


ENVY & GREED
SPELLS
MURDER



JOHN T. PETERS

Envy and Greed Spells Murder



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Also, by

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Sidetracked

Destroyed Trust

Africa Beckons

No Sympathy for Murder

Theft comes with a price

Harmful Inheritance

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CHAPTER ONE



My troubles appear to have roots in the summer of 1985 when the police found Mr Hardman's lifeless body in his office, stabbed multiple times and lying amid pools of blood. It was labelled a crime of passion, driven by deep hatred towards the victim.

Our tight-knit start-up business lacked access to modern technology such as telex or fax machines, so we turned to Hardman Secretarial Services for our digital correspondence needs.

Paul introduced the agency, and as I had never met Mr Hardman, it was evident I had no connection to the incident. Unknown to me, it only surfaced later how closely entwined we were to Mr and Mrs Hardman. My primary concern was for the well-being of our messages.

After Mr Hardman's death, Mrs Hardman promised to work from home and deliver our messages daily, ensuring they were cared for as if they were hers.

Two times before, someone had broken into Hardman's Secretarial Agencies. However, this time,

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it was more serious. After rummaging through, the intruders pulled out drawers and dropped them on the ground. They yanked the copy machine from its spot in the corner, and its contents—telexes and fax copies—were swiped clean. The ransacked office looked like a cyclone had come through it, leaving behind a mess of paper scraps, broken furniture, and smashed equipment.

While the police continued sifting through the rubble, they finally focused on Mr Hardman's clients.

My associate Paul White and I run an import/export agency in England. We try to source and market products on behalf of local customers. In addition, we do marketing research and write reports, partly funded by the British Overseas Trade Board, for clients who wish to export their products to foreign countries.

The BOTB would finance thirty per cent of the cost, provided they received a copy of the report for their files and general use.

Currently, I am working on the potential of a log-splitting machine that works from the PTO of most tractors for a selection of African countries.

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The purpose of the machine was to create firewood in bulk for resale.

Even at this early stage of our business, I realised that Paul was not keen on market research and left most of the work for me. I made a mental note to discuss it with him before it brewed ill feelings. Market research was labour-intensive and a bit of a bore, but it was the bread and butter of our business. Paul seemed to be more interested in our company's distribution side. We imported orchids from Thailand and sold them in wholesale markets like Covent Gardens.

I became friendly with the staff at the BOTB, who mentioned that they had a register of barter traders and asked if I would like to join. Consequently, for a laugh, I also registered the business as a barter trader with the British Overseas Trade Board.

As a result, a Belgium Company contacted us. They had sold military equipment to Libya in exchange for oil worth many million United States dollars. Our involvement in the transaction was to find a buyer for the oil on behalf of the Belgium Company.

Because of the nature of the transaction, the Belgian Company did not want to leave a paper trail

documenting their involvement in the transaction, so they asked that I visit them in person.

I visited them in Brussels and was impressed. They were a subsidiary of a large German arms manufacturer known for its famous tank. The export of military equipment from Germany was sensitive. Export licenses and end-user certificates were required, and exports to countries like Libya were frowned upon as they may sell the equipment to other countries. Therefore, the hush-hush side of the operation.

The Belgian Company director presented me with the contract, and we both signed it. They offered a substantial commission. He further asked me to keep their name confidential and not mention it to anyone. 'We have given you the contract to sell the oil on our behalf because we need you as a buffer to protect ourselves from the media and the thousands of brokers out there.'

I will never know how the news got out, but several brokers heard about this and messaged us, trying to find out who the Belgium Company is.

We did not trust these brokers. We thought their only interest was to find out the source of the transaction and bypass our involvement.

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However, we kept our messages downbeat and avoided mentioning large amounts of money, oil or armaments. Still, we could not prevent some of our contacts from citing these details.

The men were mostly oil brokers, trying to find Libyan oil at a low price for their so-called principals and then sell it on the open market as if they were the owners, making themselves a tidy profit.

I felt sure that if the brokers could discover our dealings, the police would also know about our potential transactions, and we would become a target for their investigation.

As I feared, the inevitable happened. I knew that the police would come to interview us as we dealt with imports and exports and used the Hardman's Secretarial agency for our communications.

I had been dreading this moment for days. I heard the faint sound of sirens growing louder and closer; a police car pulled up in front of our office building. We watched silently as two officers emerged from the vehicle and marched slowly towards our offices.

The shrill sound of the doorbell shattered the stillness in the air. The police, dressed in blue uniforms, loomed on our doorstep like vultures

hovering over fresh prey. Their eyes were cold and calculating, taking in every inch of our office like a detective examining a crime scene.

They thought there might be some involvement in Mr Hardman's murder and came to visit us with their suspicions. They interrogated us ruthlessly, leaving no stone unturned in their hunt for the truth. They wanted to know if we were dealing with or knew of a person capable of such a crime.

I understand and would not put it past the brokers chasing this deal to steal our messages from the secretarial agency we made use of in a bid to try and find information on our principal, the Belgium Company—but to stoop to murder. I thought it was a bit far-fetched.

I mean, the moment you murdered the owner of the secretarial agency, you lost your potential link to our supplier.

To my annoyance, Paul left me to answer all the police questions. Still, it was impossible to answer their question as we hardly knew our clients personally. We could not help the police. They soon decided that we had no part in Mr Hardman's murder.

Even though the police declared our innocence, Mrs Hardman panicked and asked us to take our business elsewhere, forcing us to purchase a telex and fax machine, which was just as well, as we needed to keep our business confidential. It was a good thing because we were amazed at how desperate these companies were to try and steal copies of our messages from the secretarial agency. Later, they even broke into our offices.

Fortunately, to protect our possible commission, I did not mention the name of the Belgium Company to anyone, not even to Paul, to his displeasure. I did not intentionally withhold the Belgium supplier's name from Paul, as he was my business partner, but events overtook regular business.

To prove to potential buyers, without revealing the Belgium Company's name, I confidently approached the Chamber of Commerce to issue a letter stating that the transaction was genuine and that they had seen the original documents. After that, I hid the original contract in my apartment.

Several companies showed interest, making appointments to meet us in London with interest in purchasing the oil. Most of them turned out to be brokers trying to get access to the oil for their buyers, or so they claimed. They came from Canada,

America, and Lebanon—some even as far away as South Africa.

Some were so desperate that they would arrive at our offices unannounced. I found that somewhat annoying as we had a meagre setup.

Our offices consisted of two rooms in the basement of a dilapidated building in London's East End. A far cry from the posh headquarters I'd envisioned when starting the business. But Paul and I could hardly afford the office rent, with the limited funds remaining after leasing the space and buying second-hand furniture.

One large office is for Paul and me, and a second smaller office is for two young girls doing work experience as our clerical staff.

After meeting one or two actual buyers, I felt confident that such vital people would not visit small fry like ourselves on the off chance. These unannounced visitors were brokers and most likely poorer than we were.

Some of these visitors/brokers were highly pushy, virtually demanding that we hand over all the transaction information to them. They claimed that we were too inexperienced to handle such a significant

transaction. Some tried to bribe us, and some were bullies threatening to take the transaction away.

One of our unannounced visitors, Mr John White from Washington DC, offered to buy a share in our company. He had the same surname as Paul, but I made no connection as he was from America and Paul was English. John White was obviously trying to obtain information on the Belgian Company. However, he informed me that he had a business associate who represented a group of farmers in Iowa and had access to maize. It greatly interested us, as we had several genuine enquiries for maize.

The oil transaction created such interest that three overseas teams stayed in nearby hotels, trying to become part of the transaction.

It crossed my mind that if we were fraudsters, we could have created false documents and manipulated these brokers into investing thousands in the transaction; there was so much hunger for wealth amongst them.

They seemed to believe we would make them part of the company if they hung around. Every morning at 9 AM, they were waiting at our office doorstep to start work. It took willpower to keep them off our

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phones. We had to insist that they pay upfront for each phone call they made.

Without their knowledge, help, or even informing Paul, I was completing the oil transaction. There was a leak in our office, and I suspected that Paul was involved.

I have found a Swiss petroleum company based in London willing to take whatever oil was available from the Belgium Companies' barter deal with Libya. The procedure was simple, as both Companies knew each other and were happy to pay our commission as a founder fee.

The brokers camping on our doorstep somehow found out that the transaction was concluded and left in a foul mood one by one, complaining that they should receive a share for all the help and advice they gave us. That is all except for Mr John White, who thought he had become part of our business.

Fortunately, he ran out of money. The only financial help we offered him was a single plane ticket back to America.

Every muscle shuddered with joy as I finally waved goodbye to him. I felt like somebody had lifted a ton of weight from my chest, and I could hardly believe

our freedom. I went out drinking that night; I felt like dancing in the streets and shouting joyfully.

From this experience, we learned nothing about crude oil, so we decided to do something about it as we received numerous enquiries from the BOTB for oil barter deals.

Due to our ignorance, we lost the next deal between Wimpy Homes and the UAE.

I enrolled in an online course in crude oil and the refining process and soon discovered the error of our ways.

I learned that all crude oils located globally have different physical properties and characteristics.

Establishing a globally traded market for crude would be impractical if you trade every grade individually. The industry evolved to use only a few major crude oils to price much of the world's output. These crudes are known as *benchmark crudes*, effectively price markers for other crudes, which can be traded at a premium or discount to the benchmark, depending upon the crude quality and distance from the destination market.

The three most widely traded benchmarks are West Texas Intermediate (WTI), North Sea Brent Blend and Dubai Light. The trade benchmarks in the

first two far outstrip the importance of the Dubai benchmark.

The industry categorised crude oil according to its density, the presence of impurities, and its location. It is traditionally measured using the API gravity. The lower the API gravity, the heavier the crude oil.

Density indicates the composition of the crude oil and the ease with which refineries can process it. Lighter crudes are usually more valuable than heavier ones and have a lower processing cost.

Crude oils contain many impurities, including toxic, corrosive and reactive substances that can be costly to deal with. One of the most critical impurities is sulphur.

The industry classifies crude oils according to sulphur content as sweet or sour. Sweet crudes typically contain less than 0.5% sulphur, and sour crudes more than 2%. Higher sulphur crude oil requires costly treatment and is sold at a significant discount compared to sweet crude oils.

Then, to complicate matters even more, I learnt that in addition to API gravity and sulphur content, petroleum refining and processing require more physical and chemical properties and characteristics of crude oils. This information is typically supplied in the form of an 'assay'.

An assay is the product of extensive laboratory testing. It provides a detailed physical and chemical analysis of a particular crude oil. The refinery uses this information to determine the suitability of crude oils for a specific refinery configuration. It is essential in determining the potential value of the crude oil.

Crude oil in its natural state at the wellhead has limited value. Complex and expensive industrial processing steps are needed to convert crude oil into valuable products. Combining these processing steps constitutes a petroleum refinery.

Crude oil is a complex mixture of thousands of molecules, and processing crude oil produces various products.

We soon realised that offering crude oil to any refinery without considering the above essential points was foolhardy. We realised these oil deals were too complicated to undertake at this stage. We should not waste too much time exploring them until we know more about the oil industry. It was pure luck that the buyer and the Belgium Company knew each other, allowing the transaction to proceed smoothly. We had to concentrate on regular trading and market research for our bread and butter.

The commission from the Belgium oil deal did give us a head start financially. We moved into better offices suitable for entertaining clients.

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In the back of my mind, I was still troubled by the murder of Mr Hardman. Could it have been Mr John White, I wondered.

I did not want to play detective, but I was intrigued. Suppose one of the brokers who visited us was guilty. I would have to point the finger at him.

Even though I mistrusted John White, I knew I would have to visit him. A genuine Iranian Government agent has asked us if we can source a regular supplier of maize.

Mr John White claimed he had contact with Mr Tom Mark, who represented a group of farmers in Iowa. It greatly interested me, but I did not trust Mr White and realised I would have to fly to Washington and meet Mr Tom Mark. John had previously invited me and was still regularly phoning the office to involve himself in our business. My duty was to check if Mr Tom Mark existed and if he had access to Maize.

It felt like I stood at the edge of a precipice. I was so nervous about phoning John White my hand trembled as I reached for the phone. Arranging a meeting with him and inviting Mr Tom Mark to this meeting would bind me to John's services as part of the transaction. I did not trust John, but despite all my doubts, I knew I had to go through with it. I had to go

to Washington, DC, to evaluate this supplier. A single phone call laid everything on the line.

Despite my reservations, I felt compelled to proceed with the transaction after speaking with John White. His words were like honey, luring me in with promises and flattery. But as I ended the call, a gnawing feeling of unease crept into my gut. Despite his charming demeanour, I couldn't shake the sense that something was off about John White.

CHAPTER TWO



The following Monday, I arrived at Heathrow Airport, my heart racing as I checked in for my flight. The air was thick with anticipation and the smell of jet fuel as I passed through security and boarded the plane bound for Washington.

The easy familiarity of the plane's leather seats felt like a worn pair of slippers. It was my favourite aeroplane, a Boeing 747, and I spent many memorable and happy hours in it. I even had my favourite seat by the emergency exit, with plenty of legroom.

I spent the flight time well, writing notes and remembering my early childhood for the first time in months. My father worked in an office on the seafront; he read the paper while my mother made breakfast daily. Later, they would walk to the beach and swim or sit and talk until sunset. They were both gone now. I was born in Folkestone and raised by my grandmother - Nana, as I called her. She owned a small hotel on Folkstone High Street, where she put up tourists and served them cream teas. When her husband passed away after many years, it was too much for her. She sold off the property and began

travelling on sea cruises with friends who shared her interests.

Staid old Folkestone never changed: a town of essentials laid out in neat rows between sky and earth, a centuries-old landscape accustomed to accepting all comers.

My parents christened me as Graham Ward. I am six feet tall, reasonably fit and intelligent. I went to a day school in Folkestone and a boarding school up north, where I excelled. I yearned to be in the import and export business all my growing years. Having succeeded with the oil barter deal made everything seem possible, and it set my future from that moment on. The maize agreement would be another feather in my cap.

As I landed in Washington, I could feel the heat radiating off the tarmac. It was a scorching day, and my suit stuck to my back as I made my way through the airport. I had arranged to meet John White and Tom Mark in a hotel lobby near the airport.

When I arrived, John was already waiting for me. He greeted me with a firm handshake and ushered me over to a table in the corner of the lobby.

‘Great to see you again, my friend!’ he said, flashing a wide grin. ‘How was your flight?’

‘It was fine, thank you,’ I replied, taking a seat. ‘Listen, John, I’m here because I’d like to meet your business associate, Tom Mark.’

I could tell he did not appreciate my abruptness. A frown appeared on his face, and I could see the hostility in his eyes. I did not trust this man and was uninterested in being his friend. He was about to comment when a burly man with a thick beard and a friendly smile approached our table and saved the day. ‘Hi, I am Tom Mark. Pleased to meet you.’

I stood up and shook his hand. He seemed genuine, but I thought I had better tread carefully because I did not trust John White.

John White declared. ‘I have taken the liberty to book a room for you here at the hotel. Let us check you in, and then we will discuss the business further in your room.’

I agreed. We went to reception, where I signed in as Graham Ward. John tried to present his credit card, but I insisted on paying as I feared to be indebted to this man.

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As we sat in my hotel room, Tom poured us a glass of whisky, each from a bottle he had produced from his briefcase. ‘Duty-free from my flight. John tells me you’re interested in maize,’ he said, sipping his whisky.

‘That’s right,’ I replied. ‘We have a client who is interested in purchasing it. It is the Iranian government, and we’d like to see if we can work something out. But we must be careful; the Iranian Government does not tolerate failure. My Iranian associate tells me that if we screw up, he and his family’s life would be at stake.’

I opened my briefcase and produced a letter from the Union Bank of Switzerland. ‘To show you the seriousness of these people. They gave me this bank letter to state their intent and that the funds are available.’

Tom nodded, and I could see that he was impressed. ‘Well, I can tell you right now that we have some of the best maize in the country. We take great care in our farming practices, and our yields are always top-notch.’

‘That’s great to hear,’ I said, taking out my notebook to jot down some notes. ‘And what kind of volume can you produce?’

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Tom leaned back in his chair, stroking his beard thoughtfully. ‘We can produce about 500,000 bushels per year, and there is a possibility of increasing the volume by adding more growers to our syndicate. We’re always looking for new farmers to work with.’

I scribbled down the figure in my notebook. ‘That’s a good amount. And what about pricing? How does it compare to other suppliers in the market?’

Tom leaned forward, a cunning glint in his eye. ‘Well, we like to think that our prices are competitive. But I’ll be honest with you: we do have some flexibility. Especially if we can establish a long-term relationship with a buyer.’

I nodded, sensing an opportunity. ‘That’s good to hear; a long-term relationship is what we all want. And what about shipping? Can you handle shipments to multiple locations?’

Tom smiled. ‘Absolutely. We have a great relationship with a trucking company that can handle all of our logistics. And we’re always looking for new business opportunities.’

I nodded with caution. I still did not trust John White. ‘Is it possible for me to visit the farming community and your bankers so we can move this

transaction forward? By the way, you and John must take care of your commission. The Iranians won't pay any further commissions other than to my Iranian friend who will take care of me.'

Tom agreed. 'Thanks for being so open with us. You can stay with me on the farm to visit the producers. I have an office in Chicago where we can conclude the transaction. The bank is also there.'

John explained that he had some pressing business to take care of. 'Please excuse me for a few days; I will meet you in Chicago later.'

Tom booked flights for the following day. We flew to Chicago, where he had a car waiting. We then drove to his farm in Cedar Falls.

Tom's home was a sprawling rusty red timber-framed farmhouse surrounded by acres of cornfields. As I exited his car, the scent of fresh earth hit me, with crickets chirping in the distance. 'Welcome to Cedar Falls,' he said with a broad smile. 'Please come in.'

I followed Tom into his home, decorated with charming rustic furnishings. The living room had a large stone fireplace, with antiques scattered throughout the house. I could tell that Tom took great

pride in his home, and I admired his attention to detail.

Tom introduced me to his wife, Shirley and their adopted son, Kevin, an eight-year-old with Down syndrome.

I immediately relaxed in their company, feeling respect and trust for this family unit.

In my opinion, any couple who is brave enough to adopt a Down syndrome child must be exceptional, as children with Down syndrome have delays in speech and motor skills and may need help with self-care, such as dressing and grooming. Medical problems associated with Down syndrome can vary widely from child to child. But some kids and teens need a lot of medical attention.

Then, there are behavioural problems such as stubbornness, impulsivity, and temper tantrums. Many Down syndrome children talk out loud to themselves as a way of understanding and processing information.

Parents adopting Down syndrome children need to be caring and have loads of patience, and are usually carefully vetted by social services before adoption is allowed.

With John White out of the way, I felt confident that Tom and I could successfully conclude this Iranian maize deal.

After settling in, Tom took me on a tour of his farm. We walked through fields of maize, and I was impressed by the size of his operation. Tom had a team of skilled workers who planted, harvested and maintained the crop. It was clear that he took great care of the quality of his product, and I was excited to see what else he had in store.

Over the next few days, we visited several banks in the area and some of Tom's suppliers. I was impressed by the level of organisation and efficiency in his business, and it was clear that he had a solid reputation in the industry.

One evening, after a long day of meetings, Tom invited me to join him, his wife Shirley and his sister Veronica for dinner at a local restaurant. I was immediately drawn to Veronica's sharp wit and intelligence as the conversation flowed. Her dark, glossy hair fell gently down her back, framing her face perfectly. Her bright green eyes showed intelligence and wisdom, with a mischievous twinkle that added life to her expression. Her features were delicate, with high cheekbones and a small nose.

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Like a summer's night breeze, she carried a hint of jasmine with subtle undertones of cinnamon and sandalwood that lingered around her.

After dinner, Tom and Shirley left to attend church business, as they were church committee members—leaving Veronica and me alone at the restaurant.

I offered Veronica a glass of wine. Accepting, she leaned in close as we sipped our drinks and whispered, 'You know, Graham, I find you very intriguing. I would love to get to know you better.'

Her forwardness took me aback, but I couldn't deny my attraction to her.

We spent the rest of the evening talking and laughing, and by the end of the night, we were in each other's arms.

Veronica worked as an assistant manager in human resources for John Deere, a sizeable agricultural tractor producer in Waterloo, Iowa, who employed many people.

Over the next few days, Veronica and I spent as much time together as possible. We went on long walks through the cornfields, shared meals at local diners, and even went skinny dipping in a nearby lake.

Our connection was intense and electric, and I felt like I had finally found my equal.

As the days passed, I continued to discuss business with Tom. He had agreed to our terms, and we moved forward with the maize deal. But as I thought about Veronica, I realised my feelings for her grew stronger daily, and I didn't want to leave her behind.

My hands trembled as I gathered up the courage to speak. 'Veronica,' I said, my voice low and full of emotion, 'I love you beyond anything else in this world. If I return to England without you, life there would be meaningless. I have almost finished my business here, and it is time to go back, but I was hoping you could come with me. Together, we will be unstoppable, a powerful duo that will turn the businesses into a profitable empire.'

Veronica's eyes widened with surprise, but then a slow smile spread. 'Oh, Graham,' she breathed, 'I love you too. I can't imagine a life without you, either. But I can't move to England just yet, I have my work to consider. Besides, we hardly know each other.'

My heart filled with sadness. I realised I was rushing things.

We hugged each other tightly. 'I don't want to lose you, with me being on the other side of the world.'

Veronica smiled. 'I tell you what. I will come with you to England for two weeks. I am sure they can spare me at work for that time.'

My heart swelled with joy. Deep inside, I knew this was the woman I wanted to spend the rest of my life with.

We quickly made plans for Veronica to come back to England with me. Tom was disappointed to see us go, but he understood our decision. We agreed to continue our joint business arrangements and promised to visit frequently.

Then, out of the blue, John White arrived and tried to take control of the deal, demanding more profit.

I could tell by the look on Tom's face that he was not pleased with John's sudden arrival. 'What's going on here?' Tom demanded, his voice laced with anger. 'I thought we had a deal.'

John smirked, his eyes flicking over to me. 'Oh, we do have a deal. But I have to meet some additional demands. Surely, you can understand that, Tom.'

Tom's fists clenched at his sides, and I could see the anger building in his eyes. 'I don't like this, Graham. I don't like it at all,' he muttered.

I knew that John was playing a dangerous game by trying to renegotiate the terms of the deal at the last minute. Still, I also knew I couldn't let him ruin everything we had worked so hard for.

I thought he was insane. It was a deal with the Iranian government. If we kept them sweet, they'd repeat the order regularly. It was not a one-off transaction.

'John, we signed an agreement with the Union Bank of Switzerland. You cannot make any additional demands; either you accept the deal, or I will cancel it. I am not prepared to upset these Iranians. So make up your mind. I am happy to cancel this transaction and start a fresh one without your involvement.

I thought John was going to explode. 'You do that, and I will sue you for everything you possess.'

I laughed. 'What can you sue me for if my client cancels the transaction? Please grow up. Either accept the deal, or I will walk away. My decision is final.'

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I left Tom and John to continue the argument and searched for Veronica.

Later, Tom joined us and confirmed that John had accepted and returned to Washington.

I let out a sigh of relief and complained. 'I never trusted that man. I still think he is somehow involved in Mr Hardman's murder.'

Tom gritted his teeth in frustration. 'We've got to keep him out of Iowa,' he growled through clenched jaws, 'he's nothing but trouble.'

Veronica and I clung to each other's hands, our fingers tightly intertwined as we settled into our seats on the plane.

As we took off, the engine roared to life, and the force of acceleration pressed us back into our seats. We looked out the window, watching as the world below grew smaller and smaller. The bright sun filtered through the fluffy clouds outside, casting a warm golden glow throughout the cabin. Our hearts raced with excitement for the future, but at that moment, all that mattered was the present and our being together.

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We turned to each other, our eyes locked in pure love and devotion. The rush of wind and hum of the engines filled the air around us, but it felt like nothing compared to the overwhelming joy and love between us. We both leaned in for a kiss, our lips meeting in a passionate embrace. At that moment, time stood still as we poured all our emotions into that kiss. Tears of happiness welled up in our eyes as we whispered promises of forever to each other, knowing that no matter what challenges lay ahead, we would always have each other's love to guide us through.

