.

He stayed there for two weeks, attending counselling every day until the staff determined he was no longer a threat to himself or others. Neither Fagan nor Colt went to visit him while he was there, but Seth brought him messages from well-wishers.

When he was released, he returned home and that's when Fagan and Colt joined to visit him. "We wanted to visit you earlier but had to maintain our distance in case people were looking for a conspiracy," Fagan said.

"You were right every step of the way. Thank you for everything. Even the therapy was good."

"You're not having nightmares for shooting that man, are you?" Colt asked.

"No, I don't think about him, I don't hate or resent him, I don't feel sorry for him, and I don't feel bad about what I did. It's just over, time to move on."

Colt and Fagan knew something was missing, he was in love, engaged to get married, surely, he missed Eave. He had to be hurting inside more than he was letting on. "I'm glad," Fagan said, "if you need to talk with anyone, we're here for you."

"Thanks," Dallas said, "How about you, Seth, how are you holding up?"

"I'm a little lonely, I miss Elle, but for you to be home is great. I want to thank you for doing what I could not. I owe you an unrepayable debt."

"No, you don't. You owe it to Elle to continue her work."

When Colt and Fagan left, they felt that would be the last time they would see them socially. "Without Elle and Eave, I don't think we need to spend much time with them. I think they need to get on with their lives. What's your thoughts?"

Fagan agreed, "Something doesn't seem right with Dallas anyway, I don't think his troubles are over. He seemed a little too calm and cool. I knew he would need some adjustment time, but I figured it would take a little longer. I have a feeling there is a lot more going on upstairs than he's showing."

Colt concluded, "I for one would like to get this whole thing behind us and move on."

“Me too, but you know, we’ll forever have to be alert. There’s no telling how many more unstable people there are out there?”

## Chapter Eleven

New Providence continued to grow. Rather than building the city up, they chose to limit population density by expanding. Service and resource standards have long been established and made sectors of the city self-sufficient. New Providence was more like seven cities within itself. The commuters helped considerably. People didn't need to be near their place of employment, they could fly anywhere around the city in a matter of minutes.

The newest expansion was Prudence's dream to rebuild her ancestor's home on the gulf coast. Colt's influence with the building commission and department of public services played a large part in the decision to freeze the expansion north and west and focus on the coast. Prudence loved New Providence but inside, she always felt it temporary. "This is where our people settled," she told Colt, "but there's something about the beaches and water that comforts me."

"Maybe it's that painting you have hanging in the grand room, calling you home."

"Maybe."

"I'll bet Sierra would love it. When we flew down there last year, she wanted us to continue to fly south to see where the water went."

"I think there's too many people up around here. I like the idea of going somewhere and getting to know the people around me. The more I go into town, the more I realize the city is filled with strangers, and without the protection of our powers, I don't feel safe anymore."

"I know what you mean," Colt replied.

Emma and Fagan entered from the sky port. "I reprogrammed the EM Receiver. As of right now, our four commuters are the only transponders it will recognize, which reminds me, Colt, you'll have to increase the security lock on

Prudence's commuter. Someone could break in and steal her transponder if they knew where to look."

"Thanks, I will. Well, there you go, not even Ryan and Blanca can visit anymore."

Prudence said, "Don't forget to let Ryan know so he doesn't get a rude awakening if he tries to visit, and his commuter gets shut down warnings midflight."

"Let me see if I can connect with him now." Colt concentrated and felt that he had Ryan's attention but didn't receive an indication in return. "I don't know if he got the message."

"The signal could be getting scrambled if there are dark forces intervening. That's how we found out Blanca's dad had that altercation with his neighbor, do you remember?" Prudence mentioned.

"Yeah, I remember. Do you want me to fly down and check it out?"

"No, if we were that concerned, we would have kept them in the EM receiver. They have got to be able to take care of themselves as long as they are going to live down there."

Colt said to Fagan and Emma, "That reminds me, if we move down to the coast next year, will you be staying here or are you coming with us?"

Emma said, "I want to go with you," then looked at Fagan, "but I don't know if Fagan wants to leave."

"It's not that I don't want to go, what do we do with the mountain?"

"I think we should lock it down and use it as a sanctuary in case of hurricanes," Prudence said.

"We could let Ryan and Blanca keep it up in our absence," Colt suggested.

Fagan replied, "I don't like that idea. This castle's been in your family forever and the only reason it was built was to protect us. It is sacred, I don't think we should treat it otherwise."

Prudence replied, “He’s right. My grandparents and parents would not approve.”

“Ok, if Fagan and Emma come with us, we’ll just shut down the reactor and close the sky port,” Colt said.

“We’ll need another way in if you do that.”

“No, we’ll just need an auxiliary generator and remote for the sky port door. I can have something in place within a day, it’s not going to be an issue.”

“We still have at least a year before we’d have to act,” Prudence said. “So, is there any other reason to stay?” she asked Fagan.

“No, I’m adventurous, I think it’d be fun.”

“Have you ever been on a boat?” Prudence asked.

Fagan replied, “No, why would I float on the water when I can soar in the sky?”

“It’s all about relaxing and taking life slowly, enjoying the peace of the open water.”

“Sounds like you’ve been,” Fagan said.

“No, just some old stories my grandparents used to tell us,” Prudence said.

Emma said, “I remember that, you could see the glow in grandpa’s eyes as he described the waves rolling the boat back and forth, the salty sea breeze in his face and the shimmering flashes from the sun reflecting off the waves.”

Fagan addressed Emma, “Like the glow in your eyes now?”

“We’re going to have to go out on the water ourselves to find out, won’t we?” she replied.

Prudence interjected and made sure she had everyone’s attention, “There is one thing I want to emphasize, the houses of worship need to be up and running and fully functioning before we can leave. These churches have proven to help the people and if they are abandoned now, the city would fall back into chaos.”

Fagan said, “You can’t be responsible if you’re not here.”

“Elle and Eave put everything into it, and it was the right thing to do, even though they didn’t get the full chance to enjoy it. We owe it to them and the people to do what we can to make sure it continues to benefit them,” Prudence insisted.

“I agree,” Emma said.

They discussed how many churches there were, who was in charge of each of them and shortly thereafter determined it wasn’t going to be a problem.

The business of the city continued, the council members redelegated assignments and responsibilities to subcommittees to streamline bureaucratic processes. They built more facilities to handle disciplinary issues and increased educational requirements for the studies of humanity. A new civilization was thrust upon the people and their duty became ensuring everyone could adapt to it. It certainly didn’t help that they had to start without the knowledge of the spirits but in their quest for order, they encountered a paradox between freedom and a balance in the universe. Prudence had reminded them often that had it not been for mistakes, they’d never known what it was to be right.