CHAPTER THREE



The plane touched down at Heathrow, and after the pain of shuffling through the line for passport control, we hailed a taxi, eager to get home quickly despite the high cost of the taxi fare. I watched out the window as we drove past familiar streets until, finally, our car pulled up to my flat in West Hampstead. We exhaustedly threw our luggage into the hallway. We removed our coats, pleased to be home.

As soon as we were inside, I scooped Veronica up and carried her to the bedroom. Gently placing her on the bed, I kissed her neck and whispered, 'I have been dreaming of this moment for so long.'

Veronica smiled and pulled me closer, her hands wandering over my body. 'I am all yours, Graham,' she said. 'Take me now.'

We spent the night exploring each other's bodies and desires. It was a night I would never forget, filled with passion and love.

As we lay tangled in each other's arms the following morning, I felt a sense of peace and contentment wash

over me. I knew I had found the missing piece of my life and that Veronica and I would triumph together.

To convince Veronica that there was also work for her in England, I took her to my office to show her around.

The doors of the elevator slid open, and we stepped out. We walked down the passage into the hallway outside my office. Veronica was eager to start. I told her she would be responsible for market research and report compiling. It would be a good test of her skills. By tomorrow, she would grasp how things worked around here.

First, it was time to go to the British Overseas Trade Board offices to introduce her to our contacts there. The bureaucrats were friendly enough and welcomed her with open arms.

I introduced her to Paul and our two female clerical assistants at our office before leading her down the hall to her future office. I thought I had shown Veronica enough to convince her she would have a secure job here in England.

Paul seemed to be unhappy about Veronica's presence. He had been quiet and withdrawn since the oil barter deal. Perhaps it was because I never told him

who the Belgium Company was. He was not getting involved with any of the current deals either. I made a note to discuss my observations with him.

The following two weeks were a blur of endless passion. Pouring ourselves into each other's arms, we spent our days absorbed in work and our nights devoted to exploring the vibrant city, catching shows, sampling the delicious cuisine, and falling further in love with each passing day until I felt my heart had never known such longing.

As Veronica's departure neared, it almost felt like someone had ripped my heart from my chest. On the way to Heathrow airport, a heavy silence hung between us, neither of us wanting to confront the question that was consuming us- would this be the last time we saw each other?

Veronica made me swear to keep in touch and visit soon. However, her tears threatened to swallow me up as she boarded her flight, while I returned home feeling utterly broken.

Back in the office, I could not concentrate on my work and thought again about Mr Hardman's murder. Was it John White, or who else could it be?

I decided to call the police station and speak to Detective Officer Bailey.

‘Hello, this is Graham Ward calling. I need to ask you a few questions about the murder of Mr Hardman. Remember you interviewed me at my office some time ago. It’s for personal reasons. Mr White wants to do business with me, and I am concerned that he may be involved in Mr Hardman’s murder.’

With an amused voice, Bailey replied, ‘It’s alright, Mr Ward, I don’t mind.’

He continued, ‘You see, I’ve come across more information. Five years ago, Mr Hardman was in a business deal with a company in Vegas.’

Well, it seems that Mr Hardman’s company filed for bankruptcy, and a year later, John White’s company went bankrupt, too. I believe that John White has some relationship with Mr Hardman’s casino company and was instrumental in its bankruptcy. I have information that he made two million dollars from that deal. However, that’s not enough to convict him for Mr Hardman’s murder,’ said Officer Bailey.

‘There is more,’ he added, a little hesitant, ‘it seems that they arrested John White in the casino’s conference room for trying to blackmail Mr Hardman for a portion of the casino’s shares. He was arrested but later released. I advise you not to trust John White in any business deal.’

Officer Bailey’s advice was more straightforward said than done. John White seemed involved in every transaction we attempted with the United States of America.

Fortunately, to distract myself from Veronica, I was involved in selling Kruger Rand’s gold coins to a Suisse precious metal company. The seller was from Spain and wanted the transaction completed in Spain.

It gave me a golden opportunity to phone and hear her voice. I told her I would be away for a few days and would call her at the first opportunity. ‘It was like hell, living without you,’ I complained.

Veronica said. ‘I miss you too, and I love you. I will do everything possible to shorten my stay here in America.’

Veronica loved corporate life but genuinely desired a lovely home and at least two children. However, she was unsure that Graham would settle

down to provide her with that stability. He seemed to mix with unsavoury characters like John White, and now his business partner Paul had made her feel most unwelcome. Her brother Tom had warned her about John White.

That Sunday, I took a plane to Spain. The seller and buyer scheduled the transaction to take place there. They had insisted that I make the trip.

I boarded the plane to Malaga; I was nervous, as I had never been to Spain and could not speak Spanish. My main concern was to make sure that everything went smoothly. We had planned to meet with the buyer from Switzerland at Malaga Airport on Monday to review the transaction details.

I arrived at Malaga Airport at night, and after a short taxi ride, I checked into my room in a nearby hotel arranged by my office. I was tired and decided to go straight to bed.

When I woke in the morning, I decided to walk to clear my head. The town was busy with people, many of whom seemed to be on their way to work. I enjoyed the sights and sounds as I walked through the streets.

I continued my stroll until I came across a small café. It looked so inviting I thought I would have

breakfast and then return to my hotel to prepare for the meeting.

After a delightful breakfast, I returned to my hotel, where I saw an agitated group of men gathered outside the entrance. Coming to the group, I heard shouting. I decided that there must have been a fight, and I was about to walk by, but then I heard my name mentioned. I was surprised to hear my name. I stopped and listened but could not understand, so I entered the hotel.

‘Si, señor,’ I said, approaching the front desk.

The man at the desk stood up, clearly shaken. ‘Señor Ward, I am so sorry for the inconvenience,’ he said. ‘It seems that there was a problem with your booking.’

‘Yes, what kind of problem?’ I asked.

He told me that there was a problem with my credit card payment. I was surprised because the travel agent assured me everything was in order.

I told the man at the desk that I would resolve the issue with the travel agency and went to find a telephone.

I called the travel agency and was relieved to find that my card was still valid. I calmly explained to the man at the reception that the hotel had made a mistake and confirmed that my card was working.

I was still puzzled about why the hotel had tried to charge me twice. I went to my room and thought about it. I decided to call the hotel's manager and ask him what had happened.

‘Señor Ward,’ said the manager when he answered, ‘I believe it is an unfortunate misunderstanding. Let me make it up to you. I am going to upgrade you to our deluxe suite.’

I accepted his invitation, packed my suitcase and went downstairs to the lobby, waiting for someone to show me to my new deluxe suite. I was sure that I would find out what was going on.

The reception staff advised me that they were preparing my room and would take care of my suitcase shortly after. I decided to continue my previously interrupted walk.

As I again walked through the streets, I thought about Veronica. I couldn't wait to see her again. After a while, I tired and returned to the hotel to freshen up for my meeting. As I stepped into the lobby, I was

grabbed by the arms and thrown against the wall by two men.

‘What is going on?’ I shouted. ‘Who are you?’

I was surprised to see Paul from the office. He grabbed me by the neck and whispered, ‘We have you now!’

‘Paul, what is going on?’ I protested. ‘What’s going on, Paul?’

‘You don’t know?’ he replied. ‘You are so stupid!’

‘What are you talking about?’ I growled. ‘You’re crazy!’

Paul and his friend continued to manhandle me. His friend picked up my suitcase with his free hand. Paul spoke while walking me out of the hotel.

‘Let’s get out of here!’ he said.

Paul and his friend took me to a house located in an isolated area. I was kept there for three days. I only saw Paul during this time. He held me handcuffed in a cold, dark room.

Paul did not talk to me. He was always on his phone. Paul had one of the first mobile phones, brick size. I don't know if he was talking to someone or showing off his new toy. I had no idea what was going on.

'Who are my captors?' I asked Paul one morning.

'Don't worry about it,' he said. 'It's better that you don't know!'

'I am going to die here, aren't I?' I said.

'Yes, you are going to die here, but don't worry about it,' he replied. 'You deserve it! You claimed you only received a small commission on the oil barter deal, but we know you received millions and cheated me out of my half-share. You cheated me, and for that alone, you need to die. John told me how much commission they paid.'

'My God!' I shouted. 'You've been in my office this whole time! You know exactly how much commission we received. I trusted you! I believed in you!'

'You're a fool!' said Paul, the hatred shining from his eyes. 'You should never have trusted me! You should have known that I was involved with John White. I worked for him in the casino.'

Paul revealed that John White suggested that he start a partnership with me. He thought having a trusted person in the business here in England would be advantageous. 'And you thought the business was your idea. But you thought you were clever keeping information from me.'

Paul continued, full of hate. 'You are so full of yourself that you did not even invite me to help in the maize deal or this gold coin deal. So I invited myself. You will never do any deals again. It will now be up to me because you will not leave here alive.'

Paul had been setting me up from the beginning. He was always in the shadows, passing information on to John White.

I still had no idea what happened. So I asked, 'Did you have to kill Mr Hardman? Couldn't you have just stolen from him?'

'I did not kill Mr Hardman or steal from him. But I will gladly kill you,' he replied. 'I am a man of honour. He wanted in on the Libya oil deal. He thought that because he was John White's partner in the casino, he was entitled to a share in the oil barter deal.'

Envy and Greed Spells Murder

I was stunned. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I had gotten myself involved with a group of killers and criminals. I was sure that I was going to die soon. Paul had promised me that he would kill me, and I believed him. I was afraid for my life.

Days passed, and I was still in that cold, dark room, waiting for my fate. I couldn't believe that I had fallen into such a trap. I had tried to do the right thing all my life, but now I was paying for it.

One evening, while Paul was out, the door to my room creaked open. A woman stepped in. She had long, dark hair that hung down her back in glossy curls, and her eyes were a deep brown that seemed to swirl in the light. Her features were delicate, and her skin was flawless porcelain. She had a gun in her hand.

'Who are you?' I asked.

'I am Maria,' she replied. 'And I am here to rescue you.'

'Rescue me?' I said, incredulous. 'Why?'

'Because I don't believe in killing innocent people,' Maria said. 'I was forced into this way of life by John White, but I want out. And I want to help you get out, too.'

I couldn't believe it. After everything that had happened, someone was trying to help me.

'How do we get out of here?' I asked.

Maria released me from my cuffs and handed me the gun. 'We'll have to be quick and quiet. Follow me.'

We crept through the dark corridors of the house, avoiding any guards we came across. Maria seemed to know exactly where she was going.

We finally made it to the front door. Maria checked to ensure the coast was clear, and we ran for it. We ran for what seemed like forever until we finally reached town.

'We have to go our separate ways now,' Maria said. 'I can't be seen with you. But here, take this.' She handed me a piece of paper with an address on it.

I returned her gun, thanked her for helping me, and promised never to forget her kindness. With that, we parted ways.

As I walked towards the address Maria had given me, I couldn't help but feel like someone was watching me. I looked around but couldn't see anyone

suspicious. Nevertheless, I quickened my pace and soon arrived at the address.

It was a small apartment, but it looked clean and cosy. I knocked on the door, and a woman answered. She was middle-aged, her black hair streaked with grey. The sun had wrinkled her skin, and hard work had worn out her hands.

‘Can I help you?’ she asked.

‘Maria gave me this address,’ I said, showing her the paper.

The woman’s smile disappeared, immediately replaced with a look of suspicion. ‘Who are you?’ she asked, eyeing me up and down.

‘I’m a friend of Maria’s,’ I said. ‘She told me to come here for help.’

The woman studied me briefly before nodding and letting me in. As soon as I entered the apartment, I knew my troubles were over. I understood that I was safe. As I sat drinking some tea with the woman, I listened to her put the pieces of a puzzle together.

‘Until recently,’ she said, ‘Maria was my daughter. I have not heard from her for over two years, and I

had given up hope of ever seeing her again, but perhaps she has changed. It is the first contact I have from her.'

'How long ago did Maria leave?' I asked.

'Two years,' said the woman. 'I am Mrs Curzon. Maria and I used to have a happy life here, but then that bastard John White came into our lives. He took Maria away from me.'

'Is John White related to Paul from my office?' I asked.

Mrs Curzon nodded. 'Yes, Paul is John's son—that womanising, cheating bastard. Maria fell in love with John.

He forced Maria to work for him at the casino. He gave her drugs, and she became a prostitute. I didn't want Maria to work for John at the casino, but she wouldn't listen. She was in love with John, and that man used it to his advantage.'

'What do you mean?' I asked.

'I heard that when Maria told John that she didn't want to work for him anymore, John drugged and

raped her. I don't know if he forced her into that life or she did it willingly.'

Mrs Curzon started to cry. I held her in my arms and comforted her.

'John White forced Maria to have an abortion,' she continued. 'That bastard. I have always suspected that he was responsible for my grandchild's death!'

'I'm so sorry for your loss,' I said.

'I don't care anymore,' Mrs Curzon continued. 'That was the beginning of the end for me.'

I wanted to say something to comfort her, but I couldn't find the right words. She told me that she hated White and that he had taken everything away from her.

She didn't care if I was a hitman or a killer. She wanted revenge and was willing to join me in getting John White. 'If you take him to court, I would be willing to appear as a character witness. It would be a great pleasure to tell the world what an evil person he is.'

The following day, I called Veronica's brother, Tom Mark, in the United States. I told him about my

situation and everything that had happened to me. He asked me to wait in the apartment and not to do anything. He also added, 'The sooner you get the White family out of your life, the better. John White is trouble.'

I always suspected that John was a bad apple, but not that he was Paul's father. 'How could I have been so blind?'

Later that day, two police inspectors came to the apartment. They asked me a few questions, and I answered all honestly.

CHAPTER FOUR



I returned home a few days later - nothing felt normal. Revenge overcame me with a burning need. Memories of John White, Paul, Maria, and even Mr Hardman's death kept coming back, vivid like a flame. I couldn't forget what had happened, and the overwhelming desire for justice grew inside me with every passing moment.

Veronica was at the airport to meet me, and I collapsed into her embrace, my relief overwhelming. No words could express what I had been through. Veronica seemed to understand that, holding me close and whispering soothingly in my ear. 'You don't have to explain a thing right now. Let's go home, and let me love you back to life.'

'Tom has told me all about it, and now all you need is my tenderness and comfort. I came immediately.' Tears streaming down my face, I clung to her as we walked out of the airport.

And yet, even as I held her, the questions kept crowding into my mind. I wondered if John White would ever stop his evil ways and how many more people would suffer because of him. I was full of

mixed emotions, which I was finding more challenging and difficult to control.

Veronica had taken a few days off work to spend time with me. I was hoping it was forever. It created even more sadness in me. We drove home in silence.

I phoned Detective Officer Bailey the following morning and explained what had happened.

He asked me to come to the police station and make a complete statement. He promised to ask the Spanish police to arrest Paul, extradite him to England and charge him with kidnapping. However, we had no jurisdiction over John White as he was an American resident.

He was unsure if he had enough evidence to arrest John White or Paul but would interview and question them both, if possible. Paul would probably deny everything.

That evening at home, I phoned Veronica's brother Tom and thanked him for his help in getting me out of Spain. 'The police will interview my partner Paul and maybe John as well. I dread the day that John entered my life. He is a most despicable person.'

Envy and Greed Spells Murder

The police arrested John White at his home in Spain, where they found drugs and prostitutes. He also had a lot of cash. They also discovered a large stash of guns and ammunition hidden in a secret room behind a bookcase.

In addition, they discovered that he had been sending money to Paul in England and paying for the protection of the local police force.

The Spanish police decided that John White was not guilty of my kidnap or the rape of Maria. There was not enough evidence. He then disappeared.

Paul was met at Gatwick Airport by the police and taken in for questioning about my kidnap, as well as the murder of Mr Hardman. He denied everything and was set free due to a lack of evidence. Fortunately, he did not try to return to work.

It worried me that Paul and John White were still on the loose. What would happen next? I thought.

To my delight, I was overjoyed. Veronica decided to stay on for good. She declared that I needed care. I agreed. 'I will always need your love and care.' Thanking her with a big hug and a kiss.

Envy and Greed Spells Murder

I had to continue my work, as our Iranian agent was now looking for large quantities of frozen chickens.

I had some workable offers from a German Company.

The Iranians were willing to pay a high price for ten containers, each carrying frozen chickens. The Iranian government wanted the contract, but like always, they were threatening the Iranian agent with severe punishment to him and his family if he failed to deliver.

On my next meeting with the Iranian agent, I told him to accompany me to Germany to meet the sellers, as his government would hold him responsible for failure.

I was concerned that this was a risky business and that we should not trust the German suppliers. But this was an enormous deal, and we were desperate to conclude.

The German Company seemed legit and had been trading for some time.

The Iranian agent and I were too trusting and eager for the deal. In Germany, we scrutinised the

paperwork. The American Company would ship the chickens. The Germans were only the agents of the American Company. Alarm bells started ringing in my head, but the Iranian agent wanted to push ahead. He was satisfied that the Americans would deliver.

I wanted us to inspect the facility in America, but the Germans would not allow an inspection. They were, presumably, scared that we would bypass them and steal their supplier. They were dealing with an American company sourcing chickens from several suppliers. The order was too large for one single supplier to handle.

In front of the Iranian agent and their government officials, I stated that I would not proceed with the transaction until we had met the American Company and viewed their agreements with the various suppliers. The Iranian agent took no heed of my concerns and insisted that we go ahead, and he signed the contracts there and then.

I secretly noted the name of the American Company on the contract for future reference. I was concerned that we may be dealing with another John White and was nervous about the setup.

I then asked the German suppliers to send me some photos and videos of the factory in America.

The factory was said to be in Alabama. I wanted to know the chickens' quality and how they packed them into the containers. The Germans refused to send anything, and this worried me even more. I was feeling uneasy about this business. But the Iranian agent insisted that his government had already done the deal, and they would issue a letter of credit for the first shipment.

He needed to buy the chickens before their price rose, and he said his government had instructed him to buy, which he intended to do.

The Iranian agent flew back to Iran. I was worried that I had put my neck and his in a noose.

The Iranians were a notoriously devious people, and I feared the worst. I had a bad feeling about this deal.

I rang the American Company whose name was on the contract I spotted in Germany and asked about the chickens. I told them I needed to see the chickens packed into the containers. The American Company said that it was not possible. I explained that I was buying the chickens. They said they could not show me the chickens because they were too busy. Like all customers, I had to buy them on the strength of an SGS inspection.

Envy and Greed Spells Murder

I then threatened to cancel the deal and the letter of credit. The American Company said they would agree to show me the chickens if I could see them in America. I knew that it was too late to cancel the deal. I was too far down the road, and I had no authority.

I told the American Company I would inspect them when the containers arrived at the port in Iran. I asked them if they would mind sending pictures of the chickens on the farm. They said that they would be only too pleased to do so.

I was not happy with this arrangement - but there was nothing else that I could do. It was one of the worst deals I had ever done. My instincts were telling me to run for the hills - and fast.

I knew the Americans would not bother sending pictures of the chickens. All I could do was ask the Iranian agent to inspect the chickens when they arrived in Iran. I had arranged for him to meet the container ship at the port in Bandar Abbas.

The letter of credit was divisible, and the payment for the first container would be due on the day the container departed from the port in America. I was nervous when they loaded the first container of chickens on-board the ship.

Envy and Greed Spells Murder

I knew that the Americans would use cheap chickens. But there was nothing I could do about it. I just had to hope the chickens would still be in good condition when they arrived in Iran.

To my dismay, it was not the quality of the chickens I had to be concerned about. When the container arrived at Bandar Abbas, it was empty, and they had cashed the letter of credit using forged documents. The German Company was on the phone with me in tears. The American Company no longer existed.

I feared for the Iranian agent's life. It is dangerous to cross the Iranian government.

Large-scale fraud or counterfeiting, if enough to disrupt the 'financial stability of the Islamic Republic' or 'intentionally aimed at undermining the government', is punishable by death or life in prison. In addition, they can sentence to death people who act against the Islamic Republic.

Human rights groups believe Iran executes the most people per capita in the world. Iran insists that the execution numbers human rights groups allege are 'exaggerated' and that they only carry out executions after a lengthy judicial process.

CHAPTER FIVE



I explained to Veronica what happened with the chicken deal. I added. ‘I have decided to stop getting involved in these large deals that I can’t control, but instead, try smaller transactions that I can afford to finance myself. I have a client in Latvia who requires a forty-foot container of used clothing per week. Now that I can finance myself. I also know clients who want to buy second-hand fridges and television sets. All I need is a warehouse to check, clean and pack them. I can also use the warehouse to import items for local distribution, like Coca-Cola from South Africa.’

Veronica agreed. ‘That sounds less intimidating, and I can continue marketing research from the same warehouse and help you when I have spare time.’

We found an affordable warehouse big enough to accommodate the business needs in Bexley, south-eastern London.

As the warehouse was only one space, we divided one end into three offices: one sizeable open-plan office for the clerical staff and reception with a separate office for Veronica and one for me.

I purchased my first load of used clothing from the Salvation Army. The quality was superb, and with the help of some casual labourers, we loaded our first container with clothing in bin bags. Because this method was bulky, we could not get twenty metric tons into the container as planned. I immediately realised we needed a bailing machine to compact the clothing and load the maximum weight as promised to our Latvian customer.

With the bailing machine, we made neat square 45 Kilo bails. It was also the ideal size for African hawkers to handle, and soon, we received orders from Nigeria. They also wanted containers of used fridges.

Our business was growing smoothly, and we expanded into importing containers of Coca-Cola from South Africa and sold palette loads to local dealers who could not finance a container load.

Veronica was also doing well with the marketing research side of the business.

I lost contact with my Iranian agent completely, and I feared the worst. The Iranian government was not the forgiving type. The German Company phoned a few times, apologising for their part in the fraud and promised more diligence in vetting their suppliers. However, they lost interest after I explained

that I no longer get involved in such transactions and am no longer in contact with the Iranian agent. I have not heard from them since.

John and Paul were also quiet, but I never let slip my guard. I knew they would appear from the woodwork suddenly with devastating consequences. Particularly now, Tom Mark, Veronica's brother, had phoned to inform me that the Iranians had placed another order for maize. It was not through my old Iranian agent but some government official. It seemed as if my Iranian agent had vanished. He promised me a small commission as I had initially introduced the Iranian buyers.

One day, as I was going about my business, I received a call from an unknown number. A deep, gravelly voice spoke on the other end when I picked up. 'You don't know me, but I know you. And I know what you did.' My heart started pounding in my chest. I had a feeling that this was not going to be good.

'Who is this?' I asked.

'It doesn't matter who I am. What matters is that you screwed over some dangerous people. And they're not happy about it. They want their money back.'

‘I don’t know what you’re talking about. I don’t owe anybody money,’ I replied.

‘Don’t play dumb with me. You know what I’m talking about. And you’re going to pay for it.’

Before I could respond, the line went dead. I sat there for a moment, trying to gather my thoughts. Who could this person be? And how did they know about my deals? It had to be the Iranian deal they were referring to.

Veronica entered my office as I tried to figure out my next move. ‘What’s wrong?’ she asked, noticing the fear on my face.

‘I just got a call from someone who claims to know about our Iranian deal, threatening me.’

Veronica’s eyes widened. ‘What are we going to do?’

‘I don’t know yet. But we better take care. We may be under observation right now.’

From that moment on, I lived in constant fear. Whenever the phone rang, or I heard a car pull up outside, my heart would start racing. I knew that John

and Paul were capable of anything, and I felt they were somehow behind this. But I couldn't be sure.

Days turned into weeks, and I didn't hear from the mysterious caller again. But the fear never left me. I knew I had made enemies, and they would not give up easily.

One afternoon, as I was leaving the warehouse, I noticed a dark figure lurking in the shadows. I couldn't determine who it was, but I knew someone was following me. I quickened my pace, hoping to lose them, but they kept up with me.

As I turned a corner, the figure lunged at me, and I felt a sharp pain in my side. I screamed and fell to the ground, clutching my wound. The figure ran off, and I was left bleeding on the pavement.

Fortunately, Veronica left work after me, found me on her way home, and called an ambulance. I was rushed to the hospital and treated for a stab wound. The doctors said I was lucky to be alive and would need to stay in hospital for at least two weeks for the internal injuries to heal.

The following morning, Veronica came to see me with some devastating news. She first enquired, 'How are you feeling today?' I gave her a forced grin. 'Still

hurting like hell, but I will live.’ I looked at her ashen face and took her hand. ‘By the look of you. I would say you should be in hospital. What is the matter?’

Veronica collapsed onto the bed beside me, tears streaming down her face. ‘Tom’s gone. Somebody killed him...Shirley is in pieces; she needs me there now!’ Her voice was strained and desperate as she pleaded for help to go to America.

The news hit me like a ton of bricks. Tom was not only Veronica’s brother but also my friend. It was through him that I met Veronica, and now he was gone. I felt a lump form in my throat as I struggled to hold back tears.

Veronica’s voice broke as she continued, her despair palpable. ‘I don’t know how to go on,’ she whispered, her throat raw with emotion. ‘I can’t stay here, and I can’t leave you. How do I juggle the two? What if something happens while I’m away?’ She shook her head in anguish, feeling helpless against the forces of fate that had placed her in this impossible situation.

I reassured her that I would be fine and that she should be with her family. I could tell she was uncertain about what to do but ultimately decided to leave the next day.

Envy and Greed Spells Murder

As soon as she left, I knew I had to do something about the situation. I couldn't just sit back and wait for whoever was after me to strike again. I called my security firm and arranged for security personnel to watch the warehouse and my home.

I also instructed some of my contacts in the commodity world to try and find out who was behind the threats. It didn't take long for me to get a lead.

My informant could not say for sure, but John White had found out that Tom was supplying more maize to the Iranians. He was upset because he thought he should be involved with all of Tom's deals with the Iranians. Furthermore, my informant had heard rumours that implicated him in the failed chicken transaction.

I thought, 'This John White seems to lurk behind everything.'

CHAPTER SIX



As I lay in the hospital bed, I mourned my missing chance to say goodbye to Tom at his funeral. Veronica called me daily and shared each detail of the sad event, voicing her disappointment on behalf of the entire family that I could not be there.

Her return flight arrived in England at the same time as my discharge from the hospital. I was relieved to have someone home with me. Despite her grief, Veronica was eager to return to work and worried about how much she would do to catch up.

Thankfully, during my two-week hospital stay, I had already cancelled all orders for used clothing and second-hand fridges.

Everyone had much to catch up on the following day at the office.

Veronica was trying her best to keep the business running smoothly, but I could tell that the weight of her grief was starting to take its toll. As she sat at her desk, staring blankly at her computer screen, I could see the pain on her face.

I gave up dealing in major commodity deals to escape greed and violence. Still, violence was prevalent everywhere, and Veronica needed a break to distract herself.

I knew I had to do something to help her cope with the loss of her brother. So, I suggested we take a week off work and go on a trip together. Just the two of us, to get away from everything.

Veronica initially hesitated, but I saw in her eyes that she needed this. So, we packed our bags and headed to the coast.

The sound of the waves crashing against the shore was so calming, and the salty air was refreshing. We spent our days walking along the beach, talking, and reminiscing about our time with Tom. It was healing for both of us to process our grief together.

One night, as we sat on the balcony of our hotel room, sipping wine and watching the sunset, Veronica turned to me and said, ‘Thank you for being here for me. I don’t know what I would do without you.’

I smiled at her and squeezed her hand. ‘You don’t have to thank me. We’re family, and that’s what family does for each other.’

We spent the rest of the night talking and laughing, and for the first time in a long time, I felt a sense of peace wash over me.

As we returned to work the following week, I saw that Veronica was in a better place emotionally. She was more focused and had the energy to continue the business.

But our focus was now on discovering who was behind the attack on me. I had a gut feeling that John White was involved and needed to get to the bottom of it. I called my contacts and found out that John was having financial troubles. His business was not doing well, and he had borrowed money from dangerous people to keep it afloat.

It all started to make sense. John had learned about our deal with the Iranians and wanted a piece of the pie. When he realised he was not involved, he got angry and decided to take matters into his own hands. He did not believe for one second that the chicken deal had not succeeded, and I was not going to tell him.

To my amazement, I discovered that he was in London. I knew I had to confront him, but I also knew it would be dangerous. He was not the type to back down easily. I made some preparations, and with

the help of my security personnel, whom I had hired to look after the warehouse while still in the hospital, I set up a meeting with him.

When John arrived, he looked surprised to see me. I could see the fear in his eyes when he saw the security personnel standing around me. I didn't waste any time and got straight to the point.

'Did you have anything to do with the attack on me and Tom's murder?' I asked, my voice calm but firm.

John stuttered and stammered, denying any involvement. But I could see the guilt written all over his face. I confronted him with the information I had gathered, and he finally broke down and confessed to my stabbing but denied involvement in Tom's murder.

'I'm sorry,' he said, tears streaming down his face. 'I was in trouble and needed the money. I thought you were cutting me out of the Iranian deals as you did with the Libyan oil. I didn't know what else to do. I can't let people cheat me.'

I felt a mix of anger and pity for him. He knew he had made a terrible mistake trying to use fear and violence to extract money from me. He was not even aware that the chicken deal with the Iranians failed.

Envy and Greed Spells Murder

I explained to John that he had nothing to do with the Libyan oil deal and that the Iranian chicken deal was a failure, as the American supplier was a fraud and could not deliver.

Foolishly, I made a deal with him. I was always too willing to forgive - if he could give me information that would lead to the arrest of the people who had killed Tom, I would drop all my criminal charges against him. In addition, he and his son Paul must keep their noses out of my business and never contact me again.

John agreed to my deal and gave me the names of the people responsible for Tom's murder. I handed the information over to the Iowa police. They were able to locate and arrest them. It was a bittersweet moment, knowing that justice had succeeded but also feeling the absence of Tom.

As for John, I still felt that he was behind Tom's murder. The people arrested were purely some of his footmen. Without any doubt, John and Paul were motivated by envy and greed.

Looking back on everything that had happened, I realised how fragile life could be and how important it was to have family and friends you could rely on in times of trouble. I was grateful for the bond that

Veronica and I had and for the fact that we had been able to help each other through the darkest times.

As we sat in our office, looking out at the busy street, I knew we had come out of this ordeal stronger and closer than ever before. And I understood that, no matter what else life might throw our way, we would face it together.

I said to Veronica. 'Hopefully, with the deal I made with John, we can move forward and build our business undisturbed.' Veronica replied, 'I do not think John White is a man of his word. You just made a deal with the devil. I would never accept that this is the last we have seen from him or his son.'

I secretly agreed with Veronica but did not want to alarm her. 'We must move on and can only hope we never hear from them again.'

Veronica nodded in agreement. 'You are the most kind-hearted and forgiving person I have met. That's why I love you.' Now, let's get back to work. I could not shake off the feeling that John White and his son, Paul, were not to be underestimated. They had proven dangerous, and I knew we had to keep an eye on them.

A few weeks passed, and everything seemed to return to normal. The business was running smoothly, and Veronica and I were working on expanding our

operations overseas. But then, one day, I received a call from an unknown number. When I answered, I heard a familiar voice on the other end.

‘Hello, Mr Ward. I hope you’re doing well,’ John White said, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

‘What do you want, John?’ I asked, trying to keep my voice steady.

‘I just thought I’d let you know I’m not one to mess with. You may have won this round, but the game is far from over.’

I felt a chill run down my spine. John’s words were a clear threat, and I knew we were in danger.

‘What do you want?’ I asked again, my voice trembling slightly.

‘I want what’s mine. My share of the oil deal and the chicken transaction. And I won’t stop until I get it.’

With that, John hung up, leaving me more vulnerable than ever. I knew that we had to take this threat seriously and that we could not let our guard down.

I turned to Veronica and told her everything that had happened. We both knew that we had to act fast if we wanted to protect ourselves and our business. We hired additional security personnel and increased the security measures at our warehouse. We also

investigated John and his son, Paul, to gather more information about their plans.

As we dug deeper, we discovered that John had been connecting with other criminal organizations, trying to gather support to take us down. He had also been attempting to get his hands on the Iranian chicken deal, which he believed was ongoing.

We made sure to keep a low profile and avoid any unnecessary risks.

But despite our precautions, John and Paul managed to find a way to strike back. One night, as Veronica and I were leaving the office, after we passed our security guards, we were ambushed by a group of armed men. They had come out of nowhere, and we could not defend ourselves.

I felt a sharp pain in my side as one of the men stabbed me with a knife. I fell to the ground, gasping for air, as the men started to attack Veronica. I could hear her screaming, and I knew that I had to do something to help her.

I forced myself to stand up, despite the pain and charged at the men. I tackled one of them to the ground and wrestled the knife out of his hand. I used it to fend off the other attackers, but they outnumbered me.

Just when I thought it was all over, I heard a loud shout and saw a group of police officers rushing

towards us. One of our security personnel had tipped them off and had arrived just in time to save our lives.

They arrested the attackers and rushed us to the hospital. I had lost a lot of blood and needed emergency surgery. Veronica had suffered a broken arm and multiple bruises but was alive and conscious.

As I lay there, recovering from my injuries, I realised that John White and his son had finally crossed the line. They had tried to kill us, but they had failed. But I knew they would not stop until they were dead or behind bars.

Trouble seemed to be following me. I wished I could put a stop to the violence and greed.

I vowed not to rest until we brought John and Paul to justice. I knew I had to be more careful than ever before and couldn't let my guard down. I also knew I needed to devise a plan to deal with John and his son.

After recovering from my injuries, I gathered all the information we had collected about John and Paul's plans. I went to the police and presented them with the evidence, hoping they could arrest them.

The local police took the information seriously, launching a full-scale investigation into John and Paul's activities.

They then handed over all their findings to their counterparts in America, who continued the investigation. It wasn't long before they gathered

enough evidence to arrest them both on charges of attempted murder, extortion, and connections to other criminal organizations.

Hopefully, they would receive a stiff sentence, and we breathed a sigh of relief. Their danger was finally gone, and we could focus on our business again.

Looking back on everything that had happened, I realized that life was unpredictable and danger could come from anywhere. But I also learned that having people you could trust and rely on was essential. Veronica had been my rock throughout the ordeal, and I knew I wouldn't have made it without her.

I also knew that I was more robust and resilient than I ever thought possible. And I understood that I could face it head-on no matter what life threw my way.

Veronica and I decided to take a much-needed break from the business and have a vacation in Cornwell. We spent our days lounging on the beach, sipping cocktails, and soaking up the sun. It was the perfect way to unwind and forget about the chaos we had been through.

One afternoon, as we walked along the shore, we stumbled upon a secluded cove surrounded by tall cliffs with crystal-clear waters that sparkled in the sun. It felt as if the cove drew us closer. We decided to explore the cove and see what it had to offer.

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As we swam into the cove, we noticed something strange. There was a small cave at the base of one of the cliffs, and it seemed to beckon us to enter. We were both curious, so we swam to it and entered.

Inside, the cave was dark and damp. It smelled of seaweed and saltwater, and waves crashing against the rocks echoed throughout. We saw a faint light in the distance as we walked deeper into the cave.

We followed the light and soon found ourselves standing at the entrance of a large chamber. The walls were covered in ancient symbols and drawings, and a faint glow emanated from the centre of the room. We approached the light and saw it was a crystal pulsating with energy.

Veronica and I were both mesmerized by the crystal. We had never seen anything like it before. As we reached out to touch it, we felt a jolt of electricity run through our bodies. Suddenly, the crystal started to glow brighter and brighter until it was blinding.

When the light faded, we found ourselves in a different place entirely. We were no longer in the cave but a strange, futuristic-looking city. The buildings were tall and sleek, with flying cars zooming through the air. We looked at each other in disbelief, trying to figure out what had just happened.

A group approached us as we stood there, trying to make sense of our surroundings. Their clothing was

strange suits that shone like metal armour plates, and carried weapons we had never seen before.

From how they carried themselves and the serious looks on their faces, we knew these were not people to be trifled with. The metallic suits made them appear like armoured soldiers from an ancient army sent down from heaven for some great purpose. We had no choice, so we followed them through the city. As we walked, we noticed that everyone was staring at us like we were aliens. We couldn't help but feel out of place and uncomfortable.

I asked. 'What place is this?'

One of our escorts replied. 'It is the city of the enchanted crystal, or Encryst to us locals.'

Eventually, they led us to a large building resembling a government headquarters. We were escorted inside, taken to a room, and greeted by a group of people who looked like they were in charge.

The leader spoke. 'We have implemented this portal to allow certain chosen people to enter our realm. Rest assured, these chosen people will be of good character, selected by Sheba, the guardian of the crystals. We will not allow criminals or murderers.'

‘We share this planet with you in a different realm and have become concerned about how you are destroying the planet's environment, notably the continuous burning of fossil fuels to create energy. Together with other people we chose, we would like you to promote ecological sustainability in your energy supply, eliminating the need to burn fossil fuels.’

Their leader briefed us, ‘We recognise that if you are to cause a movement in the world to eliminate fossil fuel-based energy generation, then it would be prudent if many people believed your story. However, as few people will believe you in this matter, it is our wish to bring many people over to our dimension, as these people will recognise what you have seen here; they’ll have an intense look in their green eyes, and their crystals would give them the power to communicate telepathically. It is how they will be able to identify each other. It will also give Sheba the ability to communicate with them and you. You should all work together to impress upon the population the urgency of the matter.’

However, Sheba has chosen you alone as the saviour of our lovely city, as you have a pure heart. Your crystal will provide you with superpowers—a lion's strength and the speed of a swallow to overcome whoever may threaten you. You will also receive additional powers, such as instant teleportation to

anywhere on Earth and time travel. You may think this is a futuristic world, but we only live in a different dimension in the same place and time.

Our advanced technology, such as AI, has improved our way of living, and everything is automated, using technology to automate tasks that would otherwise require human intervention. It includes using software, hardware, or other technologies to streamline workflows, improve efficiency, and reduce the need for manual labour. Still, it has weakened our citizens, and I fear they are no longer equipped to protect our lovely city against dark forces. For insurance, we have decided to select someone from your realm who still has the courage for battle but with a pure heart who would not abuse the power of the crystal. Our choice was you.”

They extended assistance to us and showed us around their fabulous city. We learned more about their sustainable energy system. They created all their energy by fusion, an abundant free energy source. We saw terrific technologies such as vehicles that could take off vertically from any flat surface and cruise hundreds of miles an hour, forms of transport that floated above the road with no friction. It appeared as if gravity was just not present. They had developed cures for most diseases, extending life expectancy by many years, and they recreated food using genetic manipulation - they called it bio-fabrication. No one

seemed hungry here; everyone had enough resources to live comfortably.

As Veronica and I explored the city, we also learned about the political and social structures that governed this society. They told us that they had eliminated poverty and had a system of government based on meritocracy. The people who held positions of power were those who had excelled in their fields and had proven their ability to lead. They were known as the group of elders, led by four individuals fondly referred to as John, Paul, George and Ringo.

I thought it was a joke, but they were deadly serious. These names go far back in history and were cherished in their society.

Veronica and I were both fascinated by this new world, and we couldn't help but feel envious of the people who lived here. It was a utopia, and we wondered what our world would be like if we had access to this kind of technology and social structure. But as much as we were in awe of this new world, we also missed our own. We missed our friends and family, and we missed the familiarity of our own culture. We were mindful that we couldn't stay in this new world forever, but we also knew we would never forget our experience here.

Thinking about our experience, I did not know anyone in our world who would believe our experience. Most people would put it down as a dream or some hallucination.

As our time in this new world ended, they allowed us to return home. They told us that we could use the portal to return to our dimension with the aid of the crystal. Their leader told me I could keep the crystal for protection in an emergency.

As much as Veronica and I wanted to stay in this new world, we knew our place was back in our reality. We said our goodbyes to those who had shown us such kindness and escorted us through this world, and we stepped back through the portal.

When we emerged on the other side, we found ourselves in the cave where it all began. We looked at each other in disbelief, wondering if it had all been a dream. But as we looked down, we saw I was still holding onto a small, glowing crystal.

We knew that we had to keep this crystal safe. It was a reminder of the incredible experience we had, and it was also a symbol of the hope we felt for our world. If a society like the one we had just witnessed was possible, maybe one day, our world could achieve something similar.

As we exited the cave and returned to our lives, we knew things would never be the same again. We had witnessed something extraordinary, with a glimpse into the future. It was up to us to take what we had learned and make a difference in our world, one step at a time.

Veronica and I were both in awe of the experience we had just gone through. As we walked along the shore, we couldn't help but talk about the incredible advancements and technology we had witnessed in the new world. It was like nothing we had ever seen, leaving us feeling excited and hopeful for the future.

As we continued to talk, we both started to feel a sense of responsibility. We had seen what was possible and knew we couldn't just sit back and do nothing. We had to take action and make a difference in our world.

Our back-on-earth business was running smoothly, and we were pleased to be in the recycling trade. We were exporting used clothing and second-hand domestic appliances, making us feel we were doing our bit for the environment.

Veronica and I tried to share our magic crystal experience with friends, but they did not believe us. Some laughed at us and thought we had a dream. When I showed some of them the crystal, they declared they were a dime a dozen at most jewellery stores.

We decided that this was not the correct course of action, so we joined a political movement that had members who supported similar views as ourselves: to inspire others to strive for something more significant and the need to eliminate the use of fossil fuels to create energy. The Green Party was the closest to our ideals, promoting ecological sustainability, grassroots democracy, social justice and non-violence.

In addition, we joined Green Peace, an independent global campaigning network founded in Canada in 1971. Greenpeace states that its goal is to 'ensure the ability of the Earth to nurture life in all its diversity'. It focuses its campaigns on worldwide issues such as climate change, deforestation, overfishing, commercial whaling, genetic engineering, and anti-nuclear issues. It uses direct action, lobbying, research, and ecotage to achieve its goals.

The network comprises 26 independent national/regional organisations in over 55 countries across Europe, the Americas, Africa, Asia, Australia and the Pacific—and a coordinating body, Greenpeace International, based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Greenpeace uses non-violent, creative confrontation to expose global environmental problems and develop solutions for a green and peaceful future. That means they want to:

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Stop the planet from warming beyond 1.5° to prevent the most catastrophic impacts of the climate breakdown.

Protect biodiversity in all its forms.

Slow the volume of hyper-consumption and learn to live within our means.

Promote renewable energy as a solution that can power the world.

Nurture peace, global disarmament and non-violence.

We wanted to bring hope to those who had lost it and show them that anything was possible if they believed in themselves.

We started by sharing our ideals with others, and soon, people from all over the world were reaching out to us. Some had shared our crystal travel experience, while others had similar beliefs. Our journey inspired them, and they wanted to be a part of something bigger.

Together, we worked towards a better future. We focused on sustainability and developing new technologies to reduce the reliance on fossil fuels, such as solar panels and wind turbines. We also worked to eliminate poverty, creating new systems that

would ensure everyone had access to the necessities of life.

We were amazed by the growth in the movement, and the same crystal dimension experience we encountered ourselves influenced many. We immediately recognised our fellow travellers by their eyes and telepathy and became best of friends. None of us who visited the futuristic world via the different portals openly discussed our experiences, as we felt that mentioning them would divert from the seriousness of our ideals. We thought nobody would believe us and treat it as a joke.

It wasn't easy, but we knew we had to keep pushing forward. We were determined to make the government understand the damage done to our planet by burning fossil fuels. Still, we knew it would take time and effort to achieve our goals. Many governments disliked our demonstrations and campaigns, arresting scores of campaigners and activists.

Years went by, and our movement grew stronger and stronger. We had achieved so much but knew more work still needed to be done. We continued to push forward, never losing sight of our mission to create a better future for all.

As our movement gained more and more momentum, we started to face opposition from those who were resistant to change. We also made many

enemies among those who thought we were trying to destroy their livelihood. But we didn't let their negativity discourage us. We knew we were on the right path and were unwavering in our determination to make a difference.

Eventually, our hard work began to pay off.

The world leaders adopted the Kyoto Protocol as the first addition to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This international treaty committed its signatories to developing national programs to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

Our endeavours had become a global force for change, and the environment was cared for more responsibly and sustainably.

As we gazed upon the crystal, safely encased in a display cabinet, Veronica and I couldn't help but feel a sense of fulfilment. Our journey through the portal had driven us to act and make a difference in the world.

Even though we may never return to that strange, futuristic world, its memory was etched into our minds forever. The crystal was a tangible reminder of our purpose here on Earth and our incredible experiences while travelling to a different realm.

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We would often sit in the evenings and take out the crystal for cleaning, using it as an opportunity to reminisce about our exciting journey and how much we had accomplished together. With each passing day, the presence of the crystal filled us with hope and determination to continue shaping a remarkable future for ourselves and others.

CHAPTER SEVEN



A few years later, while examining and cleaning the crystal I had stored and guarded so carefully, it started pulsating and grew brighter in my hand. Then suddenly, I was back in the other earth realm I had visited before. I knew that they had summoned me, and I wondered why.

I did not expect to return to their realm again. It had to be urgent for them to recall me.

As I looked around, it was clear that something was different. The once pristine and advanced utopia was now in chaos. I wondered what could have been the cause of all this destruction. People were running in every direction, screaming and shouting. The sky was dark, and lightning struck the ground all around me. I could smell the scent of ozone in the air and knew something terrible was happening.

I felt vulnerable without Veronica by my side. We had become such a unit over the years. Everything around me was so strange and frightening.

I started to panic, unsure why they had brought me back to this world or what I was supposed to do. I

clutched the crystal tightly and looked for signs of what was happening. It was then that I saw her.

A woman was running towards me, visibly distressed. She was shouting something, but I couldn't hear her over the sound of thunder. As she got closer, I could see the fear in her eyes. She held something in her hand and thrust it towards me. It was a small device that resembled a communicator.

I didn't know what to do, but something inside me told me to take the device. The woman vanished as soon as I did, leaving me alone in the chaos.

I looked down at the device, not sure what to expect. It started to glow, and a holographic image appeared before me. It was a man, and he looked worried.

'Whoever you are, you must help us,' he said urgently. 'Our system is compromised, and we're under attack. We need your help to stop them.'

I didn't know what he was talking about, but I knew I had to do something. I looked around, searching for clues about who or what was attacking the city. That's when I noticed a dark figure in the distance. It was massive, at least seven feet tall, and headed straight towards me.

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I knew then that it was up to me to stop whatever was coming. I had no idea how to do it, but I had to try.

I took a deep breath, channelling all my strength and courage. I closed my eyes and focused on the crystal in my hand. It started to pulsate again, and I knew it gave me the power to fight.

I opened my eyes, and a glowing aura surrounded my body. I felt invincible like nothing could stop me. I ran towards the figure, ready to take on whatever came my way.

As I got closer, I realized it was a massive autonomous mobile robot. It had glowing red eyes and metal claws that could crush anything in its grip. It fired laser beams in every direction, destroying buildings and causing chaos.

I didn't hesitate. I leapt into action, my body moving faster than ever. I dodged the laser beams and evaded the robot's attacks. I used the crystal's power to blast the robot with energy, weakening it with each hit.

It was a long and gruelling battle, but I was determined to win. I fought with everything I had, and as I stood there, panting and covered in sweat, the

robot finally crumbled to the ground. I knew I had done something incredible. I had saved the city and possibly the entire world for all I know from destruction.

I was confused, like soldiers in a war, not knowing who I was fighting or why. You don't know who the enemy is or why you attacked them. You followed instructions. In my case, the crystal somehow told me what to do, not a sergeant. I wish I could correctly manipulate and control the crystal's power. Up until now, I think the crystal was using me.

I did know one thing for sure. It seemed logical that the futuristic realm I was in was also our future and part of our planet, so I must defend it; if the mysterious invaders won, it would also affect our dimension. Our existence as civilized beings depended on winning this battle for Earth. The future of our planet was at stake, and these people are my fellow citizens.

But my mission wasn't over yet. I still had to find out who was behind the attack and why they targeted the city. I looked down at the device in my hand and tried to contact the man who had called for my help earlier.

‘Are you there?’ I said into the communicator. ‘I’ve taken down the robot. What’s going on here?’

There was silence for a moment, and finally, after what felt like hours, a man’s voice came through the device.

‘Thank you for your help,’ he said, sounding relieved. ‘We’re not sure who’s behind the attack yet, but we’ve received reports that they’re planning more. We need you to find out who they are and stop them.’

I nodded, even though the man couldn’t see me. ‘I’ll do everything I can,’ I said.

As I set off to investigate, I couldn’t help but wonder how I had ended up in this situation. One moment, I was living an ordinary life on Earth; the next, I was fighting a giant robot in a futuristic-like world.