The concept of people believing in gods or spirits, was a corner stone for societies that held their principles dear. A moral code, once taken for granted, had to be exercised and tweaked to remain relevant. Right and wrong were behaviors separated by the social morays of the day and had to be learned and reinforced. In the old days of the gods, righteousness was a self-evident truth, but since their departure, it become a spiritual and societal challenge. Elle and Eave’s campaign of worship was the best tool they had to prevent anarchy and was the first course of action taken upon the rebuilding of the coast.

The first structure built in Ellesville was a church dedicated in Elle’s honor. The community grew around a fleet of fishing vessels and within two years became, not only the largest supplier of seafood in the new world, but the fastest growing community.



“Can you believe eight thousand people relocated from New Providence last year?” Colt asked Prudence.

“No, quite frankly I’m surprised. That wasn’t the plan. I thought we’d have our own little community.”

“I’ve got good news. The plans for Eavestown have been approved and a new shipyard will employ a couple thousand people. Looks like more people will be joining us down here.”

Prudence said, “I’m glad Eave will finally get her town, but I’m concerned about all the people. I wanted a quiet, peaceful life, how long will it be before we’re as congested as New Providence?”

“I think we’ll be fine. The council has voted on per capita limitations,” Colt said.

“I recall New Providence doing the same thing and how did that work out?”

“We understand much more about city planning and governing now than they did then, I think things will turn out just fine.”

“I hope so,” Prudence said, “I’d like Sierra to be able to enjoy the spirits and nature without the chaos large populations bring.”

They left Ryan, Blanca, and Amoura behind when they left New Providence. Although the adults were able to adjust to not having them around, Sierra missed Amoura.

“Why can’t we visit Amoura or have her visit us?” she asked her mother.

“Well, sweetheart, they have their own lives to lead. People grow up and move on, it’s all part of life,”

“That’s not right. If people were free to pursue their own happiness, maintaining friendships would surely be part of that equation.”

“If we invite them down would that satisfy your argument?”

“Yes,” Sierra got excited. “Can I ask them?”

“I’ll tell you what, you ask Amoura if she wants to come down and visit, and I’ll talk with Blanca. Keep in mind she’s in school.”

“Ok.”

Sierra hadn’t developed the keen sense of telepathy that Prudence had yet. Even Prudence’s abilities became limited and found it difficult to concentrate on communicating with Blanca. She found that she could receive information from Blanca, but Blanca was unable to receive Prudence’s inquiries. Prudence had to contact her via communicator to have a two-way conversation, which she hated.

“Hi, it’s been so long, I was afraid I wouldn’t recognize your voice,” Prudence said.

“Yeah, it’s great to hear from you, how’s the water?”

“It’s nice down here. I’m calling to ask if you, Ryan, and Amoura would like to come down and visit, Sierra misses Amoura terribly.”

As Blanca replied she began to cry, “I’m sorry we grew apart, I had my family’s influence here holding me back. Dad didn’t want us to leave.”

“That’s alright, we understand,” Prudence said.

“Dad passed away a couple months ago.”

“Oh my,” Prudence said, “what happened?”

“He had a defect in his heart and one day he just dropped to the floor,” Blanca said.

“I’m sorry, honey, is there anything we can do?”

“Well, mama needs us here more than ever now, but Amoura could really use a friend. She is all alone up here, all she has is us and nana. Can she come down and visit for a couple days?”

“She can stay as long as she likes, she can even attend school with Sierra while she’s here. How about you and Ryan come visit for the weekend and leave Amoura here with us for a little while, we’ll take good care of her.”

“That sounds great, I’ll talk with Ryan and call you right back.”

While Prudence was discussing the situation with Colt, they couldn’t help bringing up comparisons in their new life to their old. “I’ve never heard of someone just dropping dead,” Colt said.

“Neither have I,” Prudence agreed, “do you suppose the spirits have anything to do with it or is it truly a coincidence?”

“I’m afraid we may never know. The longer we live without our powers, the less I believe I know about them. It’s probably just a matter of time before we can’t remember at all.”

Prudence disagreed, “I think we’ll always have the spirits with us, even if we fail to recognize it.”

Sierra walked into the room behind them during their conversation. “Are you talking about the spirits again?”

“Yes honey, we were just reminiscing. I’ve got good news,” Prudence said.

Sierra interrupted, “I know, Amoura’s coming to visit.”

“Yes, we told her mother she can stay as long as she likes, but remember, you may enjoy having your friend around, she also has a family that will miss her while she’s here, so sooner or later, she’ll need to go back home.”

“I understand, it’s like when I went to space camp, I enjoyed my time, but I missed you too.”

“Right,” Colt said, “we’ll try and do things together while she’s here so she can have fond memories when she goes home.”

“Like going sailing?” Sierra asked.

“Absolutely,” Colt said.

Prudence remembered her great grandfather telling his stories and thought it must be genetic. Colt had never seen the open water till he made a trip down here a few years back, now he fancies himself a sailor. It amused her and helped confirm her suspicions of destiny.

Fagan and Emma were due their first child. A boy, the first boy in her bloodline in the past three hundred years. Emma wanted to name him after an ancestor, but Fagan convinced her if she was going to honor anybody it should be someone larger than life, so they settled on Atlas.

Colt and Prudence built a two-story plantation mansion in a cleared section of land, thirty miles north of the coast. Prudence fell in love with the design from historical images in the ancient archives. It had plenty of room and a retractable hurricane dome in case of emergencies. Blanca and Ryan arrived on a Tuesday and left on Friday. While there, they covered all the stories they could remember sharing together. The only went sailing with Colt once but loved it. Blanca got a sunburn even though Colt warned her the sun's reflection off the water is more powerful than she might think. Other than the one outing, they stayed to themselves at the plantation and just enjoyed each other's company.

Prudence could feel their loneliness and stress. "We really should have visited Elle's church. The people there are great, and it would have lifted your spirits, I'm sure."

"I haven't felt much like worshipping since Dad passed. I don't understand powers of the universe that allow so much pain. I had no idea the of the emotional and mental struggles I would be forced to endure, and I find it hard to be thankful for it."

"I know it's hard," Prudence tried to console her, "pain serves a profound purpose, it reminds us to appreciate the wonders and beauty of the world, especially in our relationships. If we hurt, that's our soul talking to us, telling us that we had loved and now we mourn its loss. Honey, you have to embrace the opportunity for goodness and love to return to your heart. It would help to remember all the good things about your Dad, forgive every resentment or shortcoming, and I assure you, his spirit will come and visit yours, maybe in a dream or maybe while you're walking on the beach."

"How can you assure me of that?"

“Because I believe,” she said, “that’s what make us different, that’s what makes us special.”

Blanca told her, “You’re a good friend, you’ve always been a good friend. Thanks. I’ll try to take your advice. When do you want us to come back and pick up Amoura?”