But I knew that I had a purpose here. Sheba, the crystal guardian, chose me and enchanted my crystal for this purpose. The powers from this dimension had brought me here for a reason, and it was up to me to figure out what that reason was.

The force attacking our planet was clearly from another world and planned to take over.

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As I made my way through the ruined city, I couldn't shake the feeling that something even more significant was at play. This attack was just the beginning, and I needed to prepare for whatever came next.

But for now, I focused on the task at hand. I was a fighter and a hero, and I would do everything possible to protect this world and those living here.

Why would I risk my life for these people? I don't know. Maybe they made me think of our children's future as we shared the same planet.

I moved through the rubble and debris, my senses alert for any sign of danger. The destruction was immense, and it was clear that somebody was attacking this highly advanced society. I wondered how anyone could have infiltrated their sophisticated systems and brought them down so quickly.

As I continued to search, a sudden movement caught my eye. I turned to see a figure in the distance running towards me. I readied myself for battle, but as it drew near, I noticed that it was a young woman with dark brown hair.

She was panting heavily, her eyes wide with fear. 'Please,' she gasped. 'My name is Jane. You have to

help us. They're coming. They're going to destroy everything in our beautiful city.'

I could feel her voice's urgency and knew we had to move fast. 'Take me to them,' I said, determined to end this once and for all. Again, I was amazed at my braveness. The crystal was exceedingly powerful and seemed to control my mind.

Jane nodded and led me through the city; she called Encryst. We passed through destroyed buildings and empty streets until we arrived at what appeared to be a research facility. There was a large gate, and as we approached, it began to open.

Inside, I could see figures moving around in the shadows. They were heavily armed and dressed in black. I knew without a doubt that they were responsible for the attack.

Without hesitation, I charged towards them, my body bathed in the glowing aura of the crystal. They opened fire, but I dodged their shots with ease. I used the crystal's power to take them out one by one, moving faster than they could react.

The battle was intense, but I was determined to come out on top. I fought with everything I had, fueled by a fierce determination to protect this world

and its people. As the last of the attackers fell, I felt a wave of relief wash over me. I had neutralized the thread, and the people of this world could finally find peace.

But as I looked around, I realized my work was far from over. The research facility consisted of advanced technology and equipment, and it was clear that these attackers had been after something specific.

I scanned the room to identify what they had been looking for. And that's when I saw a machine, unlike anything I had ever seen. It was massive, with pipes and wires snaking in every direction.

I approached the machine, feeling a sense of foreboding wash over me. There was something familiar about this machine, something that nagged at me. And then it clicked - this was similar to the device that had initially transported Veronica and me to this world.

I stared at it in disbelief, trying to comprehend the enormity of what I was seeing. Had these attackers used this device to penetrate Earth?

As I pondered these questions, the crystal in my hand began to pulse again. It was sending me a message, one that I knew I couldn't ignore. I closed

my eyes and focused, letting the crystal's power guide me.

And then I saw a vision of a dark figure cloaked in shadows. Possibly the mastermind behind everything that had happened and the one who orchestrated this attack.

With renewed determination, I decided to find this figure and end their plans.

I followed the crystal's guidance, moving stealthily through the shadows. I could feel the presence of the dark figure growing stronger with each step. I knew I was getting closer.

Finally, I saw them. They were standing in the middle of a massive room, surrounded by high-tech equipment and screens displaying complex data. I could sense their power and malice even with their backs turned towards me.

Without a second thought, I charged towards them. The figure turned around, and I saw its face for the first time. It was a woman with dark hair and piercing blue eyes. She was wearing a black suit, and there was a cold smile on her lips.

‘You shouldn’t have come here,’ she snarled, her voice dripping with malice. ‘You’re not supposed to know about this.’

I didn’t reply. I knew that words would be useless. Instead, I focused on the crystal in my hand. Its power surged through me, and I felt stronger than ever before.

I launched myself at the woman, my body moving faster than the speed of sound. She tried to fight back, but I was too quick. I used the crystal’s energy to weaken her defences and landed a decisive blow.

The woman stumbled back, her face contorting with rage. She was stronger than I had anticipated and refused to back down. I kept fighting, using every ounce of strength the crystal gave me.

The battle was intense, and it seemed like it would never end. But finally, after what felt like hours, I landed the final blow. The woman crumpled to the ground, defeated.

As I stood over her, catching my breath, I couldn’t help but wonder what had driven her to this point. What had made her so obsessed with power and destruction?

But there was no time for answers. I knew I had to act fast, for the device that had brought me to this world still hummed ominously in the background. It was clear that I had to destroy it before it was too late.

With a sense of urgency, I approached the machine. It was massive, and I knew that destroying it would be no easy feat. But I had the crystal's power on my side, and I was determined to succeed.

I began to concentrate, gathering all of my strength and energy. The crystal began to pulse even more fiercely in my hand, its energy crackling around me.

And then I unleashed it. A massive wave of power erupted from my body, engulfing the machine in a brilliant white light. Sparks flew, and wires snapped as the machine tore apart, piece by piece.

It was a chaotic and terrifying sight, but I knew I had to destroy it. And when it was over, all that was left was a smoking pile of rubble.

As I stood there, surrounded by destruction, I couldn't help but feel a sense of sadness. This world had suffered so much, and it was clear that it would take a long time for it to heal.

But there was hope, too. With the attackers gone and the machine destroyed, the people of this world could finally begin to rebuild. And with the crystal in my hand, I knew I could lend them a helping hand.

I turned to leave, but a voice called out to me as I did. ‘Wait,’ it said.

I turned around to see the woman I had just defeated now sitting up and looking at me with fear and curiosity.

‘What do you want?’ I asked my guard still up.

‘My name is Una, and I want to know,’ she said, her voice shaking slightly. ‘I want to know how you got that power. How you were able to defeat me.’

I hesitated for a moment before replying. Something about the manner of the question made me think there was a genuine interest, not just trying to find another way to attack me.

‘It’s a long story,’ I said finally. ‘But if you want to know, I’ll tell you.’

And so, amid the rubble and destruction, I sat down with my former enemy and began to tell her

how I had come to possess the crystal and everything that had happened since then.

As I spoke, I could see the woman's expression changing. The fear was still there but mixed with something else now - wonder, maybe even a little hope.

When I finished, she sat in silence for a long time, seemingly lost in thought.

Finally, she looked up at me again. 'Thank you,' she said. 'Thank you for telling me that. I don't know what I believe, but maybe there's a chance for us after all.'

I nodded, unsure what to say. Sitting here with someone who had been my greatest enemy only moments ago and now seemed almost like a friend was strange.

'Well,' I said, standing up. 'I should be going now. There's still a lot of work to do.'

The woman nodded a hint of sadness in her eyes. 'I understand,' she said. 'But... maybe someday, we'll meet again. And hopefully, it won't be as enemies.'

I smiled at her, feeling a strange sense of hope. Maybe she was right. Maybe there was a chance for peace in this world after all.

As I walked away from the ruins of the machine, the crystal in my hand began to pulse again. It was sending me a message filled with urgency.

I knew much was still to be done, and this was only the beginning of my journey. But with the crystal's power on my side and a newfound hope in my heart, I was ready for whatever lay ahead.

I continued to follow the crystal's guidance, moving through the ruins of the laboratory that had once housed the machine. The destruction was massive, and there were signs of a fierce battle everywhere I looked.

But amidst the rubble and debris, there were also signs of life. I saw people moving about; some were injured, and others were helping them. They looked up as I approached, and I could see the relief in their eyes when they recognized me as a friend.

I walked among them, offering whatever aid I could. The crystal pulsed in my hand, responding to the needs of those around me. With its power, I could

heal wounds and soothe pain, comforting those suffering.

I marvelled at the power of the crystal. But even as I helped others, I could feel a sense of unease growing within me. The crystal sent me a message, warning me of something dangerous approaching.

I didn't know what it was, but knew I had to prepare for it. I looked around, searching for signs of trouble. And that's when I saw them.

A group of figures dressed in dark clothes and carrying weapons were approaching from the east. They moved with purpose, their footsteps heavy and deliberate.

I could feel their hostility even from a distance, and I knew that they were not here to help. They were here to cause more destruction and take advantage of the chaos already wrought.

Without hesitation, I sprang into action. I raised the crystal, feeling its power surge through me. My muscles bulged, and my senses sharpened as I prepared to face the threat.

The attackers were getting closer now, and I could see the fear in the eyes of the people around me, but

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I didn't let it deter me. I charged towards the attackers, moving with incredible speed and agility.

My sudden assault took aback the attackers, but they quickly recovered. They spread out, surrounding me.

I could feel their weapons slicing through the air, but my movements were too quick for them to land a blow. I dodged and weaved between them, my fists striking out incredibly.

I could hear the sounds of bones breaking and screams of pain as I fought on, my determination growing with each passing moment.

But it wasn't just my power that kept me going. It was the knowledge that I was fighting for something greater than myself, for the people who had suffered at the hands of these attackers, and for the hope of a better future.

And in the end, hope triumphed over the darkness. With a final burst of energy, I landed a crushing blow that sent the last attackers sprawling to the ground.

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The people around me cheered, but I barely heard them. I was too focused on the crystal in my hand, which pulsed with an almost blinding light.

I knew it was telling me something important that would change everything. And so, with a sense of anticipation, I set off towards the horizon, ready to face whatever lay ahead.

As I walked towards the horizon, following the crystal's pulsing light, I felt a strange foreboding growing within me. I didn't know what awaited me, but I knew it would be dangerous.

The crystal still pulsated in my hand, sending energy waves through my body. I could feel my muscles tightening and my senses sharpening as I prepared for whatever was coming.

And then, I saw it. A massive tower rising from the ground like a twisted monolith. It was unlike anything I had ever seen, its surface covered in strange symbols and glowing runes.

But it wasn't just the tower that caught my attention. It was the energy emanating from it - a dark, evil force that seemed to spread in all directions.

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I approached the tower cautiously. My hand tightened around the crystal. I could feel its power growing stronger as I drew closer, as if it was responding to the danger ahead.

The closer I got to the tower, the more I could feel the darkness closing in around me. It felt like a tangible force pressing against me from all sides.

And then, I saw them, creatures unlike any I had ever seen before. They were humanoid, but their skin was a sickly green, and their eyes glowed in an otherworldly light.

They moved towards me with an eerie grace, their movements almost supernatural. I could feel their hostility, their desire to destroy everything in their path.

But I wasn't afraid. Not anymore. With a fierce determination, I raised the crystal and charged towards the creatures. Their eyes widened in surprise as I approached, my body moving with unparalleled speed and agility.

I could feel the crystal's power surging through me as I fought, each strike fueled by its pulsing energy. The creatures were strong, but I was stronger. And

with each passing moment, I could feel their defences weakening.

The battle raged on, the creatures falling one by one under my relentless assault. But even as I fought, I could feel the darkness growing stronger. It was like a weight pressing down on me, threatening to crush me under its oppressive force.

And then, I saw a black-cloaked figure standing at the top of the tower, its face obscured by shadow. But even from a distance, I could feel its malevolence.

It must be the one behind all this - responsible for the world's chaos and destruction. And I knew that I had to stop it.

With a final burst of energy, I charged towards the tower. The crystal pulsed in my hand, its power surging through me almost blindingly.

The figure watched me approach, its eyes gleaming with a sickly green light. But I didn't let it deter me. I raised the crystal, ready to strike. And then, everything went dark.

When I opened my eyes, I was no longer standing in front of the tower. Instead, I was in a dark and unfamiliar place. The air was thick with the smell of

smoke and rot, and the ground beneath my feet felt unnaturally cold.

I looked around, trying to get my bearings. But there was nothing to see except for the darkness.

And then, I heard it: a soft, almost imperceptible whispering. It sounded like a hundred voices speaking at once, their words incomprehensible.

I followed the sound, my hand tightening around the crystal. The closer I got, the louder the whispering became. It was like a physical force pressing against me from all sides.

And then, I saw a massive, shadowy figure looming in the darkness ahead. It was unlike anything I had ever seen, its shape constantly shifting and changing.

The whispering grew louder as I approached, like a chorus of voices urging me forward. And so, with a deep breath, I stepped into the darkness.

I could feel the shadowy figure's presence all around me, its energy pressing on me from all sides. But I didn't let it stop me. I raised the crystal, feeling its power surge through me. And then, I struck.

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The crystal's power flowed through me, striking the shadowy figure with an almost blinding force. It seemed like the darkness was being ripped apart, torn asunder by the crystal's pulsing energy.

And then, it was gone. The darkness had vanished, replaced by a blinding light. I shielded my eyes, struggling to adjust to the sudden brightness.

When my vision finally cleared, I stood in a field of flowers. The sun shone overhead, filling the air with the sweet scent of blooming buds.

I looked around, confused. How had I gotten here? And what had happened to the tower and the shadowy figure?

And then, I felt a hand on my shoulder. I saw a woman standing beside me, dressed in a flowing white gown with long, golden hair adorned with flowers.

'Welcome,' she said with a smile. 'You have done well.'

'Who are you?' I asked.

'My name is Nexus. I am the guardian of the crystals,' she replied. 'And you, my dear, are its chosen one. Your crystal has been charged with

special powers to make you invincible. Use them well; the world depends on you.'

'The chosen one?' I repeated, still feeling dazed.

'Yes,' she said. 'The crystal has been seeking a champion to defeat the darkness that threatens this world. And it has found that champion in you.'

I stared at her, feeling overwhelmed by the weight of her words. Me? A champion?

But then, I looked down at the crystal in my hand; it pulsed gently as if confirming her words.

And so, I knew what I had to do. I had to continue to face whatever challenges lay ahead for the crystal, the world, and myself.

I thanked the crystal's guardian with renewed purpose and set off towards the horizon again. I must be in some rural location on the outskirts of the city. The crystal pulsed in my hand, guiding me towards my next destination.

As I walked, I couldn't help but wonder what other dangers lay ahead. What other evil forces would I have to face? But I pushed those thoughts aside and

focused on the present. I had a task to perform and was determined to see it through.

As the day wore on and the sun began to set, I spotted a small estate ahead leading to the city. Without hesitation, I approached it, hoping to find a place to rest and gather supplies.

As I entered the estate, I could feel people's eyes on me. They seemed wary as if they didn't trust outsiders. But I paid them no mind and approached what looked like a public house.

Inside, the innkeeper greeted me with a smile. 'Welcome, traveller. My name is Jerimiah, and I own this humble establishment. We don't get many visitors around here. What brings you to our humble village?'

'I'm just passing through,' I replied. 'I hoped to find a place to rest and gather supplies.'

'Of course,' the innkeeper said. 'We have a room available for you and can provide you with food and water. Is there anything else you need?'

I shook my head. 'No, that should be fine. Thank you.'

As I settled into my room, I couldn't help but feel a sense of unease. Something didn't feel right about this area. But I pushed those thoughts aside and focused on getting some rest.

That night, I dreamed of the dark, evil figure I had defeated. Its energy lingered in my mind like a dark stain on my thoughts. I tossed and turned in my sleep, unable to escape its grasp.

And then, I felt a hand on my shoulder. I jolted awake, reaching for the crystal in automatic defence. But it was just Jerimiah, the innkeeper, standing by my bedside.

'Are you okay?' he asked, his brow furrowed with concern.

'I'm fine,' I said, my heart racing. 'Just a bad dream.'

The innkeeper nodded, but I could tell he didn't believe me. He lingered for a moment longer before finally turning to leave.

I lay back down, trying to calm my thoughts. But it was no use. The shadowy figure's energy lingered like an invisible weight pressing down on me.

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And then, I heard it. A soft whispering, just like the one I had heard in the darkness before. It was coming from outside, on the village streets.

I got up, feeling the crystal's power humming in my hand. With a sense of foreboding, I made my way outside.

The estate was quiet, but I could feel unease in the air. Then, I saw a group of dark, hooded figures moving through the streets with purposeful strides.

I knew they were up to no good. And so, with a sense of determination, I charged towards them.

Their eyes widened in surprise as I approached, the crystal's power surging through me with renewed strength. We clashed in the streets, their dark energy matching my own in intensity. But I refused to back down, fighting with everything I had.

It was a fierce battle, the crystal's power pulsing through me with each strike. But in the end, I emerged victorious. The hooded figures fled, their dark energy dissipating into the night.

Breathless and battered, I took a moment to catch my breath. And then, I noticed something strange.

The villagers were no longer wary of me. Instead, they approached me with gratitude and relief in their eyes.

‘You saved us,’ Jerimiah said, emotion palpable in his voice. ‘We had no idea what those hooded figures were planning, but we knew it couldn't have been anything good.’

I nodded, feeling a sense of satisfaction in my chest. It was why I was chosen. To protect those who couldn't defend themselves.

As I returned to the inn, I asked the innkeeper. ‘Several wise people interviewed me when I first came to your world. They were your leaders then. Do you know what happened to them? I am sure they would help restore the order once more.’

The innkeeper's expression turned grim at my question. ‘Those wise people you speak of were the council of elders,’ he said. I could tell that my question had hit a nerve. ‘They're gone,’ he said quietly. ‘All of them.’

‘Gone?’ I repeated, feeling a sense of dread in my gut. ‘What do you mean?’

‘They were taken,’ the innkeeper said. ‘By the shadowy figure that you defeated. He came to our

village and demanded that they hand over the crystal. He took them captive when they refused and locked them in a dungeon at the bottom of the tower. I will find out for you.

I nodded, feeling a newfound sense of urgency. ‘Thank you,’ I said. ‘I need to find your council of elders. And I need to stop the shadowy figure once and for all.’

Jerimiah nodded, a look of determination in his eyes. ‘I’ll help in any way I can,’ he said.

Together, we set off towards the tower, where the council of elders was held captive. The crystal glowed in my hand, urging me forward.

As we approached the tower, I could feel a sense of dread settling over me. The shadowy figure was here. I could feel its dark energy pulsing from within the tower walls.

But I pushed those thoughts aside and focused on the task at hand. With Jerimiah, the innkeeper, at my side, I charged towards the tower, ready to face whatever lay ahead.

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A wave of darkness met us as we burst through the doors. The shadowy figure stood at the centre of the room, its eyes glowing with malevolence.

‘You again,’ he sneered. ‘I should have known you would come crawling back.’

I didn't respond. Instead, I charged, the crystal's power surging through me with renewed strength.

And then, it was chaos. The shadowy figure and I clashed in the centre of the room, its dark energy reverberating around me like a vortex. But I refused to back down, fighting with everything I had.

With a final burst of energy, I struck the shadowy figure with all my might. There was a blinding flash of light and then nothing.

When I opened my eyes, I found myself outside the tower, the crystal humming strongly in my hand. I looked around, dazed and disoriented, trying to recall what had happened.

And then, I saw him, the shadowy figure, lying motionless on the ground. He had been defeated.

I felt a sense of relief wash over me, knowing I had neutralised the threat. And yet, I couldn't shake the

feeling that something was still unfinished. The council of elders were still missing, and I needed to find them.

With a renewed sense of purpose, I set off on my quest once more. I searched high and low, scouring every inch of the village and surrounding areas for any sign of their whereabouts.

It wasn't until days later that I finally found them, held in a nearby dungeon, their conditions deplorable and their spirits broken.

I wasted no time breaking them out, using the crystal's power to destroy the locks and chains holding them captive. And then, we made our way back to the estate, the council of elders in tow.

As we arrived, the residents greeted us with cheers and celebration. The people anxiously awaited our return and welcomed us with open arms.

But even as the celebration raged, I knew my time in this world was ending. With my task completed, it was time to return, but first, I had to find out what had happened to destroy this beautiful world.

The elders sat around in a circle, and their leader explained. 'It was our fault. We perfected artificial

intelligence that took over every sphere of influence in our lives. It even designed and programmed our computers, making us too reliant on robots to do all our work. Making people weak and lazy, and when the aliens attacked us, we not only did not know what to do, but we were too frightened and intimidated to stand up to these people from the darkness. Our only hope was you. Sheba had chosen you for your courage and determination. You had the special crystal and were the only person left brave enough to use the crystal's powers. That is why we summoned you.'

He continued. 'The other problem we created is that our world was led by us four elders. The invaders easily overpowered and forced us to give them control of our central computers. It is not wise to have a centralised government. They could get too powerful and greedy or, in our case, weak and old. Also, having a proportional representative parliament is safer, allowing each political party to partake in decision-making.'

I listened intently as the elder explained what had happened to their world. It was a cautionary tale, a reminder of the dangers of becoming too reliant on technology and centralized government. But even as I absorbed their words, I knew it was time to return home.

‘I’m glad I was able to help,’ I said, looking around at the grateful faces of the villagers. ‘But it’s time for me to return to my world now. I hope you will remember my time here and our lessons together.’

The villagers nodded, tears in their eyes. ‘We will never forget you,’ the innkeeper said, his voice filled with emotion.

And then, with a final wave goodbye, I activated the crystal, feeling its power surge through me again. And then, in a blinding flash of light, I was gone.

Still clutching the crystal, I returned to my world and opened my eyes. It was a jarring transition, and it took me a moment to catch my breath.

But even as I stood there, catching my breath, I knew my experiences had changed me. I had seen the consequences of unchecked power and technology. I understood that I needed to be mindful of it in my own life.

And so, with a newfound sense of purpose, I set off into my world once more. But this time, I was armed with the knowledge and experience I had gained in the fantasy world. And I knew I could make a difference with the crystal’s power within me.

CHAPTER EIGHT



Veronica commented on my absence. She thought I had been to the local shop. She was amazed when I told her what had happened, the dangers I had to face, and that I had been on the other side for several weeks. The following day, we went to work as if nothing happened.

But deep down, I knew that I was different. I had seen and experienced things and learned some of the powers of the crystal that no one else could even fathom. As I sat at my desk, staring at the computer screen in front of me, I couldn't help but feel a sense of restlessness.

I knew I couldn't return to my old life and pretend nothing had happened. I needed to do something, to use the power of the crystal to make a difference.

And so, I began to research. I scoured the internet for articles and news stories about technology and centralized power, using the knowledge I had gained in the fantasy world to understand the dangers ahead.

As I delved deeper into my research, I realised that others shared my concerns—people fighting against the same things I had seen in the fantasy world.

I contacted these people, connected with them online, and joined their causes. Together, we worked towards spreading awareness about the dangers of technology and centralized power and advocating for change in our world.

It was a long and often arduous journey, but I persevered. With the crystal's power fueling me, I connected with like-minded individuals and inspired change in ways I never thought possible.

I became a leader in the movement, speaking at rallies and organizing protest marches. And with each victory, I felt a sense of satisfaction.

But as time passed by, I realised there was a cost to my newfound purpose. I had neglected other areas of my life, and my relationships suffered.

Veronica, once my closest friend and confidant, had grown distant. She had never understood my obsession with the crystal and the fantasy world. It seemed she didn't understand my passion for this new cause either.

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And yet, I knew I couldn't stop. The crystal had given me purpose, and I couldn't turn my back on it now.

But as the movement grew more robust, so too did the resistance. Those in power fought back, using technology and centralized systems to silence us.

It was a war, with battles fought both online and in the streets. And as the stakes grew higher, I found myself relying more and more on the crystal's power.

I didn't realize it then, but I was becoming addicted to the rush, the feeling of invincibility that came with wielding such immense power. Unfortunately, to make matters worse, this made people aware of the enormous power of the crystal, something I needed to keep low-key.

It wasn't until one fateful day that everything changed. We had organized a massive protest in the city's heart, demanding change and calling out those in power.

But as we marched, I felt a sudden surge of energy, the crystal's power coursing through my veins. At that moment, I forgot all caution and reason, and I raised my hands, unleashing a devastating wave of energy that

shattered the windows of nearby buildings and sent people tumbling to the ground.

Horror overtook me as I slowly realized what I had done. I had let the crystal's power consume me; now, innocent people were paying the price.

I tried to backtrack, to undo what I had done, but it was too late. The authorities had arrived, armed with their technology and weapons.

The ensuing battle was brutal, and I fought with all the power I could muster. But I was no match for the might of their technology, and soon, I found myself cornered, the crystal's power waning as I struggled to breathe.

It was then that Veronica appeared, her face twisted with anger and fear. 'What have you done?' she screamed, her voice drowned out by the sounds of explosions and gunfire.

I could see her disappointment and the sense of betrayal that I had let my cause consume me. And in that moment, I knew that I had lost everything.