Colt said, “That’s ok, I’ll fly her home whenever you want. You and Ryan should take a little time for yourselves, don’t worry about Amoura, we’ll take good care of her. Just give us a call when you’re ready, there’s no hurry.” Ryan passed information to Colt about Blanca’s depression. Colt remembered all too well what Prudence had to go through when Elle and Eave were taken from them. They just shared a look of acknowledgement and continued being supportive in silence.

After Ryan and Blanca left to go back to New Providence, Colt told Prudence of Ryan’s concerns about Blanca.

“I know,” Prudence said, “I could feel every burning tear on her cheek. She needs to open back up and let the spirits back in.”

“I agree.”

At the first of the week, Prudence took Amoura to Sierra’s school to register her as a part time student. School was a difficult service to maintain but for an odd reason. Children of all ages had a thirst for knowledge and competing for the best monitors, computer simulations and archived records became an art form. Competition was fierce and the educators had to provide a balance to prevent the younger, less experienced students from being neglected.

“We have a central database for all of our archives,” Amoura told Sierra.

“They’re working to consolidate our curriculum, by next cycle we should have all four beta crystals aligned and the master database will be complete. Until then, we have to access the databases individually.”

“So, it’s slow?”

Sierra replied, "You would not believe."

School provided more than just knowledge, it was their proving ground for social awareness and community service. The teachers were more facilitators than teachers, the children didn't have a problem learning, providing the information flow remained within a logical academic sequence. Opinions were debatable, but fact was a truth well learned and valued by the youth, and the possession of knowledge was an honor.

"Come with me," Sierra said, as she led Amoura by the hand to the video library. She opened a cabinet, took out a virtual reality screen, and set it on an empty table. She turned it on and navigated the touch screen to archive file AC4723-117, a video file from before the great comet. In a hospital room, a woman was giving birth, standing at the door was a man. "The woman is an ancestor of mine from before the great comet."

"Are you sure?" Amoura asked.

"I'm positive. My mom showed me how to find this video last year."

"It amazing you have this on video file, how old is it?"

"Over four of five hundred years, I guess," Sierra said, "keep watching." The video continued; the woman's husband was at the door of the room nervously looking on as doctors and nurses worked frantically to deliver a baby and save the mother's life. Suddenly the man stepped forward and exposed a pair of aliens standing behind him. Sierra froze the screen. "There, do you see that?"

"Wow! Is that real?" she asked.

"It is. This was the beginning. My 10<sup>th</sup> great grandmother gave birth to a child that had alien DNA, and this is the only video or recorded image of the aliens. All the other footage that was supposed to have recorded their image showed nothing as if they were invisible. This is the only one."

"Why, who else knows about it?"

“I don’t know, but I’m afraid to tell anyone, something might happen to it.”

“What happened to her and the baby?” Amoura asked.

“Watch,” she continued the film. The baby was delivered cesarean, the man held the mother’s hand, crying and looking down at her. The aliens walked toward them appearing translucent and walked right through the man and stopped at the woman. A very subtle flash of light appeared between them, and the aliens disappeared.

“Mama says they came to take her home.”

“This was amazing. Can we make a copy?”

Sierra said, “I tried, but they don’t show up in it. This is it.”

“What happened to them?”

“I don’t know. My mom says she died giving birth, the baby grew up and created our species using her DNA, her name was Hope.”

“I learned about her. I didn’t know you were related,” Amoura said.

“Technically, we are all related.”

“I guess so, many times removed I suppose.”

“I wanted to show you this because my mom says sometime, within our lifetime, another similar event will take place and she warned me to be prepared. This is a secret, you can’t anyone.”

“Ok, did she say when or how?”

“No, other than it will come from another galaxy,” Sierra replied.

“That doesn’t help at all.”

“Anyway, mama says this was why we were able to talk with the spirits.”

“I still don’t get it. Everyone always talking about the spirits, but if you can’t see them, how can you tell they’re real?”

“You saw the aliens, then you didn’t see them, how can you tell they’re real?”

“You have a point.”

Amoura’s first day at school was exciting and thought she’d like to stay down on the coast with Sierra but knew she’d eventually have to return to New Providence unless she could convince her parents to relocate. She would conspire with Sierra to set that plan in motion.

Every weekend, Colt flew down to the marina and either worked on his boat or went sailing out in the gulf. With his days of divine responsibility behind him, he found a new calling. Even though he still had a strong commitment to promote the good spirits and help protect people from the bad, he found a healthy balance in his personal life and was finally able to enjoy life with minimal stress.

Prudence continued with promoting Elle and Eave’s churches. She spent more time back and forth between the two than she did at home. She organized events, wrote articles for publication and lobbied city counsellors on social issues. Her role had changed considerably from Prime Counsellor to spiritual advisor and after adjusting to not having special powers, felt she was doing just what she was meant to do. After losing her other sisters, she developed closer ties with Emma and wondered why she hadn’t spent more time with her earlier.

Emma’s delivery with Atlas seemed easier to Prudence than her own delivery of Sierra and during the entire process, Prudence thought of Elle and Eave. In either case she sought to comfort Emma, “Imagine Elle and Eave putting their loving hands on you like they did Blanca, it would make this so much easier,” Prudence told her. Fagan paced outside the room and cringed every time he heard Emma groan.

Colt told him, “Get in there, she needs you.” Colt was toying with him, knowing Fagan was squeamish about her labor,



and felt that her pain was his fault. “What are you afraid of, she needs you.”

Fagan gave in and went into the room to hold her hand. He stood at her side and tried to support her, meanwhile, Colt laughed at him behind his back, knowing how scared he was. He wasn’t laughing when he was called into the room to pick Fagan up off the floor after he fainted though.

Colt carried Fagan back out into the lobby, laid him on a sofa and shook him till he came around. Colt couldn’t help laughing at him again. “How embarrassing,” he said, “you didn’t last three minutes.”

“Is it over?” Fagan groggily asked.”

“Not even close. You got to pull yourself together and get back in there.”

“No way. Leave me alone.”

Colt admitted, “I’m sorry, but I couldn’t resist the chance to have a little fun at your expense.”

“How did you get through Sierra’s birth?”

“I just kept reminding myself Prudence was doing all the work. I must say, if you and Emma ever get in a fight, my money is on her.”

“Funny, smart ass.”

“Seriously, it’s going ok, Prudence is keeping us posted.”

Atlas came into the world at twelve o’clock noon, the first day of October. Fagan was a proud papa and Colt would remind him of his intolerance to the pain of childbirth for many years to come.

Amoura stayed with Sierra for most of the summer then returned home with stories of sailing, baby Atlas, and Sierra’s school. Sierra asked her to keep any information about her ancestors and especially the aliens to herself, “Mama said, most people today, won’t understand, otherwise she would have told your mom and dad herself.”