The authorities closed in, their weapons raised, and I closed my eyes, ready for the end. But instead of the fatal blow I expected, I felt something else—a

sudden surge of energy, the crystal's power returning in full force.

I opened my eyes, and everything around me was gone. I was back in the futuristic world amid a chaotic battle. The villagers were fighting for their lives against an army of robots, their weapons no match for the advanced technology of their enemies.

My heart sank as I realized they brought me back to their world. Yet, I had failed in my mission to make a difference in my world. And yet, as I watched the villagers fighting for their lives, I knew I couldn't just stand by and do nothing.

With renewed determination, I summoned all the power of the crystal, calling forth a massive burst of energy that sent shockwaves through the battlefield. The robots faltered, their circuits overloaded by the surge of power.

The villagers took advantage of the opening, launching a fierce counterattack that drove the robots back. As the battle raged on, I fought alongside them, using the crystal to turn the tide of the war.

It was a long and grueling battle, but ultimately, we emerged victorious. We had defeated the robots, and the villagers cheered in triumph.

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As I looked around at the faces of the people I had fought alongside, I felt a sense of peace and fulfillment that I had never experienced before. I had made a real difference in this world, and that was something no technology or centralized power could ever take away.

As I closed my eyes, feeling the crystal's power fading again, I knew I was ready to return to my world. But this time, I would carry the knowledge and experience of both worlds, using it to make a difference wherever I could.

And maybe, just maybe, I could find a way to balance my passion for change with the other areas of my life, mending the relationships that I had neglected along the way.

As the crystal's power transported me back to my world, I braced myself for what was coming. I knew I had a lot of work to do to rebuild my life and continue fighting for change.

But as I opened my eyes and looked around, I realized something was different. The world looked brighter, the air cleaner. It was as if the battle I had fought in the fantasy world had somehow cleansed mine.

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I saw signs of change everywhere. People protested peacefully, demanding that those in power listen to their concerns. They were using technology to empower communities rather than control them.

I felt relieved as if somebody had lifted a weight off my shoulders. I could now live an ordinary life again, realising that change was happening. And with the power of the crystal still at my fingertips, I knew I could continue to make a difference if they needed me again.

But this time, I would be more careful. I would use the crystal's power to inspire change, but not at the expense of the people around me. I would work to rebuild the neglected relationships and find a way to balance my passions with the rest of my life.

Number one on my agenda was Veronica. She had returned to America in anger. I did not know how to rebuild our relationship. Perhaps I had lost her forever. But I was determined to try. I owed it to her and myself, as I still loved her.

I started by reaching out to her, sending messages and leaving voicemails. At first, she didn't respond, and I lost hope.

But then, one day, she picked up the phone. 'Hello?' she said, her voice cautious.

'Veronica, it's me,' I said, my heart pounding. 'I know I messed up. I know I let my passion consume me, and I'm sorry for how I treated you.'

There was a long pause on the other end of the line, and I held my breath, waiting for her response.

Finally, she spoke. 'I don't know if I'm ready to forgive you yet,' she said, her voice softening slightly. 'But I'm willing to listen.'

And so we talked, for hours and hours, about everything that had happened and how we had both changed. It wasn't easy; sometimes, we were still worlds apart. Then, one day, I phoned, and there was no answer.

I panicked as I had no other contact number for Veronica. Her parents had passed away some time ago. I searched the belongings she left behind and eventually found her cousin's phone number, who lived close by in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

I got hold of her that evening, but she told me she had lost touch with Veronica. However, she promised to drive to Veronica's flat the following day to renew

contact with her. She asked me to call the following evening.

I waited anxiously, counting the hours until it was time to call Veronica's cousin again. My heart leapt in my chest when I finally got her on the phone.

'Hello?' I said, my voice shaking with anticipation.

'It's me,' came the answer from Veronica's cousin. 'I went to Veronica's place, but she wasn't there. I left a note for her, telling her that you had been trying to get in touch.'

My heart sank. 'Do you have any idea where Veronica might be?' I asked, trying to keep the desperation out of my voice.

'I'm not sure,' her cousin replied. 'But I did hear from her friend that she planned to take a trip. Maybe she just needed to get away for a while.'

I thanked Veronica's cousin for her help and hung up, feeling more lost and confused than ever. I knew I had deeply hurt Veronica, but I couldn't help feeling like I was losing her for good.

The following day at work, I received an anonymous phone call. 'We have Veronica. But we

will only release her upon payment of one million pounds. We will phone you tomorrow with the payment instructions. Get the money ready, and do not contact the police if you want to see her alive again.' The caller ended the call abruptly.

I was stunned for a moment and did not know what to do. Then I reached for the crystal and concentrated all my thoughts on Veronica with all the power in me.

I closed my eyes, focusing on my connection to the crystal and feeling its energy flowing through me as I tapped into its power. I visualized Veronica's face with a deep breath, calling out to her with the crystal's energy.

Suddenly, I felt a jolt of electricity shoot through me, and my eyes snapped open as I gasped for air. The crystal's power had never felt this intense before. I felt a surge of energy coursing through me, and I knew that the crystal was responding to my plea. I closed my eyes and focused on Veronica, willing the crystal's power to guide me to her.

Suddenly, I saw a vision of her, bound and gagged in a dark and dingy room. Her eyes were wide with fear as she struggled against restraints, and I knew I had to act fast. I used all my thoughts and

concentration to beg the crystal to transport me to Veronica somewhere in America to rescue her.

In a blinding flash of light, I felt the crystal's power lift me off the ground and hurl me through space and time. The world blurred around me, and for a moment, I felt like I was falling through an endless void.

But then, just as suddenly as it had begun, the light faded, and I found myself standing in a dark and musty room. I looked around, trying to take in my surroundings, and saw Veronica bound and gagged in the corner of the room.

I rushed over to her, quickly untying the ropes that bound her hands and feet. 'Are you okay?' I asked, my voice barely above a whisper.

She shook her head, tears streaming down her face. 'I don't know who they were or what they wanted,' she said, her voice shaking. 'They just grabbed me off the street and brought me here.'

I wrapped my arms around her, holding her tightly. 'It's okay,' I said, trying to reassure her. 'You're safe now.'

But as I looked around the room, I knew we weren't out of danger yet. There was still one more person in the room, a man with a gun pointed at us.

'Stay back,' he said, his voice low and menacing. 'I'm not afraid to use this gun.'

I took a step forward, my heart pounding in my chest. 'We don't want any trouble,' I said, calm and measured. 'We just want to leave.'

The man hesitated for a moment, then lowered his gun. 'Fine,' he said, his voice cold and calculated. 'But you're not leaving empty-handed.'

He gestured to a briefcase on the floor, and I could see the glint of gold coins inside. 'Take the money and go,' he said.

I hesitated, not wanting to take money from criminals. But then I saw the fear in Veronica's eyes and knew that we needed to get out of there, fast.

I picked up the briefcase, and we quickly made our way out of the room. As we emerged into the daylight, I felt a sense of relief wash over me. We had made it out alive.

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But as we walked away from the scene, I feared our lives would never be the same again. We were now in a dangerous world of crime and violence, and I wasn't sure if we would ever truly escape it. But one thing was sure: I would do whatever it took to protect Veronica and keep her safe from harm, no matter what dangers lay ahead.

'I don't know where we are, but do you want to return to England with me or stay in America?' I asked Veronica.

'I'll feel safer in England. I would be grateful if I could stay with you briefly. Then I can decide what to do. I'm so confused,' she begged.

'Never mind making a decision now. Hold my hand, and I'll take us back home.'

Veronica held my hand, and with a blinding flash of light, I felt the crystal's power hurtling us back through space and time.

But then, just as suddenly as it had begun, the light faded, and we found ourselves standing in my office at work.

Veronica let go of my hand, looking around in disbelief. 'Did that really just happen?' she asked, her voice shaking.

I nodded, still feeling the rush of adrenaline from our harrowing escape. 'Yes, it did,' I said, my mind racing with everything that had just transpired. 'Are you okay?'

She nodded, her eyes wide with fear and excitement. 'I think so,' she said her voice barely above a whisper. 'Thank you for saving me. I'm sorry I'm so confused. I need time to make up my mind. So much has happened, and now you have the crystal. I wish we could be two ordinary people.'

I took her hand, squeezing it gently. 'You don't have to thank me,' I said. 'I'll always be here for you, no matter your decision.'

We stood there silently for a moment, letting the realization of everything that had happened between us sink in. But then Veronica turned to me with a glint of determination. 'We need to figure out who those people were,' she said. 'And we need to stop them.'

I nodded, feeling a spark of hope ignite within me. 'You're right,' I said. 'We can't let them get away with this. We'll have to be careful but find a way to bring

them to justice. First, let us examine the briefcase the gunman told us to take and why he did that.'

We opened the briefcase and found a stack of gold coins, each stamped with an unfamiliar crest. I picked up one of the coins, examining it closely. 'This must be worth a fortune,' I said, my mind racing with the possibilities.

Veronica looked at me, concern etched on her face. 'But why did they give it to us?' she asked. 'What do they want in return?'

I shook my head, not sure what to make of it all. 'I don't know,' I said, feeling a knot forming in my stomach. 'But I have a feeling we'll find out soon enough.'

We spent the next few hours poring over the coins, deciphering their meaning and origin. But no matter how hard we tried, we couldn't understand.

Veronica stood up as the sun began to set, stretching her arms. 'I need to get some rest,' she said. 'All this is too much for me to handle right now.'

I nodded, knowing that I needed to do the same. 'Let's go home,' I said. 'We'll try to figure this out tomorrow.'

Envy and Greed Spells Murder

Even though I was dying to make love to Veronica, I decided not to push too hard. I made her comfortable in the spare room and kept my distance, not wanting to frighten her away. Besides, we both needed a good night's rest.

The following morning at breakfast, I told Veronica that the kidnappers phoned yesterday demanding a million pounds for her release. They said they would contact me today with instructions on how to make the payment. I was baffled why the man in America insisted that I take the briefcase full of coins.

Perhaps he wanted to tell his superiors that I had stolen them. It might only be a part of the total amount. He might think he can get away with the rest of the loot and blame me.

Veronica thought about this for a while. 'I do believe you are right. Today is going to be an interesting day.'

I nodded in agreement, knowing we needed to be on high alert. We spent the rest of the morning making arrangements for the ransom payment, trying to gather as much information as possible about the kidnappers and their demands.

As we were waiting for the call from the kidnappers, I couldn't help but feel a sense of unease. Something about the situation didn't feel right, and I knew we could fall into a trap.

Suddenly, the phone rang, and I answered it, my heart pounding. 'Hello?' I said, trying to keep my voice steady.

A voice on the other end of the line was distorted and complex. The caller did not know that I had rescued Veronica. It was as we thought: their man in America had deserted them. 'We have your girl,' the voice said. 'And we want our money.'

I took a deep breath, trying to think clearly. 'I understand,' I said. 'But we need to meet in person to make the exchange. Can you give me a location?'

There was a long pause, and I could feel my nerves fraying. But then the voice spoke again, giving us an address in the city centre.

We quickly made our way to the location, keeping our eyes peeled for any signs of danger. Arriving at the designated spot, we found ourselves face-to-face with the kidnappers.

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There were three of them, all armed and dangerous. But I was determined not to show any fear. ‘We have the money,’ I said, holding the briefcase. ‘Now, give us Veronica.’

The kidnappers hesitated for a moment, exchanging uneasy glances. They did not even know what Veronica looked like. But then, just as suddenly, they lunged toward us, their guns drawn.

I acted quickly, pulling Veronica behind me and using my gun to fire back at them. We darted back and forth, trying to avoid their bullets as we made our way to safety.

Finally, we managed to escape, panting and heaving with adrenaline. We ran to the nearest police station, reporting everything that had happened.

The police took the briefcase and the gold coins as evidence and promised to do everything in their power to find the kidnappers and bring them to justice.

As we left the station, I turned to Veronica, my heart racing. ‘Are you okay?’ I asked, my voice shaking with emotion.

She nodded, her eyes bright with tears. ‘Yes,’ she said. ‘I’m okay. Thank you for saving me.’

I pulled her into my arms, holding her close as tears prickled the corners of my eyes. ‘I’ll always be here for you.’

We walked back to my office together, feeling a sense of relief wash over us. The coins were with the police, and it seemed that the kidnappers were unaware that I had already rescued Veronica. I wondered if they knew it was their coins in the briefcase. They would be perplexed when they discovered I had saved Veronica the day before, as it was impossible to travel to America, find and rescue someone, and return the same day. Unless, of course, you had the magic crystal.

As we stepped into my office, I couldn’t help but feel a rush of desire for Veronica. My heart was still pounding from the adrenaline of the encounter, and I wanted nothing more than to take her in my arms and make love to her.

But I knew that now was not the time. We needed to focus on finding out who was behind the kidnapping and the strange coins in the briefcase.

As I sat at my desk, Veronica leaned against the wall, her eyes scanning the room. ‘Do you think the police will be able to find the kidnappers?’ she asked.

I shook my head, doubtful. ‘It’s hard to say. But I feel we must take matters into our own hands.’

Veronica nodded, her eyes gleaming with determination. ‘I’m with you,’ she said. ‘Whatever it takes.’

I smiled, feeling a warmth spread through my chest. ‘We’ll do this together.’

But as the day wore on, we hit dead end after end. No matter how hard we tried, we couldn’t find any leads.

Finally, as the sun began to set, we went home, and both collapsed in exhaustion, our heads spinning with the weight of everything that had happened.

‘I don’t know how much more of this I can take,’ Veronica said, her voice trembling.

I took her hand, squeezing it gently. ‘We’ll find a way. We have to.’

And with those words, we both drifted into a restless sleep, dreaming of what might come next.

The following day, I woke up to the sweet aroma of coffee and the sound of Veronica humming in the kitchen. I rubbed my tired eyes, feeling my muscles ache from the previous day's events.

As I made my way to the kitchen, I couldn't help but feel a sense of gratitude wash over me. Veronica had been my rock, and I didn't know what to do without her.

She greeted me with a smile and a cup of steaming coffee. 'How did you sleep?' she asked.

I shrugged, taking a sip of the coffee. 'Not great,' I admitted. 'But I'm still alive. Sheba spoke to me in a dream, giving me so much information. It isn't clear, and I can't make heads or tails out of it. She said I will get a clue to clarify it all.'

Veronica's expression turned serious. 'We need to keep going,' she said. 'We can't give up.'

I nodded in agreement, feeling a sense of determination rise within me. 'You're right,' I said. 'We'll keep going until we find out who's behind all of this.'

We spent the rest of the morning brainstorming and trying to develop new leads or ideas. But no matter what we did, we couldn't find anything that made sense.

Finally, as the afternoon wore on, we decided to take a break and walk in the park. The sun shone; stretching our legs and getting fresh air felt good.

As we walked, we talked about everything that had happened, trying to piece together any new information or clues. But once again, we hit a dead end.

Finally, as the sun set, we returned to my office, exhausted and defeated.

But then, as we were about to give up hope, a strange envelope was pushed under the door, with no return address and my name written in bold, cursive handwriting.

I opened the envelope and pulled out a single sheet of paper. As I read the words scrawled across the page, my heart began to race.

It was a message from the kidnappers, taunting and daring me to try and find them. They claimed they

watched our every move and we would never catch them.

But then, at the bottom of the page, there was a glimmer of hope—a tiny clue hidden in the form of a cryptic message that only I could decipher.

As I read the message, my mind began to spin with possibilities. It was a long shot, but I knew that this clue could be the key to solving the entire case.

Veronica saw the look in my eyes and knew that something had shifted. ‘What is it?’ she asked, her voice shaky with excitement.

I held up the paper, my heart pounding in my chest. ‘I think I know where the kidnappers are hiding,’ I said. ‘And I have a plan.’

Veronica's eyes widened as I explained my plan to her. It was a risky move, but it was our only option.

‘We have to be careful,’ she said, her voice barely above a whisper. ‘If we get caught, we could be in serious trouble.’

I nodded, feeling the weight of the situation bear on me. But I also knew that we had no other choice.

We had to find the kidnappers and stop them before they hurt anyone else.

We spent the rest of the night preparing for the mission ahead. We packed our bags, checked our weapons, and reviewed the plan until we both knew it like the back of our hands. I made sure the crystal was in my pocket.

As the sun rose, we set out on our journey, our hearts pounding with excitement and fear. We travelled by car, stopping only to rest and eat.

Finally, after what felt like hours, we arrived at our destination. It was a run-down motel on the outskirts of Shrewsbury, surrounded by a thick forest.

I parked the car and turned to Veronica. 'Are you ready?' I asked, my voice barely above a whisper.

She nodded, her eyes shining with determination. 'Let's do this.'

We exited the car and went to the motel, our hearts racing with anticipation. As we approached the door, I took a deep breath and pushed it open.

The first thing that hit us was the smell. It was musty and stale as if nobody had been inside for

weeks. But then, as our eyes adjusted to the dim light, we saw them.

The kidnappers were sitting at a table in the corner of the room, surrounded by piles of money and strange coins. They looked up as we entered, their faces twisting into surprise and anger.

I held up my hands, my heart pounding in my chest. 'We just want to talk,' I said, my voice as calm as possible.

One of the kidnappers, a tall, muscular man with a scar down his cheek, stood up from the table. 'Get out of here,' he growled, his voice low and menacing.

But I didn't back down. I had come too far to give up now. 'We know what you're doing,' I said, stepping forward. 'And we're not going to let you get away with it.'

The other kidnapper, a woman with wild, curly hair, also stood up, her eyes narrowing. 'What do you think you'll do?' she sneered. 'We have the upper hand here.'

But then, something strange happened. As I looked around the room, I saw that the piles of money and coins had begun to glow. They pulsed with

otherworldly energy, filling the air with a strange, humming sound.

And then, all at once, the room began to shake. The walls cracked and splintered, and the ceiling caved in, raining down debris and dust on our heads.

I reached out to grab Veronica, pulling her close as we huddled under a table for cover. The kidnappers were nowhere to be seen.

As the shaking subsided, I looked up, my heart racing. What I saw before me was not the run-down motel we had entered but a strange, otherworldly realm with swirling colours and weird creatures that I couldn't even begin to describe surrounding us.

Veronica and I looked at each other, our eyes wide with shock and disbelief. 'What the hell is going on?' she whispered.

But then, a voice spoke out from the chaos around us. It was a deep, rumbling voice that seemed to come from all directions simultaneously.

'You do not belong here,' the voice said. 'Leave now, or suffer the consequences.'

I looked around, trying to pinpoint the source of the voice, but there was nothing to see but swirling colours and strange shapes. 'Who are you?' I called out, my voice shaking.

'I am the Guardian of the Nexus,' the voice said. 'And you have trespassed into my realm. Leave now, or face the consequences.'

I turned to Veronica, my heart pounding in my chest. 'We can't leave,' I said. 'We have to find the kidnappers.'

But Veronica shook her head. 'We can't stay here,' she said, her voice firm. 'We have to go back.'

I nodded, feeling a sense of defeat wash over me. But then, as we turned to leave, there was a blinding flash of light. When my eyes cleared, I saw that the kidnappers had appeared before us, their eyes glowing with otherworldly energy.

'We're not going anywhere,' the scarred man growled. 'You're not going to stop us.'

Suddenly, the crystal in my pocket began to pulse with a bright, white light. It grew brighter and brighter until the crystal's glow illuminated the entire room.

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The kidnappers recoiled, shielding their eyes from the light. And then, they were gone all at once, vanishing into thin air.

I looked around, feeling a sense of relief wash over me. ‘What just happened?’ I asked, my voice shaking.

Veronica shook her head, her eyes wide with wonder. ‘I don't know,’ she said. ‘But I think we just defeated the kidnappers.’

I looked down at the crystal in my hand, feeling a sense of awe wash over me. It was unlike anything I had ever seen before.

And then, a voice spoke out from the chaos around us. It was the same deep, rumbling voice that we had heard before.

‘You have proven yourselves worthy,’ the voice said. ‘And now, you may leave this realm.’

And then, all at once, we were back in the run-down motel, surrounded by the debris and dust from the collapsing ceiling. But the kidnappers and the gold coins were gone, and we had succeeded in our mission.

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As we returned to our car, I couldn't help but think about the strange, otherworldly realm we had stumbled upon. It was a place of mysticism and wonder unlike anything I had ever seen.

And I knew that I would never forget that night or the strange events that had transpired within the walls of that motel room.

Veronica melted into my touch that night and welcomed me into her bed. I held her face in my hands and looked long into her clear, green eyes as I entered her body for the first time in months. We made love slowly and passionately until we drifted to sleep, exhausted and fulfilled.

The following day, we awoke entwined in each other's arms, the sunlight filtering through the curtains and casting a warm glow upon us. As I watched Veronica sleep, her face serene and content, I couldn't help but feel a surge of gratitude for having her by my side. We had endured so much together and faced insurmountable challenges, yet here we were, more vital than ever.

CHAPTER NINE



I was up first and made Veronica a cup of tea in bed. I was feeling relieved that we had such good sex the night before and hoped that we were now together again. But Veronica spoiled my hopes by saying, 'It was wonderful making love last night, but I want you to understand that no matter how much I love you, I want to be sure we can live an ordinary life together. I want an end to all this violence and magic. So, let us proceed cautiously. I will let you know when I am ready to commit myself to you.'

Veronica's words took me aback. It was true that the crystal had filled our lives with danger and uncertainty, but I couldn't just give up on the mystical and magical. It was a part of who I was, and I couldn't ignore it.

But I didn't argue with Veronica. Instead, I nodded and kissed her forehead. 'I understand,' I said, my voice soft. 'We'll take things one step at a time.'

And so, we went about our day, trying to put the previous days' events behind us. We ate breakfast, walked in the park, and shopped for new clothes.

It was a typical day, and being a regular couple for a change felt good.

That night, after dinner, we cuddled up on the couch to watch a movie. But I couldn't focus on the film. My mind kept wandering, replaying the events of the previous days over and over again.

Veronica must have sensed my unease because she turned to me with concern. 'What's wrong?' she asked.

'I don't know,' I said, my voice tight. 'I just have this feeling that something bad might happen.'

Veronica's expression softened. 'We've been through a lot,' she said. 'But we've always come out on top. We'll get through whatever happens, too.'

I nodded, feeling slightly reassured. We went to bed, but my unease didn't dissipate. As the night wore on, I constantly checked the locks on the doors and windows, ensuring everything was secure.

And then, in the middle of the night, it happened.

A loud banging on the front door awakened me. I sat up in bed, my heart pounding. 'Who is it?' I called out, my voice shaking.

But there was no answer. The banging only grew louder and more insistent.

I looked over at Veronica, who was still sleeping soundly. I didn't want to wake her, but I knew I couldn't any longer ignore the banging.

Slowly, I got out of bed and went to the front door. As I approached, I could hear muffled voices on the other side. I hesitated for a moment, my hand hovering over the doorknob.

But then, suddenly, the door burst open, and a group of armed men stormed into the room. I stumbled back, my heart pounding in my chest as they began to search the room, tearing it apart in their search for something.

Veronica was jolted awake and sat up in bed, her eyes wide with fear. 'What's going on?' she asked, her voice shaking.

I didn't have a chance to answer her. One of the men had found what they were looking for - the crystal that had led us to the otherworldly realm.

'That's it,' he said, holding it up triumphantly. 'We've finally found it.'

I didn't know what to do. The men outnumbered us, and it was clear they would do whatever it took to get their hands on the crystal. How they knew of its existence or location, I did not know. I could only guess that the White family was behind it.

But then, I remembered something. Something that the Guardian of the Nexus had said to me.

‘You have proven yourselves worthy.’

I didn't know how, but somehow, I had to prove myself worthy again. I had to show these men we wouldn't let them take the crystal without a fight.

And so, I stood up, my heart racing with fear and adrenaline. ‘You're not taking that crystal,’ I said firmly.

The men laughed, their guns pointed at us. ‘You don't have a choice,’ one of them sneered.

But I wasn't about to back down. I had to protect Veronica and the crystal at all costs. I took a deep breath and closed my eyes, focusing all my energy and willpower on the crystal.

And then, something extraordinary happened. The crystal began to glow, and a burst of energy shot

out, knocking the armed men off their feet. I opened my eyes, feeling a sense of power coursing through my veins, like I was in a trance, knowing this was the moment to act.

I charged at the men, my fists flying. I could feel the crystal's energy fueling me, making me stronger and faster. I took down the first man with a swift punch to the jaw and then turned to face the others.

They were all on their feet now, pointing their guns at me. But I wasn't afraid. I knew that I had the power of the crystal on my side.

And then, suddenly, there was a blinding flash of light. I shielded my eyes, and the armed men were gone when the light faded. The crystal was back in my hand, pulsing with energy.

Veronica stood up from the bed, her eyes wide with wonder. 'What happened?' she asked, her voice shaking.

'We did it,' I said, feeling a sense of pride and relief wash over me. 'We defeated the armed men.'

Veronica smiled, her eyes shining with admiration. 'You're amazing,' she said, wrapping her arms around me. 'I'm so lucky to have you.'

At that moment, I knew that Veronica had accepted me and the magical powers of the crystal. She was willing to be by my side, no matter what.

There was a loud crash outside, followed by a car speeding away. I followed Veronica to the window and saw a car leaving in the distance.

We had defeated the men who were looking for the crystal. Now, we could try to live an ordinary life and channel all our energies back into our business and our quest to save the environment. These were things that we had severely overlooked since we found the crystal.

But to my dismay, it seemed that the word was out about the power of the crystal. Rumours began to circulate about the extraordinary properties of the crystal we had in our possession. People whispered of its ability to grant unimaginable wealth and power to whoever possessed it. The once-hidden relic became the target of jealous eyes, drawing unwanted attention from all corners.

CHAPTER TEN



Our relationship blossomed again. It was like a honeymoon all over again. Veronica seemed to have put her doubts aside and accepted me for who I was.

We had a lot of catching up to do at work. Veronica virtually had to start from scratch with her marketing research. Fortunately, the staff kept the used clothing orders steady but failed to add more customers.

I immediately tried to drum up trade and was successful with two old clients in Nigeria.

What I found strange was that I received four offers of crude oil that first day back at my desk. I had to repeatedly explain that we did not deal with fossil fuels, as their use caused harm to the environment.

Some gentlemen offering me the oil were insistent and tried to explain the vast amount of money I was turning away. I attempted to tell them I would not know where to sell the oil. One of them was abusive and said, 'We know you have a buyer! You have done oil deals before.'

I then realised these were brokers again. They had no oil but were trying to find out who my buyer was. They would then use the information to find crude oil, using my client to authenticate the transaction.

It made me think of John White and the first barter deal we did with Libyan oil long ago. That was a runaround of brokers, so it was typical of how John White operated, and it made me suspicious. The other problem was since the incident with the kidnapers. More people knew that we had the crystal, making us an even more attractive target to criminals.

I phoned Detective Officer Bailey, explained my suspicions, and asked if he could check whether John and Paul were still in prison. He promised to call me back as soon as he had news, as their sentence was in America. He explained. 'I must ask a friend to check for me as a favour.'

Later that afternoon, Officer Bailey called, and sure enough, they were released three months ago.

I felt my heart sink as I hung up the phone, the news ringing in my ears. John and Paul were out of prison, and I couldn't shake the feeling that they were coming for me. My former friend and business partner, Paul - did he plan this with his father all

along? That was a bitter thought to swallow. But for now, it was only a matter of time before they discovered I had the crystal and came after it.

Veronica noticed my mood and approached me, putting a comforting hand on my shoulder. ‘What’s wrong?’ she asked softly.

I took a deep breath and told her about my conversation with Officer Bailey. She listened intently, her face growing pale as I spoke.

‘We have to be careful,’ she said, her voice barely above a whisper. ‘They could be watching us right now.’

I nodded, my mind racing with the possibilities. We had to find a way to protect ourselves and the crystal, but how?

And then, I remembered something the Guardian of the Nexus had said to us. ‘You have the power to protect what is important to you.’

I closed my eyes and focused all of my energy on the crystal. I could feel the power coursing through my veins, knowing I could use it to protect us.

Veronica looked at me, her eyes wide with wonder. 'What are you doing?'

'I'm using the power of the crystal to create a protective shield around us,' I said, my voice strong and confident.

And then, something unique happened. The crystal began to glow again, and a bright light shot out, enveloping us in a protective shield.

I opened my eyes, feeling a sense of power and confidence. 'We're safe now,' I said, smiling at Veronica. 'No one can harm us while this shield is up.'

Veronica looked around, awe-struck. 'I can't believe it,' she said, her voice barely above a whisper. 'This is incredible! But how long will it last?'

I shook my head. 'I don't know,' I said, my mind racing with possibilities. 'I wish the crystal came with a manual. I do not know its capabilities, but we must make the most of it while it lasts.'

We spent the next few hours making plans, discussing how best to protect the crystal and ourselves.

Veronica and I worked together, using all the resources at our disposal to create a place where we could keep the crystal safe. We installed cameras, alarms, and other security measures—ensuring nobody could get close to the crystal without our permission.

We lived in fear for weeks, constantly looking over our shoulders and wondering if John and Paul would come after us. But the crystal remained safe, and our shield held firm.

Eventually, we let our guard down, and life returned to normal. We focused on our business, growing it to new heights. And we were happy, knowing that we had protected what was essential to us and that we had proven ourselves worthy of the power of the crystal.

But in our minds, we knew that danger still lurked out there, waiting to strike. And we realised that we had to remain vigilant, always ready to protect what was most important to us.

One night, as we were closing shop, I noticed something strange. The crystal was dimming, its pulsing energy fading away. I couldn't believe it; our shield was failing. I rushed over to the crystal and touched it, trying to channel my energy into it again, but it was useless. The crystal had lost its power.

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Veronica appeared beside me, her eyes filled with worry. ‘What’s happening?’

‘The crystal,’ I said, my voice barely above a whisper. ‘It’s lost its power.’

We both knew what this meant. Our shield was gone, and we were vulnerable once again.

We quickly packed up and left the building, making our way to our car. We kept glancing over our shoulders as we drove home, wondering if John and Paul were watching us.

When we got home, we rushed inside, locking the doors and windows. We were both shaking with fear, wondering what would happen next.

Just then, we heard a knock on the door. We froze, our hearts pounding in our chests. Who could it be at this time of night?

I went to the door, trying to stay calm. When I opened it, I saw a man standing there, his face hidden in the shadows.

‘Who are you?’ I asked, my voice trembling.

The man stepped forward, his face still hidden. 'I'm here for the crystal,' he said, his voice low and menacing.

I knew then that it was John. He had finally found us, and we were in grave danger.

Without a second thought, I shut the door and returned to Veronica. 'It's John,' I whispered urgently. 'He's here for the crystal.'

Veronica's face went white as a sheet, but she quickly regained her composure. 'We have to get out of here,' she said, her voice firm. 'We'll take the crystal with us.'

We grabbed the crystal and ran to the rear exit, but it was too late. John and his men had already surrounded us.

We were overwhelmed. 'There's no escape,' John said, his voice cold and calculated. 'Hand over the crystal, and we'll let you live.'

I looked at Veronica, and she nodded. We knew what we had to do.

I stepped forward, holding out the crystal. 'Take it,' I said, my voice steady. 'Just let us go.'

John took the crystal, his eyes gleaming with triumph. 'Good choice,' he said, his voice dripping with sarcasm. 'Now get out of here before I change my mind.'

He didn't need to say it twice. We ran out of our home and into the night, not looking back until we were sure we were safe.

As we drove away, Veronica placed a hand on my shoulder. 'We'll find a way to get the crystal back.'

I nodded, my mind already racing with possibilities. We had lost the crystal, but we hadn't lost our determination. We would do whatever it took to regain it, even if it meant going up against John and his men.

For now, though, we needed to lay low and devise a plan. We couldn't risk being caught by John again.

We drove to a nearby hotel and checked in, using fake names and paying in cash. We kept a low profile, staying in our room and only leaving for essentials.

Days turned into a week, and we still hadn't devised a plan to regain the crystal. We were starting to lose hope.

But then, one night, I had a dream. In the dream, I saw the crystal pulsing with energy, and I heard Sheba's voice whisper to me, telling me how to get it back.

When I woke up, I knew what we had to do. I told Veronica about my dream, and she agreed it was worth a shot.

We spent the next few days preparing and gathering the necessary tools and materials. And then, we put our plan into action.

We tracked down John's hideout, a warehouse on the outskirts of London. Using the tools we had gathered, we broke in and went to the back of the warehouse, where we knew they hid the crystal.

When we found it, we saw that armed guards surrounded the crystal. But we were prepared. We had brought weapons of our own and were ready to fight.

And fight we did. We took down the guards individually, using our determination to overpower them. And then, we had the crystal back in our hands.

We escaped, running out of the warehouse and into the night. We drove away, elated and relieved.

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As we drove, I looked over at Veronica and smiled. We had done it. We had gotten the crystal back and proven we were a powerful force.

But I knew this wasn't the end. John and his men would come after us again, and we had to be ready. We couldn't let our guard down again.

So we drove to a new location: a small town called Folkestone on the Kent coast. I explained to Veronica, 'This is where I come from, but it was long ago.' To remain anonymous, we rented a warehouse under a newly formed limited company's name and through the same company, we bought a house. We could keep the crystal safe in this place and build our new life. We worked tirelessly to create a new shield that was even stronger than before.

Veronica felt safe here and agreed to marry me. We had a quiet wedding in the local registry office, choosing not to advertise our whereabouts.

As we settled into our new lives, we knew that our past could come back to haunt us at any moment. But we were no longer afraid. We had the crystal, and we had each other. We were determined to protect what was most important to us, no matter what.

As time went by, we started to relax. We had built a life here, and it was good. But one day, I received a phone call that would change everything.

‘Hello?’ I answered.

‘It’s John,’ came the reply. ‘I need to see you.’

I hesitated. We had been so careful, but now it seemed like our past had caught up with us again.

Like a fool, I agreed. ‘Fine,’ I said finally. ‘Where?’

‘I’ll send you the details,’ John said before hanging up.

Veronica looked at me, concern etched on her face. ‘What did he want?’

‘He wants to see us,’ I said, my voice heavy. ‘We have to go. I bet he has made some plan to steal the crystal.’ Veronica stared at me. ‘You are a soft-hearted man. Can’t you say no? You know he will only use you for his benefit.’

Our hearts pounding, we made our way to the address John had sent us. When we arrived, John was waiting for us, his face unreadable.

‘What do you want?’ I asked, my voice cold.

‘I need your help,’ John said, his voice low. ‘There's something big happening, and I need your help to stop it.’

I looked at him incredulously. Asking our help after stealing the crystal and probably also behind Mr Hardman's murder all these years ago. ‘Why should we help you?’ I asked.

‘Because if you don't, we'll all be doomed,’ John replied, his voice urgent. ‘Trust me on this.’

Even though I did not trust him, something in John's voice made me pause. I knew he wasn't the type to ask for help unless necessary. And if what he is saying is accurate, we couldn't just sit back and let it happen.

Besides, our lives had become so entwined with John and Paul's. And as Veronica frequently stated, I was a soft touch for anyone who needed help.

‘Fine,’ I said finally, my voice resigned. ‘What do you need us to do?’

John explained the situation to us, and we realized how big of a threat we faced. A group of terrorists had

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gotten their hands on a powerful weapon, planning to use it to cause mass destruction. John and his team were the only ones who had a chance of stopping them, but they needed our help, knowing that I had the power of the crystal.

I don't know how much John told me was true, But I decided to go along for the ride.

We agreed to join forces with John and spent the next few days planning and preparing. We trained marshall arts, perfecting our hand-to-hand combat skills with his men, honing our skills and learning new ones. And then, when we were ready, we set out to stop the terrorists.

The mission was dangerous and intense, but we worked together seamlessly. With John's leadership and our skills, we were able to infiltrate the terrorists' base and stop them before they could carry out their plan.

We stood in the aftermath, panting and covered in sweat when it was all over. But we were alive, and we had succeeded.

John looked at us, a sense of gratitude in his eyes. 'I couldn't have done it without you,' he said, his voice sincere.

I nodded, feeling a sense of camaraderie with him that I never thought was possible. 'We couldn't have done it without you as well,' I said.

And then, something unexpected happened. John reached out his hand, and I shook it without hesitation. It was a gesture of respect and trust that had been missing between us for so long.

As we walked away from the site, I smiled at Veronica. We had come a long way since our first encounter with John, and now we had a newfound respect for each other. We had learned that sometimes, the most unexpected allies could be the ones you needed the most. But we also realised, now that John has found us, that it could have blown our cover.

We returned to our new life in Folkestone, relieved that the threat was over. But we knew there would always be another threat, another challenge. And we were ready for it.

As we settled back into our routine, I realized our experiences had changed us. We were no longer just two people trying to survive in a dangerous world. Veronica and I were a team, a force to reckon with. And together, we would face whatever came our way, no matter how difficult or dangerous.

Veronica looked at me, her eyes full of love and pride. 'We make a pretty good team,' she said softly.

I smiled, knowing that she was right. 'We do,' I replied, grateful for everything that had led us to this moment.

As we stood together, watching the sunset over the ocean, I knew we had something special. We had love, trust, and the knowledge that we could face anything together. And that was the most crucial thing in a world where danger lurked around every corner.

But as we basked in the peaceful tranquility of our new life, it seemed that danger always found a way to rear its ugly head.

One evening, we sat in our living room, snuggled up on the couch, watching a movie. Suddenly, there was a knock on the door.

We both froze, our eyes meeting in silent communication. We weren't expecting anyone, and we rarely had visitors out here.

I got up from the couch, my heart pounding, and went to the door. I looked through the peephole and saw a face I did not recognize. My hand instinctively went to the pistol I kept hidden in my waistband.

‘Who is it?’ I asked, my voice steady.

‘It’s me,’ came a voice I couldn’t quite place.

‘Who?’ I repeated, my hand tightening around the grip of my gun.

‘It’s Sarah Brown,’ the voice said again, suddenly it clicked. Sarah was a school friend I hadn’t seen in years.

I hesitated, unsure whether to trust her. But after a moment, I decided to open the door. Sarah looked different from how I remembered her; her hair was shorter, and her eyes were haunted. But she was still the same person.

‘Sarah,’ I said, surprised. ‘What are you doing here? How did you find me?’

‘I need your help. Some strange force led me to this address for safety,’ Sarah said, her voice urgent. ‘Can I come in?’

I looked at her for a long moment, weighing my options. I didn’t know what she wanted help with, and I couldn’t trust her completely. But something in her eyes made me believe she was telling the truth.

‘Fine,’ I said finally, stepping aside to let her in.

Sarah stepped into the entrance room, her eyes darting around nervously.

‘What's going on?’ Veronica asked, looking just as wary as I felt.

‘I need your help,’ Sarah repeated, her voice shaking slightly. ‘I'm in trouble and don't know who else to turn to.’

‘What kind of trouble?’ I asked, my hand still on my gun.

‘Can we go somewhere private? I don't feel safe here in the hall,’ Sarah said, looking over her shoulder.

I nodded, knowing that we needed to hear her out. ‘Fine,’ I said, gesturing for her to follow us. ‘We'll talk in the study.’

We made our way to the study, and I closed the door behind us, cutting off any potential eavesdroppers.

‘Okay,’ I said, turning to face Sarah. ‘What's going on?’

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Sarah took a deep breath, her hands shaking slightly. 'I'm in trouble with some people,' she said, her voice barely above a whisper. 'They're after me, and I don't know what to do.'

'Who are these people?' Veronica asked, her eyes narrowing.

'I can't say,' Sarah replied, shaking her head. 'But they're dangerous and won't stop until they get what they want.'

'What do they want?' I asked, trying to keep my voice calm.

'Something that I have,' Sarah said, trembling. 'Something that I can't give them.'

I could see the fear in her eyes, and I knew she was telling the truth. But I couldn't risk our safety by getting involved with something this shrouded in mystery.

'I'm sorry, Sarah,' I said, my voice firm. 'But we can't get involved in something we don't understand. We need to know what these people are after.'

Sarah looked at me, her eyes pleading. 'Please,' she said, her voice breaking. 'I have nowhere else to turn.'

I know it's been many years. Some mystical force led me here.'

I hesitated, feeling the weight of her words. But I knew we couldn't risk our safety for some unknown object.

'I'm sorry,' I repeated, shaking my head. 'We can't help you if we don't know what's happening.'

Sarah's face fell, and I could see the desperation in her eyes. 'Please,' she said again, her voice barely a whisper. 'I'll explain everything. Just give me a chance.'

I looked at Veronica, silently asking for her opinion. She gave me a nod, and I turned back to Sarah.

'Fine,' I said. 'Explain everything to us, and then we'll decide what to do.'

Sarah took a deep breath and then began to speak. She told us about a rare artefact that she had come into possession of, something certain people were willing to kill for. She didn't know what the artefact was, but she knew it was important enough to put her life in danger.

As she spoke, I could feel a sense of unease creeping over me. It sounded like something out of a movie, not something that could happen in real life.

‘So, what do you need us to do, and why don’t you go to the police?’ Veronica asked, breaking the silence.

Sarah looked at us, her eyes pleading. ‘The police will not believe me. I need you to help me keep this artefact safe and a safe place for my protection.’

I hesitated, unsure whether to trust her. But something in her eyes made me believe she was telling the truth.

‘Okay,’ I said finally. ‘We’ll help you. But we need to keep this quiet. We don’t know who we’re dealing with yet.’

Sarah nodded, looking relieved. ‘Thank you,’ she said. ‘Thank you so much. I knew I could count on you.’

As Sarah spoke, I could feel the weight of the situation settling in. It wasn’t just some ordinary problem. We were dealing with dangerous people, and our lives were on the line.

‘Okay,’ I said, taking charge. ‘We need to come up with a plan. But first, we need to secure the artefact. Do you have it with you?’

Sarah nodded, reaching into her bag and pulling out a small wooden box. She opened it, revealing a glinting object that looked like a gemstone.

‘What is it?’ Veronica asked, leaning in for a closer look.

‘I don't know,’ Sarah admitted, shaking her head. ‘All I know is that it's important.’

I took the box from her, examining the object inside. It was smooth and calm, radiating a strange energy I couldn't quite place. ‘It's another crystal,’ I exclaimed in surprise. ‘Where did you get it from?’

‘It belonged to my late husband. Before he died, he asked me to take great care of it, and it will care for me.’

‘We need to get this somewhere safe,’ I said, closing the box and tucking it under my arm. ‘Veronica, can you call in some favours and find us a secure location?’

Veronica nodded, picked up the phone, and got to work. I turned to Sarah, my expression serious.

‘Can you tell us anything else about these people who are after you?’ I asked.

Sarah shook her head. ‘I don't know much. Only that they're dangerous and will stop at nothing to get what they want.’

I could see the fear in her eyes, and I knew we needed to take this seriously.

‘Okay,’ I said firmly. ‘We're going to protect you and your crystal. It was the crystal that led you here. We also have a crystal, and we know people are trying to find it.’

‘We will work together to keep both you and the crystals safe.’

Sarah nodded, looking grateful. ‘Thank you,’ she said. ‘Thank you so much.’

As we waited for Veronica to finalize the secure location, I couldn't help but feel a sense of unease. We were in uncharted waters, dealing with unknown people willing to kill for these crystals. But I knew we had to stay strong and protect what was right.

Finally, Veronica got off the phone. 'I've got a location,' she said. 'It's a private facility customers use to store valuable objects. They've got top-notch security, so it should be safe.'

'Good,' I said, feeling relieved. 'We'll take the crystal there now. Sarah can stay with us until we figure out what to do next.'

We made our way to the facility, our nerves on edge as we navigated through the city. Sarah clutched the box tightly, her eyes darting around as if she expected someone to jump out at any moment.

As we arrived at the facility, a guard approached us. 'Can I help you?' he asked, eyeing us suspiciously.

'We need to store something here,' I said, holding up the box. 'It's of great value, and we must keep it safe. My wife made arrangements by phone.'

The guard nodded, checking our credentials and then taking the box from me and examining it. 'Okay,' he said finally and returned the box. 'Follow me.'

We followed the guard through several hallways and doors until we arrived at a large vault. He opened the door, revealing a room filled with shelves and lock boxes.

‘You can store it here,’ he said, pointing to an empty shelf. ‘It’ll be safe.’

I handed him the box, watching as he locked it away in a safety deposit vault, and gave Sarah the keys. A sense of relief washed over me as I realized the crystal would be secure.

‘Thank you,’ I said to the guard. ‘We appreciate your help.’

He nodded, closing the vault door and locking it. ‘Just doing my job,’ he said with a small smile.

As we made our way out of the facility, I could feel the tension in my body slowly dissipating. We had done it. The crystal was safe, for now, at least.

‘What do we do now?’ Veronica asked, breaking the silence.

‘We need to figure out who these people are and why they want the crystal,’ I said. ‘We also need to keep Sarah safe. They’ll be coming after her next.’

Sarah nodded, looking worried. ‘What do I do?’

‘You stay with us,’ I said. ‘We’ll keep you safe.’

I knew we were in for a long night when we returned home. We needed to devise a plan and figure out who we were dealing with. I first thought John and Paul White were behind this plan to obtain Sarah's crystal. Perhaps he has given up on us, thinking Sarah might be an easier target, not knowing that her crystal had less power.

But for now, Sarah's crystal was safe, and that was all that mattered. I kept my crystal in my pocket in readiness for emergencies.

As we settled into our house, I could feel the exhaustion setting in. It had been a long day, and we all needed rest. But I knew we couldn't let our guard down. We were in the middle of a dangerous situation, and we needed to stay alert.

'I'll take the first watch,' I said, sitting on the couch and pulling out my crystal. I held it tightly, feeling its energy flow through me.

Veronica and Sarah both nodded, Sarah settling down in the other room. I could hear Veronica's soft breathing as she drifted off to sleep.

I sat there, my mind racing as I tried to piece together what was happening. Who were these people

after the crystal, and why did they want it so badly? And what was John White's role in all of this?

As I sat there, lost in thought, I felt a sudden shift in the energy around me. It was subtle, but I could feel it. And then I heard a soft click, like someone picking a lock.

I stood up, my heart racing as I pulled out my gun. I crept towards the door, listening carefully. And then I heard it - the sound of footsteps, approaching slowly.

I tensed, preparing myself for a fight. And then the door burst open, and a figure stepped inside.

I aimed my gun, ready to fire. But then I saw who it was - John White.

He held his hands up, a smirk on his face. 'Well, well, well. Look who we have here,' he said, grinning. 'I'm looking for a young lady called Sarah. But I see you've beaten me to her.'

I lowered my gun, feeling a wave of anger wash over me. 'What the hell are you doing here?' I demanded.

John White stepped further into the room, his eyes flickering as he took everything in. 'I came to talk,' he said. 'I think we need to have a little chat.'

I glared at him, my hand tightening around the grip of my gun. 'I don't trust you,' I said. 'Why should I listen to anything you have to say?'

John shrugged, unfazed. 'Because I might be able to help you. You and I both know that they are after the crystal. These people will not stop until they get what they want. And they're not just after Sarah's crystal - they're after yours too.'

I froze, my mind racing. 'How do you know that?'

John smirked. 'I have my sources. But that's not important right now. What's important is that we work together again to stop them.'

'Think about it,' he said, taking another step forward. 'You're in way over your head. You have no idea what kind of power that crystal holds. But I do. And I can help you harness that power. Together, we could be unstoppable.'

I shook my head. 'I don't trust you, John. You're too greedy, and I'm not willing to risk everything to gain some power.'

‘Suit yourself,’ he said with a shrug. ‘But know this - the people after you are just the beginning. There are much more dangerous forces at play here. Forces that even the crystal can't protect you from.’

I felt a chill run down my spine at his words, but I refused to show weakness. ‘We'll handle whatever comes our way,’ I said firmly.

I eyed him suspiciously, still unsure if I could trust him. I wondered how he knew the strength of the crystal. I bet he did not even realise a superior race from a different dimension created these crystals to help us save the earth's environment. It was not by some evil force to give the crystal holder superpowers.

The crystal's superpowers only became a reality when dark forces came to take over this planet. These evil dark forces now wanted the crystals to gain more power.

I felt that these evil forces guided John White; that was why he knew so much about the crystal - and where was Paul? But he did have a point - we needed all the help we could get to make it out of this alive.

I realised that John White's end game was to get hold of the crystal, but at least I knew I could handle

him. 'Fine,' I said finally. 'But if you do anything to betray us, I'll kill you myself.'