Amoura would honor her wishes and kept in touch with her via communicator till Sierra was old enough to pilot her own commuter.

Ryan and Blanca considered relocating to the coast to please Amoura but ultimately decided to stay in New Providence. “When Amoura is old enough, she can move down there, or she can stay with Prudence and Colt anytime they’ll have her,” Blanca told Ryan, “I can’t leave mama now.”

Ryan understood. His relationship with the gang had diminished somewhat, out of sight, out of mind. Without the spirits to keep them connected, Ryan realized he finally got his wish for independence though it wasn’t what he had in mind.

By the time Atlas was two, they all felt comfortable traveling as a family and made their first trip back to the mountain since relocating. Sierra was a teen and was in her second phase of pilot training. Her beginner’s credentials would limit the size of commuter and which altitude lanes she could navigate, but for her purposes, it didn’t matter, she was free to fly. Amoura completed her training just two months prior and begged her parents for her own commuter to no avail.

Colt engaged the remote generator to open the sky port’s outer door upon their arrival to the mountain and were surprised that it worked. They found out, after arriving, the EM transmitter was no longer working. “It doesn’t look like we’ve had a breach,” Fagan said, “everything looked just like it did when they left, except for this dust. What happened here?”

“Yeah, how did all this dust get up here?” Prudence asked, “we don’t get dust all the way up here.”

“We must have had a tornado nearby while we were gone,” Colt said, “that’s the only thing I can think of that could get dust and dirt to blow this far up the mountain. Upper-level wind shear maybe?”

“Well, it doesn’t much matter now, can I get some help cleaning it up?” Prudence asked, “I’d like to be able to have company tonight.”

“Wouldn’t you rather wait till tomorrow, that’ll give us a chance to do a little grocery shopping as well as the cleanup?” Colt asked.

“If you’re concerned about time and shopping, Emma and Fagan can do the shopping and we can start on this dust.”

“You’re not letting me out of this cleaning, are you?”

“No way bubba.” She laughed, he didn’t.

They all pitched in and got the castle cleaned up. It took the power station about an hour to reengage and come online. Once online, they were able use the ventilation system to expedite clearing and filtering the dust. “I’ve never fully engaged the vacuum feature before, this is crazy,” Fagan said.

“I wonder what it looks like outside?” Colt asked, “we must look like a volcano ready to blow.”

“I’m curious now, let’s slide out the sky port and take a look.”

“Go ahead, we have one room left and we’re done, I’m going to tackle that. I’m getting hungry and want to hit up that sandwich shop, if it’s still there, when we go to the store.”

“I forgot all about that, now I’m hungry.”

The rest of the day flew by. Ryan, Blanca, and Amoura showed up at seven, with a bottle of wine and a butter cream cake. “We made it in one piece,” Ryan said, jokingly referring to letting Amoura fly them there.

They spend hours catching up on Sierra and Amoura’s scholastic accomplishments and personal growth. “We missed you,” Prudence said.

“We’ve missed you too. We’re only an hour away, we should have visited more.”

Blanca admitted, “We should have gone with you, it’s my fault, I couldn’t say no to dad then I couldn’t leave mama.”

“Don’t be sorry for choosing family, family is the most important thing in life,” Emma said.

“Maybe we can find a way in the future to move down there,” Blanca said.

Meanwhile, Colt, Fagan and Ryan were on the terrace drinking and laughing and telling stories of how Amoura crashed their commuter the first time she flew solo, how Sierra’s infatuation for debate got her in trouble at school, arguing with other students and the teacher. Then when Colt got started on his sailboat, he took control of the conversation for twenty minutes talking about his plans to sail down to the islands.

“I don’t see what he gets out of it,” Fagan told Ryan.

“Well, there are two types of people,” Colt said, “sailors and landlubbers, you’re a landlubber.”

“I don’t even know what that means,” Fagan said.

They laughed.

“Can I get you another drink,” Ryan asked.

“Are you staying the night, because I don’t think you’re fit to fly,” Fagan laughed.

“I’ve got a designated driver,” referring to Amoura.

Colt and Fagan both laughed, “Yeah you may need another,” Colt said.

Emma carried Atlas back to one of the spare rooms and put him to bed.

“He’s so quiet,” Blanca said, “do you have to check his pulse every now and then?”

Prudence laughed; Emma didn’t get it right away.

“Somethings are funnier with wine,” Prudence said.

“I probably had too much,” Emma said, “I think I’ll go lay with the baby for a while.”

The subject of spirits never came up once. Elle and Eave were only mentioned once during Prudence’s update on her service to the community. They did a pretty good job keeping their reunion about their relationship, but Prudence would later

feel bad for not including her touching story of Elle and Eave comforting Blanca in labor. To Prudence, it was a pinnacle moment in their relationship, the one thing that brought them closer than any other.

The weekend passed and the gang prepared to shut the mountain down again and return to the coast. “This time we should close the vents at the bottom of the shaft to prevent air current from flowing through the place in case of another dust storm,” Colt said.

“Good idea,” Fagan said.

They were back in Ellesville by noon Monday.

## Chapter Twelve

Colt started a boat building company and Prudence arranged the building of two new churches shortly after returning from New Providence. Five years of dedication and labor kept Colt away from his family for much of that time. His daughter grew and entered into relationships, and he realized that his priorities may have been a little misplaced. Colt rarely seen the friends Sierra had been associating with and with his focus on his company, he failed to connect with her as he felt he should have.

Prudence had dedicated much of her time to the church and didn't appear to miss Colt's presence, at least on the outside. She also had Sierra helping her, which kept her from feeling alone. Sierra once asked her, "Doesn't it bother you that dad spends so much time away from home?"

Prudence replied, "I don't think he spends any more time away than I do."

"But you're doing work for the benefit of the community?"

"I admit, it would be nice if your father spent more time with me and the church, but then again, I'm not spending a lot of time with him and his boat."

"You don't see one more important than the other?" Sierra asked.

"No, what's important for you may not be important for someone else, I imagine that's why Baylor, Caesar and Paul didn't hang around too long."

"Ouch," Sierra said, "that's not fair, they were just friends, we weren't in a relationship."

Prudence said, "The point is, we all have our wants and needs, we all have different interests, it's not right to force your interest on someone or for them to force their interests on you. You either accept the other's choices or you don't."

"Do you accept dad's?"

“Of course, I do. He has found a love for life in ways that may differ from mine but the fact that he can find such a passion is good for his soul. Who knows, maybe one day I’ll go sailing with him and see what he sees in it.”

Sierra hadn’t had a personal conversation with Prudence about her relationship with her father before, which indicated to Prudence that Sierra was starting to think about long term relationships. “Are you seeing anyone right now?” Prudence asked.

“No, I was just curious about how you can spend so much time apart and still be happy.”

“Happiness is a state of mind honey. If you can see the good in something, you can find a way to be happy.”

“Doesn’t the church make dad happy?”

“Yes, it does, but we have a different calling when it comes to church. This is important,” Prudence paused, “come have a seat.” They sat at the corner of the kitchen table, Prudence took a sip of her coffee that she left there fifteen minutes ago, “Ech, it’s cold.” Then proceeded to elaborate on her commitment to the church. “When we were little, dad, Uncle Fagan, me and my sisters, were given special powers.”

“What kind of powers?” Sierra asked.

“Let me finish, then ask your questions. My great grandparents were supreme counsellors and had powers granted to them by the gods, they died in an accident back when the mountain was being built. Their powers laid in limbo until we were born and old enough to receive them. Their powers were split between the six of us and gave us supernatural abilities. They increased our senses, we could see better, hear better, smell better, everything, and we could communicate directly to the spirits of the world. If a storm was coming, we knew it. If it hadn’t rained in weeks and we needed rain, we could get together and bring rain. It was a great responsibility. Your dad and Uncle Fagan weren’t related to us directly, so their powers weren’t as strong as

aunts Elle, Emma, Eave, or mine.” She paused again, feeling the sadness every time, she talked of her sisters. Sierra wanted to ask another question but held it to herself while her mother regrouped.

“I’m sorry, I miss them. Anyway, our powers were given to us to do good in the world and our whole lives, that’s what we dedicated ourselves to do. Then one day, the powers were taken away and we returned to being common people. The spirits still exist, the goodness needs to continue, and because we know the truth, we could not abandon our commitment to serve the spirit just because we no longer have the powers. That is why Elle and Eave started the church, which is why I continue to serve. Your dad and Uncle Fagan have a different connection to the spirits, so you see, we all have different influences in our lives that make us who we are. Changing things in our live doesn’t necessarily change who we are.”

“I find all this talk of spirits and gods interesting but to be honest, it’s hard to imagine people having those powers.”

“Had I not had or seen the powers, or experienced it firsthand, I would probably be inclined to agree with you, but there’s even more to the story, the important part.”

Sierra had heard the story of her powers in part before, and thought that she had heard the rest of it here, “You mean there’s more?”

Prudence took another sip of her cold coffee, “Ech, what I’m going to tell you I’ve never told anyone before except for your father, and I didn’t tell him all of it. I had considered taking it to my grave, but if I was tasked with the powers because my ancestors were tasked, as theirs were tasked before them, one day my descendants may be tasked, and this information may be relevant. Just prior to losing my powers I had a vision. A new organism from another galaxy will soon enter our atmosphere and alter life as we know it. During your children’s lifetime, a genetic mutation will overwhelm the human race and bring about the fifth outbreeding of mankind. By the end of the hyper-genetic cycle,



the human race will not have enough human DNA left to be considered human. I'm sorry darling, there's one constant in the universe, everything changes."

"Are you saying we're going to go extinct?"

"My vision just showed that a new species was coming."

"No, I'm pretty sure you just said we're going extinct, that the human race would no longer be recognizable."

Prudence didn't tell Sierra of her vision to scare her or manipulate her, she wanted to prepare her. Her closing remarks were chosen carefully, "The organism is coming from a galaxy a couple billion years older than ours. There's a greater possibility that a species with advanced evolutionary properties could force us into the future through homeostasis and influence all of life's existence, from plants and animals to humans. That is why maintaining a connection with the gods of old, the gods of new, or the spirits that fill our hearts, is so important. We, as descendants of the gods, must keep the faith and preserve hope. Our faith may be the only aspect of humanity to survive."

There was something in Prudence's voice that resonated with Sierra, as outlandish as the story appeared, she believed her. Sierra said, "I've been skeptical to some degree in the past, but I just learned that believing isn't a thought in your head, it's a thought in your heart. I think I know what it means to believe now." She smiled, her eyes opened and looked at her mother and gave her a hug.

"Thanks," Prudence said, "for the hug, but you understand the world is going to change whether we want it to or not, and it will happen within your children's lifetime?"

"Yes, but isn't that what they call fate, kismet, destiny or 'Providence.' Isn't that why they named home New Providence?"

Prudence looked back at Sierra, "Yes, it was."

"I'm not worried, mama, I have faith. I will join you with and 'our' commitment with the church."

“Hey,” Prudence asked, “do you want to go see how dad’s doing with his boat? He was supposed to be done with the new sleeper cabin.”

“Yeah, I think I do.”

Colt just stepped off the boat onto the dock when Prudence and Sierra arrived. Sierra saw Colt standing on the dock next to his boat and thought the image fit him well, “He’s looks like a sailor, doesn’t he?”

Prudence looked him up and down and said, “I think he looks more like a businessman trying to get away.”

“That too.”

“Hi, darling, do you want to get some lunch?” Prudence announced as she approached.

Right away, Colt knew something had changed. The ebb and flow of emotions seemed to be less mundane, out of whack, but in a good way. “Lunch sounds wonderful. Best shrimp in the world is right here,” pointing at the marina bar and grill behind them. “You appear happy and that makes me happy,” Colt said to Prudence.

“I’m happy,” Sierra said. “We had a good chat a while ago and wanted to come and see you.”

He smiled at Prudence and told Sierra, “thanks for coming.”

Prudence responded, “Actually, I’ve spent a lot of time away from you with the church, I figured I owed you lunch.”

“In that regard, I suppose I owe you dinner.”

Sierra saw a little spark in his eye she hadn’t seen in years. “What’s the name of your boat? Is it true a boat is named after a woman?”

“Well, question number one is ‘Wind,’ and question number two I’ll answer with a question, how many women do you know named ‘Wind’?”

She laughed, “What kind of name is ‘Wind,’ why didn’t you name it after mama?”

“Was going to name it ‘Hope,’ after your mama’s great, great, greatest grandmother, then changed my mind and went with something that reminds me of your mother and resembles freedom, ‘Wind’.”

“That makes sense,” Sierra said.

Prudence asked, “What, me and freedom in the same sentence? Are you going to ask me to go on a cruise?”

He smiled, “After lunch, come down and see the boat. While on board, try to imagine you and I getting cozy for a couple of weeks out around the islands, just you and I. Unless of course, Sierra wants to come. A family would be better.”

Sierra knew they needed this time together, “No way. You two need this. I’ll go next time.”

Colt looked at Prudence, waiting for her answer.

“I’ll line up Bee and Harold to take over the schedule for the next few weeks. When do we sail?” Prudence was excited, she had wanted to go sailing on a cruise with him for a while, but it always seemed that he had work to do on it.

Colt was far happier than he appeared. He knew how close to emotionally losing his connection with his family he was, and now he had a chance to make amends. He had years of loneliness waiting to be freed. He loved Prudence, but his soul had a connection to Elle, and the anniversary of her passing was coming up.