John smiled, his eyes glinting. 'I wouldn't expect anything less.'

And with that, we settled in for a long night of planning. We didn't know what would happen next, but one thing was for sure - we were in it together.

Tension filled the room as we deliberated our next move. John had brought with him some valuable information about the people who were after the crystals. He had been tracking them for a while and had some leads on their whereabouts.

Veronica and Sarah sat across from us, their faces etched with worry. We all knew that time was running out, and needed to act fast.

'So, what's the plan?' I asked John.

He leaned forward, his eyes serious. 'We need to get to the source. The people after the crystals are just pawns. There's someone else pulling the strings.'

'Who?' I asked.

John shook his head. 'I don't know yet. But I feel they're more dangerous than we can imagine.'

'And how do we find them?' Veronica asked.

'We follow the money,' John replied. 'Someone is funding the people after the crystals. We need to figure out who that is.'

It sounded like a solid plan, but I couldn't help feeling uneasy. What chance did we have if there was someone more dangerous out there?

'We'll need backup,' I said. 'We can't take it on alone.'

John nodded. 'I have some contacts who owe me a favour. They'll help us.'

'And what about Sarah?' Veronica asked. 'She can't come with us. It's too dangerous.'

Sarah looked crestfallen, but she knew it was true. She had already been through too much.

'I'll keep her safe,' John said, his eyes meeting mine. 'I owe you that much, at least.'

I nodded, grateful for his offer. However, I knew how his scheming mind worked by befriending Sarah. Sarah had a crystal he could fall back on if anything went wrong with Veronica and me. We still had a long way to go, but at least we had a plan.

As we continued to discuss our next moves, I couldn't shake the feeling that something was off. John had been too willing to help us and too knowledgeable about the crystal's power. And what about Paul? Why was he still missing?

John knew too much about the crystals and the group after it. Perhaps he was working for this group and using them to worm into our confidence, pretending to help us. But I pushed those thoughts aside, focusing on the task at hand. We had to stop whoever was after the crystals, and we had to do it before it was too late.

As the night wore on, we finally came up with a plan. John would take Sarah to a safe location while we tracked down the funding source. It was risky, but it was our only option.

We parted ways, each of us knowing that the next few days would be crucial. I had no idea what was in store for us, but I knew one thing for sure - I was in it until the end.

With that, I headed off to sleep, my mind racing with thoughts of the future. Little did I know, the real battle was only beginning.

We gathered our weapons the next morning and set off on our mission. We followed John's lead as he led us through the back alleys and streets of London, his eyes scanning the area for any signs of danger.

We finally arrived at an abandoned warehouse on the outskirts of the city. John had received a tip that this was the location of the people after the crystals. We approached the building cautiously, our guns at the ready.

As we stepped inside, darkness surrounded us. The only light came from a single flickering bulb in the corner of the room. We could barely make out the shapes of the people before us.

'Who are you?' a voice called out, breaking the silence.

'We're the ones you've been looking for,' John replied, his voice steady.

There was a moment of hesitation before a figure stepped forward. It was a tall and muscular man with a menacing look in his eyes.

‘What do you want?’ he asked, his tone hostile.

‘We want to know who's behind all of this,’ I said, my gun still trained on him.

The man smirked. ‘You think we're just going to tell you?’

‘We don't have time for games,’ John said, his eyes narrowing. ‘Tell us what we want to know, or we'll make you.’

The man laughed, but it was an uneasy sound. I could see the fear in his eyes as we closed in on him. John put his firearm to the ready, placing a bullet in the chamber.

The man could see we were serious. ‘Fine,’ he said finally. ‘I'll tell you what I know. But you're not going to like it.’

And with that, he began to spill his secrets. He told us about a powerful group of individuals controlling everything from behind the scenes – the politicians, the corporations, and even the media. They were the real power in the world, and they had been after the crystals for years.

‘Why?’ I asked, my mind racing with the implications of his words.

‘Because they want control,’ the man explained. ‘They believe that whoever controls the crystal can control the world.’

It was a terrifying thought, but it made sense. The world was a mess, torn apart by greed and corruption. And now, there was a chance for someone to gain ultimate power.

‘We have to stop them,’ I said, my voice firm.

‘But how?’ Veronica asked. ‘We don't even know who they are.’

‘We'll find out,’ John said, his eyes determined. ‘And we'll do whatever it takes.’

And with that, we left the warehouse, our minds filled with a new sense of purpose. We had a long road ahead but were determined to get through.

As we returned to our base, I couldn't help but feel a sense of dread. The world was in chaos, and we were the only ones who could stop it. But we were only a small group against a shadowy organization with seemingly limitless resources.

But we had something they didn't - the crystals. And I wasn't afraid to use them.

The next few weeks were a blur of activity. We tracked down leads, gathered information, and prepared for the fight of our lives. John had called in all his favours, and we had a team of skilled fighters and tech experts.

But even with all of our preparations, it wasn't enough. The organization was always one step ahead of us.

It wasn't until we received a tip from an unlikely source that everything changed. A former organisation member had defected and was willing to give us the inside scoop on their plans. Knowing that if we did not destroy the organisation, they would kill him as a defector.

We met with him in a dark alley, our guns ready. But to our surprise, he was unarmed. He looked scared and desperate like he was on the verge of breaking down.

'I want out,' he said, his voice shaking. 'I can't do this anymore.'

We didn't trust him, but we listened anyway. He told us about a secret meeting that was taking place in a hidden location. The top members of the organization would be there.

'It's a trap,' Veronica said, her eyes narrowing. 'They know we're coming.'

But we had no choice. We had to take the risk.

We set off in the dead of night, our hearts pounding with anticipation. We knew that this was it - the showdown.

We saw that the man was right when we arrived at the building. There were guards everywhere, all armed to the teeth. But we were prepared. We had our weapons, and I had the crystal. We were ready to fight.

We burst into the room, guns blazing, catching the organisation members off guard, and we were able to take them out quickly.

But then we saw him- Paul. He was there, tied up and surrounded by guards. We rushed over to him, untying and helping him to his feet.

'Are you okay?' I asked, my heart racing.

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‘I’m fine,’ he said, eyes scanning the room. ‘We have to get out of here.’

But it was too late. The guards had regrouped, and they were closing in on us. We were trapped.

That's when we heard a female voice. ‘Well, well, well,’ the voice said, dripping with sarcasm. ‘Look who decided to crash the party.’

And there she was - the leader of the organization. She was a woman, tall and elegant, with piercing blue eyes that seemed to see right through you.

‘You’re too late,’ she said, her voice cold. ‘The crystal will be ours.’

‘Not if we have anything to say about it,’ John said, his eyes blazing.

The woman laughed. ‘You’re all so predictable. You think you can waltz in here and destroy what's rightfully ours?’

‘We don't care about what's rightfully yours,’ I said, my gun still trained on her. ‘We care about what's right.’

The woman rolled her eyes. ‘How noble. But it’s too late. Our plan is already in motion. Soon, we’ll have everything we’ve ever wanted.’

‘What plan?’ Paul asked, his eyes narrowing.

The woman smiled. ‘You’ll find out soon enough.’

And with that, she signalled to her guards, and they immediately rushed forward. I could feel the crystal pulsating in my hand, giving me incredible power.

I looked around the room, taking in the chaos. Veronica was fighting off two guards simultaneously, displaying her martial arts skills. John was firing shots left and right, taking out guards as they approached. Paul was wielding a large metal pipe, swinging it wildly at anyone who came near him.

I took a deep breath and focused on the crystal. I could feel its energy coursing through my veins, filling me with strength and power. I raised my gun and fired, taking out two guards with a single shot.

The woman was still standing, her arms folded across her chest as she watched the chaos unfold. She looked amused at our attempts to stop her.

‘You can't win,’ she said, her voice dripping with arrogance. ‘We have the power and the resources. And we will stop at nothing to achieve our goals.’

I didn't reply. I just raised my gun and fired. The bullet hit the woman square in the chest, knocking her to the ground.

‘No!’ one of the guards cried out, rushing to her side.

But it was too late. The woman was dead.

The room fell silent. The guards stopped fighting, looking around in confusion. We had won.

But the victory was short-lived. Suddenly, there was a loud explosion. The room shook, and debris rained down on us from above.

‘We have to get out of here!’ John yelled, grabbing Paul by the arm.

We exited the room, rushing through the hallway as the building crumbled around us. We could hear the sound of sirens in the distance, signalling.

Veronica and I found ourselves outside the building, but John and Paul were nowhere to be seen. They had taken our transport and made a run for it.

I commented to Veronica. 'I should have followed my instincts and not trusted John. He and Paul have planned this all along. I bet we will not see them again. Now they have Sarah, they will find her crystal. We better make our way home safely and avoid the police.'

Veronica nodded in agreement. 'We can't trust anyone anymore,' she said, her voice filled with anger. 'But we still have our crystal. We can use it to take down anyone who tries to come after us.'

I nodded in agreement, feeling a sense of determination wash over me. We may have lost a battle, but the war was far from over.

We returned home, the crystal still pulsating with energy in my hand.

As we walked through the dark streets, I silently searched my thoughts. We had just taken down the leader of a dangerous organization, but at what cost? John and Paul had betrayed us, and who knew what they planned to do with the crystal?

Veronica must have sensed my thoughts as she spoke up. 'We need to be careful,' she said, eyes scanning the shadows. 'We don't know who else could be after us.'

I nodded in agreement, my hand still tightly gripping the crystal. It was our only hope - our only weapon against those seeking to harm us.

As we walked, I noticed a figure lurking in the shadows. At first, I thought it was just my imagination playing tricks on me. But then I saw the glint of a knife in his hand.

'Veronica, look out!' I yelled, pushing her out of the way just in time.

The figure lunged at me, his knife cutting through the air. I dodged to the side, raising the crystal in defence. A blast of energy shot out, hitting the figure square in the chest. He fell to the ground, motionless.

Veronica rushed over to me, her eyes wide with shock. 'What was that?' she asked, staring at the crystal in my hand.

'I don't know,' I said, my heart racing. 'But it saved our lives.'

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We continued walking, now even more aware of our surroundings. The crystal hummed in my hand, almost as if it guided us.

As we neared our home, I noticed a car parked outside. It looked familiar, but I couldn't quite place it. As we approached, the car door opened and out stepped a woman.

'Hello there,' she said, smiling warmly at us. 'My name is Jane, and I've been sent to help you.'

I eyed her suspiciously. 'Who sent you?' I asked.

'The same people who gave you the crystal,' she replied. 'They want to make sure you're safe.'

Veronica and I exchanged a glance, unsure whether to trust her. But something about Jane's demeanour put me at ease. Maybe because she didn't seem armed, or it was intuition.

'Okay,' I said, nodding. 'What do we do now?'

Jane gestured towards the car. 'Get in. We'll take you to a safe location.'

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I hesitated, glancing back at our home. But I knew we couldn't stay there while the enemy was after us. So I nodded, and we climbed into the car.

Jane drove us to a location outside of the town, a secluded cabin in the woods. She led us inside, where we found a small living room with a fireplace and a kitchen with all the essentials.

'You'll be safe here,' Jane said, smiling reassuringly at us. 'I'll leave you to rest and recover. And don't worry, I'll be in touch.'

And with that, she left us alone in the cabin, the crystal still pulsating in my hand.

Veronica and I spent the next few days holed up in the cabin, trying to devise a plan. We knew we couldn't stay there forever but didn't know where to go or who to trust.

But during our time in the cabin, something strange happened. The crystal started to glow, its energy becoming more potent each day. And then, one night, it happened.

The crystal began to speak to me. At first, I thought I was going crazy. But then I realized that the crystal

was communicating with me telepathically, filling my mind with information and knowledge.

It told me about the people who had given us the crystal, a secret organization dedicated to protecting the world from evil. It informed me about John and Paul and their true intentions, how they had been working with the woman we had killed.

Most importantly, it told me about the power of the crystal, how to manipulate time itself, and how to bend it to our will. It also shared with me that they had temporarily neutralized Sarah's crystal, which was now worthless.

I shared this information with Veronica, and we agreed it was time to take action. We couldn't let John and Paul get away with what they had done, and they still had Sarah.

'I am not bothered by John and Paul's unethical methods to obtain the crystal. They will never get the opportunity again. But Sarah needs to be saved before they realise her crystal is worthless. When they discover this, there will be an all-out try to get the real thing. It could also be a good time for us to move to a new location.'

Veronica's face was a mask of determination and fear. 'I won't budge for John White or his followers. We must get Sarah back before they find out her crystal is not powerful. Who knows what they'll do to her when they learn the truth? Torture, maybe? But first, we must figure out where to begin looking for her.'

'Well, John's hangout has always been in Washington, but I do not know if Sarah has a passport,' I replied uncertainly. 'Maybe I should ask the crystal.'

I extended my hand towards the crystal, feeling its energy flowing. The crystal glowed brighter as if in response to my touch. I focused on Sarah's location, and the crystal began to pulse in my hand. After a few moments, I saw where she was - a small town on the outskirts of Washington.

'I know where she is,' I told Veronica excitedly. 'We have to go there and save her.'

Veronica nodded, her eyes shining with determination. 'Let's do it.'

My fingers hovered over the crystal, its smooth surface reflecting the dim light of our bedroom. Veronica stood beside me, her expression a mixture

of curiosity and concern as she waited for my decision. The elders from the other realm told us only to use the crystal for emergencies. Still, I couldn't ignore the temptation to travel to Washington instantly.

However, the fear of something going wrong gnawed at me. Without an instruction manual or previous experience with the crystal, there was no telling what could happen. I decided to stick with traditional travel arrangements. It wasn't worth risking our safety for a quick trip through a magical crystal.

CHAPTER ELEVEN



We packed some essentials and headed to Heathrow Airport to catch a flight to Washington, ready to face whatever challenges lay ahead. I felt confident with the crystal and Veronica at my side. The war may not be over, but we were ready to fight until the end.

The flight was uneventful, and we discussed our action plan. Knowing that John and Paul were dangerous, we also knew we couldn't let them get away with what they'd done.

When we arrived in Washington, we headed straight to the small town where they held Sarah. It was a quiet, sleepy town, and I couldn't help but wonder how John and Paul ended up there. But I pushed those thoughts aside and focused on the task at hand.

I could feel my heart racing as we approached the house where they held Sarah. Knowing this could be a trap, we also knew we had to try.

Veronica and I snuck up to the house, trying to be as quiet as possible. We heard shouting and

screaming from inside, and my heart sank. We had to act fast.

With the crystal in my hand, I blasted open the front door, the energy from the crystal tearing through the wood. Veronica and I rushed inside, ready for a fight.

But the scene that greeted us was not what we were expecting.

We found John and Paul tied up, their mouths duct-taped shut. Sarah was standing before them, her crystal in her hand. She looked up as we entered, her eyes wide with surprise.

‘What...what are you doing here?’ Sarah asked, her voice shaking.

‘We're here to rescue you,’ Veronica said, eyes scanning the room for other threats.

‘But I don't need rescuing,’ Sarah said, confusion etched on her face. ‘John and Paul brought me here to help them with something. I don't know what it is, but they said it was important.’

Veronica and I exchanged glances, unsure what to do next. Why were John and Paul tied up if Sarah

wasn't in danger? We slowly scanned the room, looking for any sign of a threat. But nothing was out of the ordinary, only the three of us standing in an empty room.

Suddenly, something caught my eye - a strange symbol on the wall, etched into the wood panelling, hidden from sight.

I signalled Veronica to come closer to help me decipher its meaning.

After a few minutes of studying the symbol, we found clues about what it might mean - but still no answers about John and Paul's plan or why they were here.

We questioned them, but they didn't give us much information other than that they were working for someone else who wanted them to steal something from this house. We assumed it had a connection with the wall's mysterious symbol.

'Can you untie us?' John mumbled through his duct-taped mouth.

Veronica approached them cautiously, her hand on the hilt of her knife. She cut the duct tape from their mouths, and they explained.

‘We...we found out that Sarah's crystal was useless,’ John said, his voice trembling. Our buyer was furious and tied us up. We promised them we would try to get your crystal for them as we knew you were coming to find Sarah. We hoped to use her as bait to get the genuine crystal from you. But then, something happened.

‘Something?’ I asked, my eyes narrowing.

Paul nodded, his eyes darting around the room. ‘Something...strange. We talked to Sarah about our plan, and then the room shifted like we were in a different place. And then we saw her crystal, it was glowing.’

Sarah nodded, her expression serious. ‘I don't know what happened, but my crystal started to glow brighter than ever before. And then, it was like I could see everything. I knew what John and Paul were planning, where you were, and everything. I refused to untie them.’ Veronica and I exchanged another glance.

Before I could ask, she continued. ‘I figured it out,’ she said, her eyes excitedly shining. ‘The crystals aren't just objects; they're alive. And I could communicate with them.’

I could hardly believe what I was hearing. Sarah had figured out how to communicate with her crystal. Until now, she had only had feelings and dreams. It must be like something out of a sci-fi movie for her.

But as I looked at John and Paul, tied up and helpless, I knew that questions still needed to be answered.

‘Why were they trying to get the crystal?’ I asked Sarah, my voice stern. ‘What was their plan?’

Sarah's expression turned dark. ‘They were going to sell it to the highest bidder,’ she says. ‘They didn't care about the consequences. They just wanted the money.’

‘I bet every crook worth his salt is now trying to get hold of the crystal to help them in their evil deeds,’ I remarked with a scowl.

I felt a surge of anger at their greed. But as I looked at John and Paul, I saw a hint of fear in their eyes. They had not realised the power of the crystal until now.

I remarked to protect the crystal. ‘For your information, the crystal is worthless to other people. Its power only works for the person to whom they give

it. But now, I bet nobody would believe that because of your efforts to sell the crystal.'

We decided to let them go. The power of the crystal frightened them enough not to pursue the crystal anymore, I hoped. Besides, what would be the point of reporting them to the police with such an unlikely story about crystals? They would not believe us.

We left John and Paul behind and headed to Washington, where Sarah, Veronica, and I caught a plane back to Heathrow Airport in England.

The biggest question now was whether we should move from our current location or brave it out with the help of the crystal.

As we headed back to England, I couldn't shake off the thought of what Sarah had discovered about the crystals. The idea that they were alive was mind-boggling but presented many questions. The other crystals out there? What other powers did they possess?

Veronica noticed the furrow on my forehead and asked, 'What's on your mind?'

‘Sarah's discovery about the crystals,’ I replied, my voice low. ‘Do you think there may be more crystals out there? And if that’s the case, what other powers do they possess?’

‘Anything is possible,’ Veronica replied, her eyes thoughtful. ‘But we need to focus on the crystal we have now. We have to protect it at all costs.’

I nodded in agreement. The crystal was the key to our survival. We had to keep it safe.

We contemplated moving from our current location when we arrived back in England. We couldn't take any chances but decided that with the crystal in our care, we should be able to care for ourselves. Besides, we should be doubly protected with Sarah and her crystal staying with us.

But we still didn't know how to use its power or fully understand the crystal's capabilities. We knew that if the crystal had been in the wrong hands, it would have caused a lot of destruction and chaos. So, we sought help from mystics or spiritualists who could help us understand more about the crystal's power and use it for good.

One of its remarkable powers was the power of healing sicknesses and injuries.

We soon found someone who claimed to be able to communicate with the spirit world and learn more about the crystal's powers. She said she could invoke a ritual connecting us with the crystal energetically so that we could explore its true potential.

The session was intense but also filled with wondrous details as we dived into its past and present lives, unlocking further secrets. We learnt of its ancient origins and realised just how powerful this small piece of rock was in our hands, capable of transforming our world for the better if used wisely.

We even had the opportunity to travel to other places, such as sacred sites and ancient monuments known to be imbued with potent energies, to learn more about the crystal's power and how to use it for different purposes.

The possibilities seemed endless, and we quickly became infatuated with learning all these grand crystals' secrets. We followed our teacher's instructions carefully, listening to her stories and teachings about the ancient world while exploring the mystical powers of our newfound crystal companion. Every day was filled with adventure as we searched for new knowledge, unearthing magical secrets from centuries past.

At times, we also encountered challenges on our journey towards understanding; yet, through patience and perseverance, we eventually overcame these obstacles and grew stronger each time. Ultimately - much sooner than anticipated - we had obtained a thorough understanding of what this crystal could do and how it could help us protect ourselves from harm or danger.

It filled us with joy upon discovering the true power of this remarkable crystal. We were thankful that they had given us such an incredible gift.

Little did we know when we first found the crystal that its potential was far beyond our wildest expectations.

Using our newfound knowledge, we set up protective wards and spells to keep ourselves safe in our current location. With the help of Sarah's crystal, we created a magical barrier of energy around our home that kept us hidden from any harm. In addition, we cast additional spells to keep any harmful or malicious energies away from us.

The crystal proved more potent than ever, and it felt like no force could penetrate its enchantments. We felt an overwhelming sense of peace and security,

knowing we had created the best possible sanctuary for ourselves and those who remained close to us.

We had finally found a way to keep ourselves safe with the help of this remarkable crystal. It seemed fitting that it had been here with us all along - waiting for us to discover and unlock its true potential.

Unfortunately, some criminals soon tested our sense of security when they came to our home to try and steal the crystal. Despite the powerful wards we had put in place, they were still determined to take it from us. We quickly realized that using its magic again was the only way to protect ourselves and the crystal.

Using Veronica's guidance, I channelled the energy from within the crystal, allowing it to fill me with strength as I cast a powerful protection spell around our home. The spell glowed brightly in response - radiating a deep purple hue that almost seemed like an extension of the crystal itself. The criminals quickly found themselves repelled by this mystical force and could not breach our ward of protection.

We watched as their attempts failed time after time until eventually giving up and retreating into the night, leaving us safe from harm but more determined than

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ever to continue learning about this remarkable crystal's true power!

We soon discovered that the crystal could also protect other people and locations. We spread its enchantments far and wide, creating protective spells for our family and friends so that they could also benefit from its magical capabilities. We also used it to create shields around our warehouse and staff to ward off any harm or danger that threatened them.

With each spell we cast, it felt like we were strengthening the crystal's power even further, allowing us to achieve miraculous outcomes quickly. Its capabilities now stretched beyond what we believed was possible, and we were filled with joy knowing how much good this powerful source of magic could bring into our lives!

Even so, as we continued exploring and experimenting with the crystal's power, we realised its true potential was still unknown. We decided to set out and find more information on the crystal's origins and its true potential. Our curiosity drove us as we began searching for answers to questions that had long been unanswered.

We headed off into the night, relying on our newfound knowledge of the crystal's abilities to keep

us safe as we ventured into unknown territory. Along the way, we encountered many magical creatures - some hostile and others welcoming - each eager to share their knowledge about this remarkable power source.

We also uncovered numerous clues and tales about the mysterious origin of this potent crystal, piecing together the fragments of history until eventually understanding its true purpose. We felt a deep connection with it now - almost as if it were an extension of ourselves - like it was part of our journey all along!

Finally, after weeks of searching, we uncovered enough evidence to piece together what this magical crystal was: an ancient gem filled with enchanted spells from a bygone era, a powerful jewel capable of incredible feats when wielded correctly, its secrets hidden for centuries.

We were amazed by its capabilities, and our respect for it grew as we realised the responsibility that came with its use. We learned how to use its power responsibly and carefully, understanding that its magic could be damaging and destructive if misused.

We soon found ourselves using the crystal in many different ways - from healing injuries to helping us

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navigate challenging situations without too much danger or harm. With each new spell we cast, our skill and understanding of this remarkable power source grew stronger until we eventually felt confident in our abilities to harness it safely and effectively.

The wisdom gained through this journey has been invaluable - not only had we unlocked the true potential of the crystal's magic, but we also found a deep appreciation for each other's differences while learning to work harmoniously. In a way, the crystal had become an extension of ourselves, a reminder that even when faced with significant challenges, our strength can always rise to turn them into something beautiful.

However, one of the drawbacks of being so connected with this magical power source was that everybody tried to befriend us, both the good and the evil. It became difficult to trust any of these so-called friends - many were looking for opportunities to use the crystal's power for their selfish gains or, worse, manipulate us into using it for their ends.

Fortunately, through our journey, we learned how to discern between those who wished us good and those who wanted to do us harm, becoming better at detecting any attempts at manipulation. We also learned how important it was to protect ourselves

from malicious intentions and not let anyone exploit our newfound connection with the crystal's magic.