Sierra had a plan, she asked Prudence, “Why don’t you two hang out here for the afternoon and I can meet you at the restaurant a little later for dinner. You guys will have plenty of time to dine together, I want my time to dine with you before you go.”

Colt laughed, “She’s trying to get rid of us.”

Prudence looked back over to Sierra and winked.

Sierra left them after lunch without seeing the boat. She wanted to test her new sense of freedom out on Mason, her latest acquaintance.

Prudence and Colt sat in the cabin at the table and enjoyed a cup of coffee together like they used to. “This is nice, just you and I.”

“Yes, it is,” he said.

“Sometimes, you just have to live for the moment, and I think this is a pretty good moment to live for.”

“That’s what I’ve been talking about. I just wanted a moment. We’re going to enjoy the spirits again.”

“What do you mean?” Prudence asked.

“When a gentle sea breeze blows across your cheek, while we tack and change course, spirits of the winds reach out and touch you, welcoming you to a flow and rhythm of life at sea.”

“Wow,” she said, “you really have been bit by the sailing bug.”

“You’ll see.”

“I can’t wait,” she leaned into him, he took her bait, they spent the remainder of the afternoon in the new luxury bed he installed.

Fagan didn’t like the water, so he worked himself away from hanging around Colt the way he used too. He spent most of his time with Emma. Inside his heart, he couldn’t hide what anniversary was coming up. He told Emma, “I can’t describe her face, but I can feel Elle’s presence.”

“I know,” Emma said, “we all feel her this time of year. I miss her too.”

Fagan wasn’t trying to out himself for being unfaithful, and lucky for him, Emma didn’t see it that way either. “We’re going to have a celebration in about a week to honor them, I could really use you help making cakes and pies. You know how much Elle loved cake.”

“I would be delighted.” As rough as Fagan tried to project, he was as light on his feet in the kitchen.

Sierra was becoming more independent and having her parents out of town for a couple weeks was an appealing

opportunity. It took two days for Prudence to get all her affairs in order, and two more days for Colt to acquire all the supplies they would need for a three-week cruise. They would be ready to sail by Monday, five days before her sister's celebration. She wondered what her parishioners would think about her not being there. "I hope they understand at church, how is it going to look for me not to be there?" She asked.

"It's been a few years now, I think it'll be ok," Colt told her.

They didn't make a big deal about them leaving. They said goodbye to Fagan, Emma, Sierra, and kissed Atlas on the head, then left for the marina early Monday morning. They set sail at dawn, it was a beautiful summer day, and a canopy over the cabin was a must if you're going to be in the gulf in August.

"Why couldn't they wait till after the celebration?" Fagan asked Emma.

"They said they had to get in front of the weather and if they waited, they'd end up having to cancel."

All Colt's navigational aids were modernized, the art of navigation through celestial and dead reckoning was not lost to history. Colt's computer program was far more accurate than the old GPS satellites and because he didn't have a backup plan for navigation, he knew he had to protect his computer, so built a watertight, lockable cabinet for it, complete with a 20-year crystal core battery pack.

On their first day at sea, they marveled at the color of the water turning from the brownish sandy coastal wash to a cleaner clearer gray abyss. The farther south they went, the bluer the water got. Birds covered the sky where schools of shrimp and krill migrated and the further south they travelled, the fewer birds they saw. On their second day, they were far enough out to experience a school of dolphins. "Look Colt," she alerted him, "dolphins" She leaned over the leeward rail and reached out to them. The dolphins took turns swimming up to receive her touch.

“I’m glad we’re doing this,” she said.

Colt was enjoying every moment. “Today, right now, life couldn’t be more peaceful, make more sense, or get any better,” he looked and smiled at Prudence. He saw in her that little spark he had for Elle, and for the first time in a long time knew he was right where he was supposed to be in life.

Meanwhile back in Ellesville, Sierra was preparing for a party. She had decided her independence deserved a celebration. It was a matter of tradition, she told herself, you have to acknowledge your milestones in life, and her taking command of her own life was such an event. She didn’t think her parents would mind her using their house to have her celebration if they didn’t know about it anyway.

Uncle Fagan and Aunt Emma didn’t need to know, this was her generational coming out and if she was going to truly be an adult, she didn’t need judgement from relatives to convince her how to behave.

It was a good thing that Fagan and Emma didn’t show up that evening. After the mess Sierra woke up to, and the smell of overindulgence, she realized her celebration was probably out of control and a poor decision. She couldn’t be sure because she spent most of the night in a locked room with Mason. She didn’t feel ashamed, nor did she feel responsible to him in any reasonable sense of the word. Indifferent was the only thing that came to her mind in his regard. She said goodbye to him by saying, “Thanks, maybe I’ll call you.”

After waking everyone up and sending them home, she spent the rest of the day cleaning the house. She thought of her parents and wondered if they were getting along if they were enjoying the time together. She whistled a tune that was stuck in her head from the night before and wondered if she should consider her behavior irresponsible. Had it been her daughter making the same decisions, what would her answer be? Now she was left with trying to forgive herself for being human.

The people of Eavestown and the people of Ellesville have collaborated on church functions in the past but this had everyone's attention, to include people who had ever been to any of their services. It was to be an all-day event, cookout, street fare, jamboree, and concert all in one. Sierra had an amends to make for trashing her parents' house and tried extra hard to help Emma set up the activities.

Days three and four were identical for Colt and Prudence. They had played their favorite songs over and over then when the wind died down a bit, they decided to reef the main and slow drift while they practiced fishing. Colt brought plenty of provisions but being able to catch your dinner was a priceless lesson. "If something grabs your bait, depending how big it is, we'll tire it out until we can reel it in."

"What do you mean, tire it out?" Prudence asked.

Colt wasn't sure if he was going to be wasting his time trying to teach her the fine art of playing tug of war with a fish. Just when he was about to take the pole from her, she got a bite. He walked her through how to let the fish tire itself out and reel it in a little as it rests. She fought with the fish for fifteen minutes and finally brought it up alongside the boat. Colt leaned over and grabbed the fish through the gills and threw it into the cabin. Prudence was excited, "I did it, I caught a fish." Then Colt picked up the fish, removed the hook and threw the fish back into the water. "Why did you do that?"

"If we are not going to eat it, we need to put it back," he said.

"I thought that was the idea, to catch it for dinner."

"While we still have our provision, I thought we'd let the fish live a little longer."

"At least we know how to catch dinner if we had to, right?"

Colt said, "You'll make a fine a sailor."

The wind started to pick up a bit, so Colt unfurled the main, hoisted the jib and set a course to the islands.

“It’ll take about two days to get there. The last time I flew down that way I remember the bluest water, you could see forty feet down, it was beautiful, you’ll love it,” he said.

Prudence wasn’t as excited as Colt, but she was happy with herself for sharing this time with him. He seemed happier than she’d recalled him being in a long time.

Back in Ellesville, final preparations for the celebration were underway. The entertainment, guest speakers, tributes and raffles were scheduled and set. Dark forces influenced small groups trying to disrupt the coordinated efforts of the faithful but were met with strict enforcement. The council decided that they would not be taking any chances during the celebration. Vandals, thieves, and discontents would be removed from public and held in lockup until the celebration was over, no questions asked. The word spread fast and worked fairly well as a deterrent. Minimal cases were expected, and a joyful attitude dominated the beach town.

Friday, the day before the celebration, was treated as a holiday. All the children were released from school early to play or help decorate the streets. Businesses closed down and people meandered the streets as they might during a parade. A stage was set up for the bands that would perform, posters of Elle and Eave were posted all around the harbor and the smell of people cooking out filled the air.

Emme and Fagan were not only surprised, but they were also speechless to the amount of admiration the community had for their founding spiritual leaders. “I can’t think of anything more fitting than this tribute to my sisters,” she told Fagan. “They wanted to stay behind with the spirits when we transitioned, and I know they were heartbroken when they were left behind. Then after accepting that fate, they were taken from us violently. For



them to reunite with the spirits seemed to make things right again, but without their courage we may have never known.”

“Amen,” Fagan said.

Sierra stood tall next to Emma. “You’re my favorite niece,” Emma told Sierra.

“Thank you, Aunt Emma, I’m your only niece.”

“You don’t consider Amoura your sister?”

“I was thinking figuratively,” Sierra replied.

“Well, you’re my favorite non the less. Aunt Elle and Aunt Eave would say you’re their favorite too. You’ve grown so fast and blossomed so well. Are you ready for the world?”

“Believe me Aunt Emma, I’ve felt the change, but I can’t help but feel even greater changes coming.”

Emma never heard anyone saying something the way Prudence could until now. “Why did you say that, you sounded like your mother.”

“Maybe it’s because mama told me a story and I can envision it.”

“Honey, that’s how it starts,” Emma said, “you’re about the same age as we were when the powers were bestowed upon us. We had a vision prior to being chosen too.”

Sierra lifted her brow and tilted her head forward, “What are you saying?”

“I’m just saying, I know what you’re dealing with. It brought back memories,” Emma said.

“How close are you to mama?” Sierra asked.

“We can read each other’s thoughts from anywhere.”

“Has she ever told you about a vision she had just prior to losing her powers?”

“No,” Emma said, “but, I felt it in her. It’s the same message using a different form of transmission, so yeah, I know about her vision.”

“Do you think she’s right?”

“Sweetheart, the wisest words I’ve ever heard came from her lips, she said, change is inevitable.”

Sierra looked out over Emma’s shoulder and gazed at the orange setting sun, “This will be the grandest celebration. Oh, how I wish Aunt Elle and Aunt Eave could be here to enjoy this celebration, they loved these things.”

The next day out on the water, just an hour before daybreak, Saturday morning started a little bit choppy. Colt relieved Prudence at the helm at four forty in the morning, the distant orange haze over the eastern horizon worried him. Just the night before, a setting orange moon was still a fresh memory. “You should get some hard rest if you can, I feel a bit of a weather system in our way, I thought we be ahead of it, it must have picked up speed.”

You can’t give Prudence a warning and have her leave it be. “Sure, you want me to sleep while the house is burning.”

“It’s nothing, just a little storm. I’m just saying if it lasts too long or is too strong, I’ll need you to be well rested to lend a hand. Don’t worry, I’m not going to let you miss a storm at sea, what would you tell your grandkids, Yeah, I slept right through it. That’s not very exciting.”

“Have you been drinking. Cat’s out of the bag, we might as well pull an all-nighter.”

“Hopefully, it’s not that bad,” Colt said.

By sunrise, the seas have risen to four feet, the swell hoisted the boat and dropped it three times a minute. She asked, “We can’t keep this course, can we? The boat won’t take the pounding.”

“I’m afraid not, set a heading for 090 degrees,” Colt said, while he trimmed his jib and held tight to the mainsail. “We need to ride this wave; we can’t let the wave ride us.” He planned to use the storm’s oncoming wind to propel them in front of the storm. With the wind from the east and the seas from the

southeast, they would have to push the boundaries to stay away from the heaviest part of the storm.

He set his course to the open waters of the Atlantic, “Doesn’t this heading put us out to sea?” she asked.

“Yeah, it does, but the alternative is to let the storm batter us into pieces or capsize us.”

Prudence said, “Fine, but before we head out into the triangle, I need to use the head.”

Colt took the wheel and said, “you’re catching on.”

“Bite me.” Prudence showed her sassy side.

Back in Ellesville, the eight o’clock tune from the courthouse’s clock ushered in another business day but this morning, the only business on the city’s schedule was Elle and Eave’s celebration. People got an early start, and the smell of southern country breakfast filled the streets. Music was playing from businesses, shops, and restaurants throughout the harbor town. Different sounds overlapped each other in intersecting areas and created its own musical mystique. While people danced in the restaurants, sidewalks, and bars, they had no idea six hundred miles south a storm was coming, or that Colt and Prudence were battling it.

For the next eight hours the town of Ellesville was awake and thriving in celebration. Everyone seemed to be outside enjoying themselves, a gentle breeze dropped the temperature just two degrees, but it was enough that Emma could tell. It suddenly hit her, “Oh my, I think there may be a storm not far away, Colt and Prudence are out to sea.”

Fagan said, “If there was a storm out there, they would have known about it or seen it coming and steered away. I know Colt, he’s always planning and thinking ahead.”

“How are they to know?”

Fagan remembered that it was their powers that gave their entire society the information and protection from the forces of nature. They didn’t have satellites or buoys, comprehensive

weather stations place around the globe, and they didn't have the powers of the gods. After she reminded him, he had to concede, "My bad, I forgot. I hope they're ok."

While the celebration was winding down, the seas just north of the islands were picking up. Their new course was keeping the bow facing due east and in six hours or so, Colt hoped to be on the outside of a retreating storm. Unfortunately, heading into the seas only allowed them to advance eastward by four knots. They would have needed at least seven knots to get ahead of the storm. His plan had them a few hundred miles into the lower triangle by the time the storm was in the rear-view mirror, but at least they would be dry and out of danger.

The seas reached twelve feet and the spray of the water in the gale force winds began to sting their face. "We have to go below now," Colt insisted.

The noise of the waves slamming into the boat and the roar of the wind was loud, Prudence shouted, "Even I know we can't abandon the wheel; I'll take it for a while."

"There's no need, I've got a remote program on the computer, we can steer it from below."

"What, now you tell me. I'm soaking wet."

Colt flipped the switch to lock the wheel and kept the helm steady while he hurried below to take control from inside the cabin.

While Prudence changed into dry clothes, Colt maneuvered his boat with a sophisticated remote system. He could sail better from below; it was his VR training program that he learned how to sail; and it would be his skills with the controls that he had just placed his and his wife's life into. Colt did his best to make it all look so second nature that it wasn't a very big thing. "Look honey," Colt attempted to light her concerns by showing a comparison to a video game and his control of the boat. "It's easy to control it from here. A lot less physical than up there."

“I’m not worried,” she said. The swells were now huge and there was no room for error. If the boat swung into or away from the wind the boat wouldn’t be able to right itself. She looked at Colt sitting on the cushion in front of the table, with his right foot on the door jam and his left foot on the table, holding the remote in his hands and watching the computer screen.

As gusts of wind pushed the boat left the power of the sea pushed the boat to the right. A rhythm developed and began to rock the boat violently as it neared the crest of the waves. Even though he taken down his jib and reefed mainsail the force was too powerful for the nylon sail. A tear in the sail took only seconds to rip it wide open. Suddenly he had no control, the boat and their lives were at the mercy of the storm.

No sooner than it registered in his mind, the boat swayed too far to starboard forcing the boat to tack near the top of a thirty-foot wave. Everything not tied down fell hard toward the stern of the boat as the bow pointed straight up. The boat began sliding down the wave while the wave continued to topple the boat.

Colt couldn’t hold his position any longer and fell down into the cabin. Prudence held her position fairly well with her back to the cabinets that were now under her. She held on to the other end of the table but when Colt slammed into the back-cabin wall, she grabbed onto him and held him tight. She knew what was happening and used every ounce of adrenaline to hold onto Colt. The cabin door crashed and broke as the boat capsized and slammed into the water. Debris swirled around violently as water rushed and began to fill the cabin. Before they knew it, they were pinned to overhead, submerged under the ruthless sea in the dark.

Elle and Eave appeared to Prudence as she gripped Colt’s arm in an effort to calm her fears. She telepathically told Colt, “I see Elle and Eave,” and relaxed her hold of him. In the dark abyss of their watery grave, he too felt their presence and calm befell him. Suddenly, it seemed like time had stopped, it got totally silent. Prudence whispered to Colt in her mind, “I love you.”

While Prudence and Colt knowingly engaged in their final embrace, Elle and Eave appeared with a glow and lit their final goodbyes. They touched Colt and Prudence's cheek and while their lungs filled with water, Elle said, "We have not been forsaken, it's time to come home." Everything went quiet and calm, and within a flash they were gone. As Colt and Prudence faded into oblivion, they walked hand in hand with Elle and Eave.

At that very moment, there were two people in Ellesville who froze in their tracks. Emme and Fagan felt it like a ton of bricks. A vision of Elle, Eave, Prudence, and Colt all appeared in their minds, standing perfectly still in front of them while their spirits filled their souls. It was the same feeling they had when Elle and Eave were taken. They didn't know what had happened, but they knew the outcome and for a moment a peaceful enlightenment overwhelmed them. Sadness and joy simultaneously overpowered them in the middle of the celebration. Emme and Fagan felt a crippling pressure on their heart from loss at the same time a feeling of relief soothed their soul. Something was very wrong, and they were at a loss as to how they should feel. The eternal peace that Elle and Eave sought was now extending its graces to Prudence and Colt. In that moment, all six demigods were in concert together, just for a brief glimpse at the hereafter and knowing that a part of them lives forever.

It was all brand-new to Sierra. She was born without powers and has never seen their effects as her parents had. All Sierra had to rely upon was Emma and Fagan's account. She saw the pain and confusion in their faces, "What the matter Aunt Emma?"

"Honey, I'm afraid something may have happened to your mom and dad."

"What, what is it?"

Emme took Sierra's hand, "We just got a vision that something terrible happened to your mom and dad and they are

gone. But we also saw Elle and Eave indicate that they are all together again.”

Sierra began to tear up, “What happened?”

“We don’t know honey, your uncle and I just received a vision, but we also received a message that everything will be ok.”

Sierra continued crying but kept her sorrow mainly to herself. All she had to go on was Emma and Fagan’s account from their vision and subconsciously held out hope that they were wrong.

The trio held each other’s hands, they didn’t have to say anything, then slowly joined in a family hug, and telepathically bonded with each other.

“Is this the change you were expecting?” Emma asked Sierra.

“No. I didn’t expect anything for at least a hundred fifty years.” More tears formed on her cheek as she thought about the possibility that her parents weren’t coming back.

Emma held her and reflected back to the last time she saw lost her parents and knew that pain all too well. “I cannot mend your broken heart, but the spirits can, that’s what Elle and Eave’s their presence was telling us, they are all in a better place and one day they would all be together again.”

The town people continued to party and dance in the streets, unaware of the events out at sea. The music was festive and the atmosphere happy. They took a few minutes to compose themselves, “We need to finish here, no one knows what has happened and this is not the right time to inform them,” Emma said.

“Let’s finish up here and go, let the people get as much out of the celebration as they can,” Fagan said.

“I’ll do my best,” Sierra said, still wiping away her tears. She pulled Atlas from his stroller and carried him on her hip to take her mind away from the situation. All three felt like crying

but put on a brave face and continued to participate in the celebration waiting for the right time to leave.

“Nothing’s over, till it’s over,” Emma told Sierra. “If Elle and Eave can come back for your mom and dad, they can come back for us. We can choose to look forward to good or dwell on the bad. I prefer looking for the good.”

Rescue flights flew for a week all around the islands with no clue to their whereabouts. Sierra spent many days just staring out of the living room window waiting for them to fly home. After a week, they called off the search and officially declared them lost at sea.

The world was Sierra’s now. She wanted independence and freedom, she wanted to be responsible and in charge of her own destiny. She didn’t want it this way but thought back to the vision her mother shared with her, that everything changes, and those changes are coming. The theme was obvious, she was warned because she was special, her family was special, her heritage required her to take charge and plan for a future she couldn’t imagine.

After visiting her aunt, a week later to discuss Prudence’s vision, Sierra left to return home, “A hundred and fifty years is a long way away.”

“No, honey, a hundred and fifty years is right around the corner.”

Sierra walked out of the house, Emma and Fagan followed her out the door, “Bye,” Sierra said, “I want to cook dinner for you next Wednesday, what do you say?”

Emma answered while looking up at what appeared to be and handful of meteorites entering the atmosphere. “Look up,” everyone turned and looked up to see a half dozen orange sparks flying through the sky.

“Maybe it’s a sign from your mom and dad,” Fagan said.

Sierra looked on and smiled back at them, “Maybe,” but she knew what it was, it was the future.