Overall, our journey in search of knowledge and understanding was invaluable; it enriched our lives in ways we could never have imagined and taught us valuable lessons about trusting our instincts, protecting those around us and, most importantly - never underestimating the power within ourselves!

We were still unsure as to the capabilities of the crystal power over distances. We knew how effective it was when holding it in our hands. It did not seem to have lasting powers if you asked the crystal to protect someone far away, as in the case of Sarah.

But to my shock, Sarah had backed away from the lessons we'd learned and seemed adamant about going on her private path. Veronica believed it was typical for a woman like Sarah to search for autonomy with the prospect of a relationship and love in the future.

The issue was that her crystal had to go wherever she did.

Finally, we helped her find an apartment in the centre of Folkestone. We wished her luck before

ensuring that our doors would always be open if she needed help.

Veronica and I continued to improve our knowledge about the crystal.

We felt a deep satisfaction over the knowledge we had imparted to her. We were confident that she would no longer be vulnerable to malicious forces. To seal her safety, we gifted her a powerful enchantment that would protect her from any attempts at manipulation by evil entities.

Veronica and I then decided it was time for us to move on. We continued our journey in search of new knowledge and understanding. Together, we explored many different cultures, learning their secrets and unlocking the power within each one of them. We connected with people from all walks of life, discovering more about ourselves - how strong our bond had become and how good it felt to be in love and depend on each other. To my delight, Veronica announced that she was pregnant. We were both excited and went out for a meal in the best hotel to celebrate.

I knew my responsibilities had shifted and that Veronica must keep a low profile for her and the baby's safety.

Her part in our business doing marketing research was blossoming, and she would need more staff. I encouraged her to hire two extra people to help her run the department and prepare for the future.

She needed to take time off work when needed without jeopardising the business.

A few months later, we learned that Paul had moved in with Sarah - it was clear that the bond between them had grown while we were apart. What troubled me was that Paul despised me, and I suspected he was not in love with Sarah but only after her crystal to use for financial gain.

What also concerned me was that wherever Paul was, you could be sure that John was not far behind. The two of them were planning a criminal act against Veronica and me.

It drove us to explore ways to use the crystal's magic to strengthen our defensive capabilities. Veronica and I studied books, scrolls and other documents on magical rituals, incantations and enchantments that we could use as a shield against evil forces. We also consulted with people who had encountered similar situations as we had and learned from their experiences.

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As we grew more familiar with different forms of magic, we experimented with combining spells to create new ones that were even stronger than before. We soon mastered creating customized enchantments for specific purposes, such as protection or healing, and strengthening our abilities twofold.

It was invaluable in ensuring our safety from evil forces seeking to harm us.

Eventually, after months of hard work and dedication, Veronica and I could use the crystal's power in ways we never imagined possible - thanks to its unique strength! Together, we had developed robust defensive measures against any dark force or entity - which gave us immense peace of mind knowing that whatever happened out there - we were always safe within our circle.

We encountered Paul and John attempting to use Sarah's crystal for their gain and had to use our newfound powers to defeat them. We knew we had become strong enough to face them head-on. We used our combined magical abilities to put up a powerful shield of protection around us. We then began conjuring various spells from the books we had studied, which created an intense light that blinded Paul and John - giving us just enough time to overpower them before they could do any damage.

Our magical attempts successfully dispelled their attempts at using the crystal for evil purposes and returning it to Sarah's hands, saving her freedom again.

Veronica and I looked at each other with a sense of satisfaction - knowing that despite all odds, we were victorious! We felt immense pride in successfully using our knowledge of magic to protect ourselves against menacing forces. That moment served as a reminder of how far we had come since learning about the power of crystals - it was genuinely remarkable what two people could accomplish when driven by love!

We were doubtful that returning the crystal to Sarah would end Paul and John's evil activities, and we prepared ourselves for whatever revenge they may have in mind. We enlisted our magical allies to help keep a close eye on Paul and John. At the same time, we pursued more knowledge on how to strengthen our defensive capabilities further. We also ensured that we always had a solid action plan in case any unforeseen danger arose.

Despite all this caution, Veronica and I still had hope that one day, these two villains would see the error of their ways and turn away from a life of crime - but until then, we were determined to stay vigilant and ready to end their malicious plans!

I said to Veronica. 'We are so busy protecting ourselves from evil people like John and Paul that we neglect why they gave us the crystal in the first place. We're supposed to use its powers to help save the planet from environmental destruction by stopping burning fossil fuels and pollution.'

'Why don't we go on a week's holiday to refresh our minds? South Africa should be a great place. We need some relaxation from all this. The sun is always shining, and it is far enough away from the evil that is pursuing us.'

Veronica smiled, her eyes twinkling as she said. 'Yes, please, let's. It will do us a world of good to get away for a while to recharge our batteries.'

CHAPTER TWELVE



We packed our bags and headed off to Cape Town. We fastened our seatbelts on the flight as the plane hummed to life. We watched the city disappear through the tiny oval window beside us and gave each other a knowing look. We whispered about using the crystal's energy to protect Mother Earth from destruction and restore her to her former glory. An invisible thread of purpose bound us together as we flew further away.

As soon as we stepped off the plane in South Africa, the captivating beauty of our surroundings hit us. We visited Table Mountain, taking in its rocky panoramas and rolling vistas extending far beyond the eye's sight. Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens was a vibrant tapestry of colour, life and scent that transported us to another world. Robben Island embodied the tragedy of the past while reminding us of hope for a brighter future free from exploitation. Nature's majestic beauty inspired and reminded us of our responsibility to protect it everywhere we go.

We then hired a car and decided to drive along the Garden Route and experience some of the stunning landscapes that make South Africa a special place for

nature lovers. Everywhere we looked were creatures going about their lives - elephants roaming through the bush and whales leaping out of the ocean - showcasing just how precious life is on this planet!

As we drove north, we visited numerous towns, such as Knysna, George, and East London, until we reached sunny Durban, where we stopped for a few days. After that, we headed to Scottborough to spend the rest of our holiday basking on the beach and enjoying the sunshine. The peaceful relaxation, lying on the white sandy beach, inspired Veronica with an idea of how to use our crystal to help us in our fight against environmental destruction. She suggested that if harnessed correctly, its powers could be used as a magical shield around vulnerable areas like forests and rivers - protecting them from further harm caused by human activities like deforestation or pollution! We both agreed that this would be an ideal way of utilizing its strength without putting ourselves in danger, and South Africa was just the place. Full of natural, unspoiled beauty spots that needed protection.

We both agreed that it would be on our to-do list and pledged our return to do our bit to help the environment.

With the experience of a shared passion under our belts, we returned home via Johannesburg with

renewed optimism for our mission and love for each other.

It was like a second honeymoon; I had never seen my wife so revitalized and full of hope again.

Veronica let out a wistful sigh as she gazed at the dreary scene unfolding before her at Heathrow Airport: a thick layer of grey clouds looming overhead, with a steady drizzle falling onto the tarmac below. In stark contrast, she couldn't help but reminisce about the vivid and ever-changing hues of the South African sky - a deep, endless azure blue during the day, speckled with countless twinkling stars at night. Veronica and I had fallen head over heels for the country during our week-long stay.

But now, with heavy hearts, we gathered our baggage and trudged through the bustling airport to make our way to St Pancras station. From there, we caught a train back to Folkestone before finally hailing a taxi to take us home. The journey seemed almost never-ending compared to the thrilling adventures we had just experienced in South Africa.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



We had just set foot in our home when we heard the shrill ring of the telephone. In a split second, my heart sank as I listened to the voice on the other end - it was the police. Someone had brutally stabbed Sarah and left her for dead. She lay fighting for her life in William Harvey Hospital, miles away from us in Ashford.

I knew my alibi was solid, but I still felt a chill run down my spine when they asked me about my whereabouts the night before- we had been thousands of miles away, safe in South Africa for the past week. 'We will be there this afternoon,' I stated as I hung up.

We arrived at the hospital where a patient police force and Paul waited for us, hatred radiating from Paul's sneering face. I didn't know what he had said to the authorities. Still, they insisted on interrogating me before allowing me into Sarah's confined quarters. They kept Paul in the room while questioning me and only permitted Veronica to visit Sarah inside her private sanctuary.

My heart was pounding as the police glared at me, but I breathed a sigh of relief when I remembered that

my passport could prove I was out of the country when they attacked Sarah. The police then shifted their gaze to Paul, who had also conveniently been away in London while someone ruthlessly assaulted Sarah.

As Paul confirmed his statement, the police begrudgingly allowed us access to Sarah's private room. The conversation between Sarah and Veronica stopped as we entered, a wave of suspicion washing over the room. I turned to Sarah, my heart racing with worry, 'Are you in pain? Who could have done this to you?' Before she could answer, Paul angrily interrupted me, towering over us with clenched fists. 'You're not asking the questions here. Stay out of it.'

The tension in the room was palpable, crackling with unspoken words and secrets. I couldn't help but feel like more was happening beneath the surface.

The air crackled with tension as we sat in Sarah's room. Paul sat silently in his chair, glaring at us as Sarah lay weakly in her bed, clutching his hand tightly. We said a quick goodbye and hastily exited the room, leaving Paul with a stony expression. Veronica proudly held Sarah's crystal up as we drove away, its shimmering surfaces catching the sunlight as she spoke. 'Sarah asked me to keep this safe for her. She knows that they're after it, and she knows who attacked

her. She'll fill the police in on the details when she's out of the hospital and feels stronger.'

It took two weeks to recover before the doctor discharged Sarah. All this time, Paul guarded her like a convict, not allowing anyone near her. He rarely left her side and seemed in absolute control, commanding the nurses and doctors around him as if he were their superior. He even chased out Veronica when she tried to visit Sarah one day.

A few days later, Paul had to go to London. Sarah requested that Veronica accompany her on a walk around town. As they moved through the bustling streets, she took a deep breath and revealed, 'I am sure now who attacked me that night.' Tears welled in her eyes as she looked up at Veronica pleadingly and continued, 'And I know why.' She begged Veronica not to tell the police what she was about to say; 'Please don't do it unless something happens to me.' In a trembling voice, Sarah explained her theory - Mrs Hardman, Paul's mother, had stabbed her out of misguided greed for the priceless crystal. It was the wish of the crystal itself that Sarah should pass it onto Veronica for safekeeping so that its power wouldn't fall into the wrong hands. So, Sarah had bought an exact copy for herself, ensuring they were safe while Veronica kept the original.

Later that day, Veronica relayed Sarah's conversation to me. Her words echoed in my head like thunder as she recounted their walk. 'Mrs Hardman is Paul's mother?!' I gasped, my heart pounding in confusion. Could it be that Mr Hardman, the man viciously murdered when Paul and I began our venture, was her husband? A chill ran through me at the thought of this mysterious connection.

I ran my hands through my hair in frustration, gritting my teeth. 'This is an interesting turn of events. I bet the police would love to hear this story. However, if somebody leaked this, Sarah's life would not be worth a dime. We had better be careful about what we say. Sarah did the right thing by making a copy of her crystal. We better place some protective field around her now that she has no crystal.'

Veronica continued her story, her voice full of awe. 'I had a dream last night. A woman with long blond hair appeared and said she was Sheba, the guardian of the crystals. She congratulated me for now being the keeper of the crystal. She encouraged me to use the crystal's power to help protect the planet from environmental destruction.'

I nodded in understanding. 'I have met Sheba before, and I agree with her; we can do a lot of good working together on that project.'

As far as Sarah is concerned, I agree that we should not let the police hear about Paul's mother. I will hire a private investigator to discreetly check the relationship between Paul, John White and Mrs Hardman. Having all the facts at our fingertips will be wise if something goes wrong.

I explained to Veronica that I was on good terms with Barry and Hammond, a private Investigator firm. 'Tim Barry is one of their investigators and a business partner. He used to work for MI5 and is completely trustworthy.'

Veronica cautioned, looking worried. 'Please be careful. I do not want to feel responsible if something happens to Sarah.'

I smiled at Veronica. 'I'll handle this with the greatest of care. We do not want to be responsible if something happens to Sarah, and we have done nothing.'

I immediately phoned Tim Barry and made an appointment for the following day. His office was in London, and I would need to catch a train.

The following morning, I was in Tim Barry's office at 10 am, thanks to the high-speed train service between Folkestone and London.

I told Tim what happened, leaving out the part about the crystal. If I told him all about that, he might think I have a screw loose.

The most important thing I needed was the background of John and Paul White and Mr and Mrs Hardman. How did they come together, and what devious deals were they involved in?

Two weeks later, Tim called. 'The report you requested is ready. When can you come over to discuss it? Unfortunately, seeing as it's too confidential, I cannot post it to you.'

I made an appointment for the following day. If you wanted information on anyone, Tim was your man. He had such good contacts you would think he still worked for MI5.

I arrived at Tim's office the following day and sat in the waiting area. After a few minutes, Tim called me into his office and confirmed what Sarah had told us. Paul was indeed the son of Mrs Hardman, the wife of the late Mr Hardman, who was murdered while Paul was my work partner. Paul's biological father, John White, had a relationship with Mrs Hardman before Mr Hardman appeared on the scene.

He continued. 'Both Paul and John White seemed out of work and badly in financial trouble. They seem to be unreliable when doing business with.'

After taking in all the facts Tim presented me with, I realised it put an entirely new dimension on Mr Hardman's murder. It could be any one of the three of them.

I explained to Tim what had happened to Sarah and my thoughts that it could even be Mrs Hardman. She seemed to be handy with a knife. Or it could be all three of them. 'Would you mind investigating a bit deeper for me? I would like to know who was responsible.'

Tim nodded. 'I understand your concerns. I'll dig deeper and see what else I can find out. But we have to be careful. If we get too close to the truth, it could put Sarah's life in danger.'

I agreed, knowing that Sarah's safety was our top priority. 'Yes, we have to be cautious. But we can't let this go. We must find out who did this to Mr Hardman, with proof of who attacked Sarah.'

Tim nodded again and began typing on his computer, pulling up more information about the

case. 'I'll do more digging, but it might take some time. It is a complicated case with a lot of moving parts.'

I thanked him and left his office, feeling a sense of unease. The more I learned about the case, the more I realised how dangerous it was. If we weren't careful, we could end up in grave danger.

Over the next few weeks, Tim continued investigating the case, digging up more information about John White, Paul White, and Mrs Hardman. He discovered they were all involved in a shady business dealing in precious stones and that Mr Hardman had stumbled upon something threatening to expose them.

Tim also discovered that Paul had a history of violence and that he had spent time in prison for assault. It was concerning news as Sarah was still in his care, and we didn't know if he would react aggressively towards her if he found out we were digging into his past.

Despite the risks, we continued the investigation, determined to find the truth. It was a risky move, but we knew Sarah's safety would be even more dangerous if we didn't act. We had to tread carefully, but we also had to be persistent.

Another worry was Veronica's advanced pregnancy, making her an easy target for any criminals searching for the crystal. Luckily, everyone knew that Paul possessed Sarah's crystal. As long as he believed he had control over it, I didn't think they would target Veronica for my crystal. It gave me a slight sense of relief regarding Veronica's safety.

I pondered the idea of Veronica returning to her parents in America until after the baby was born. Still, she would not hear any of it. She insisted, 'My place is with you, and that's final. I am not going anywhere.' However, Veronica's mother ultimately decided to visit, wanting to be present for the delivery of her only daughter's child.

We prepared for Veronica's mother's arrival as the due date approached. We wanted to ensure she had a comfortable and safe stay with us, especially with the ongoing investigation. I hired a security team to keep an eye on the house, Veronica and her mother, ensuring no harm came to them.

Despite the added security, tensions were high as Veronica's due date grew closer. We couldn't help but worry about what would happen once the baby was born, especially with the crystal in our possession. We knew we had to closely monitor Paul and his movements to ensure Veronica's and the baby's safety.

Finally, the day arrived, and Veronica went into labour. We rushed her to the hospital, where she gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. It was an emotional moment for all of us, and we were overjoyed to have a new addition to our little family.

We decided to call him Thomas, after Veronica's late brother. He was the most adorable little bundle of joy, with dark hair and super powerful little hands and fingers, clinging tightly to my finger when I presented it in his hand. He had the strength of a footballer when he kicked his little feet. We were all over the moon with him and loved him dearly.

Veronica was soon discharged from the hospital and continued her recovery at home with the help of her mother. We were grateful for Veronica's mother's assistance as Thomas woke up regularly, and someone had to rock him back to sleep after feeding.

Veronica's strength returned as the weeks passed, and she could easily care for baby Thomas. Meanwhile, I closely watched the investigation into the Whites and Hardmans. At the same time, I was keeping a watchful eye on Veronica and our baby's well-being.

One afternoon, Sarah stopped by to visit Veronica and Thomas. She congratulated them on their

recovery and the birth of our son. Still, she also had shocking news - Paul had discovered that Sarah's precious crystal was a fake. And he was not happy about it.

As Veronica's mother prepared to return home to America, I immediately implemented heightened security measures at home. The safety of Veronica and our newborn son was my utmost priority. They were both so delicate, like porcelain dolls needing constant safeguarding. Every door and window was locked and bolted, and cameras and sensors monitored every corner of the house. I could not bear the thought of any harm coming to them in their fragile state. I needed to ensure their protection from any potential danger.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



Three weeks later, the police found Sarah stabbed to death in her apartment. Her neighbour alerted the police after realising that she had not put her food waste out for collection during this time, and there was no answer when knocking on her door.

Again, it was a frantic attack with multiple stab wounds, similar to Mr Hardman's murder. Paul was nowhere to be found.

I phoned Tim immediately. He advised me to give the police complete details regarding Paul, his mother, and John.

I contacted the local police station and asked to speak to the officer in charge of the murder enquiry. It was Chief Inspector Williams. He immediately responded and promised to meet me at my home in ten minutes.

I had hardly replaced the phone when I heard a police car siren approaching.

Two gentlemen in plain suits entered the front gate, one elderly but well-built, the other young and

slender. They were both about six feet tall. I presumed that the elderly one was Chief Inspector Williams. I was correct. The younger officer introduced himself as Detective Sergeant Dunbar.

They were both friendly and polite. I invited them in, and the Chief Inspector immediately fell in love with our baby Thomas, whom I deposited on his lap while Veronica made tea.

Veronica returned with our tea and took Thomas away for another feed. I then told the Chief Inspector the whole story, including my suspicions of Paul and John White on the murder of Mr Hardman. The only information I left out was about the crystal.

I also informed the Chief Inspector that I hired a private investigator to check out the family and Paul's movements. Paul was displaying such violent tendencies. Then there was Paul's mother, who interested me as Sarah accused her of the previous attack. I gave him Tim's phone number and address.

Chief Inspector Williams thanked me and promised. 'What you told me is interesting and pertinent to the case. I assure you I will investigate every aspect of this family. It seems that the sooner we remove them from society, the better. I will also contact your private investigator when I return to my

desk.’ Before he left, he asked if he could hold Thomas once more. Veronica handed Thomas over to the Inspector, who smiled, ‘I love children when they are so tiny. They are so trusting and don’t mind us old folks holding them.’

After Chief Inspector Williams left, Veronica smiled. ‘What a lovely man.’

I agreed and went to the phone to tell Tim the Chief Inspector would contact him.

About a week later, Chief Inspector Williams returned to have another word with me. ‘Thank you for the information you gave me on my last visit. It was most helpful, but I have discovered that you omitted some details that seem relevant to the case. There has been some mention of crystals and that it is what this murder is all about.’

‘Chief Inspector, I did not mention the crystals, as I thought you would find it unbelievable and that the original murder of Mr Hardman was years before the crystals even existed. These people are murderers for greed and jealousy, regardless of what object they are after-whether it’s money or a crystal.’

Chief Inspector Williams smiled as Veronica walked into the room with baby Thomas. ‘May I hold

him while I listen to your story? Babies are a miracle and sometimes hard to believe, but here he is. Look at his eyes, focusing on me. He has become ever so alert since my last visit.'

Veronica warned. 'Try not to shake him too much; he has had a feed and may get sick over you.'

I interrupted and said, 'Veronica will tell you about finding our crystal while I make us a lovely cup of tea.'

I know it sounds cowardly, but I thought there was more chance that Chief Inspector Williams would believe the story if Veronica told it.

Chief Inspector Williams shifted in his armchair, the leather creaking as he settled into a more comfortable position. He leaned forward, resting his arms on his legs and creating a cosy place for baby Thomas. 'Now, I want you to tell me everything about these crystals,' he said soothingly. 'I promise not to interrupt or criticize.'

Veronica took a deep breath and began her story while I stood up and headed to the kitchen to make tea. As I turned on the kettle, I heard Veronica's voice rise and fall, recounting our journey to the other side and our discovery of the crystals along the way. I couldn't help but smile at her passion and

determination. If Chief Inspector Williams dared to laugh or show any sign of disbelief, I had permitted Veronica to slap him. But from the sound of things, it seemed like he was listening intently without judgment. At least one of us had a chance at being believed by him.

As Veronica finished her story, I returned to the living room with a tray of steaming tea cups and set them on the coffee table. The sound of ceramic clinking against wood echoed through the quiet room.

‘I have something to add,’ I interjected, sitting beside Veronica on the couch. ‘Veronica and I made a conscious effort to support environmentally friendly practices and joined organizations like Green Peace and the Green political party to further the cause. But Mr White and his family only saw the crystal as a means for personal gain.’

I paused, taking a sip of my tea before continuing. ‘Sarah’s late husband also possessed a crystal, which she inherited. Naive and unaware of its power, she became an easy target for the Whites. They relentlessly pursued her until she decided to give up her crystal, replacing it with a fake one from a local jeweller to deceive Paul, who has since become her lover.’

My tone was sombre as I added, 'I understand that this may all seem far-fetched, but it's the truth.'

Chief Inspector Williams leaned forward in his chair, his expression serious yet open-minded. 'I must admit, stories of this nature are hard to believe. However, I am keeping an open mind. It seems there have been numerous similar incidents reported, and I believe in the existence of other realms as described in the Bible, where humans cannot physically enter.'

He continued after a moment of contemplative silence. 'I don't doubt your words, but would you be willing to show me your crystal? I have never seen one myself.'

I reached into my jacket pocket and pulled out a purplish crystal. I carefully placed it on the coffee table in front of Chief Williams. 'This is my crystal,' I explained. 'It's not something I usually show people, but in this situation, I think it's important for you to see what these people are after.' The chief looked at me curiously as he picked up the crystal and held it. 'Don't worry, nothing will happen to you,' I reassured him. 'You're not the enemy.'

Chief Inspector Williams exclaimed whilst returning the crystal. 'Nothing is happening. It's only a beautiful crystal.'

I pointed to the crystal in my hand, its purple hue pulsating with each of my pointed finger movements. 'The power of the crystal is vast, and you can use it for many things, but its true potential lies in its ability to connect with others who possess the same power,' I said, my voice filled with awe and admiration. 'And as you can see, it is not a weapon, but a tool for communication and protection.'

Chief Inspector Williams looked sceptical, his eyes never leaving the crystal. 'And how does one acquire such a tool?' he asked, raising an eyebrow.

I smiled, knowing the answer he was looking for. 'Only those who are worthy and have the purest of hearts can obtain the crystal. It chooses its destiny,' I said as I carefully examined the crystal's smooth surface. 'And as for its power, it is said to be unparalleled in the other realm. It can heal, protect, and bring peace to those who seek it.'

'But how can I know if someone is truly worthy of possessing the crystal?' Williams asked, his voice revealing his anxiety.

I paused, my eyes reflecting the same concern. 'One can only hope that those who seek the power of the crystal will use it for good,' I said, my voice filled with conviction. 'But even then, no one can be certain.'

The crystal's power is ancient and beyond our understanding.'

Chief Inspector Williams nodded, his gaze still locked on the crystal.

I smiled, holding the crystal up for him to see. 'In the right hands, it is a powerful weapon.' The crystal immediately came alive, pulsating in my hands and glowing like a light. 'With enough concentration, I can now use it to do the most fantastic things. Like teleporting us all to New York in a split second.'

'Look, I will demonstrate with something less dramatic. Watch the door; it will shut without me moving a finger.' With that, the lounge door closed.

Chief Inspector Williams looked surprised. 'Can all the crystals do magic tricks like that?'

'I don't know. Sarah's crystal only gives her warnings. I think it depends on Sheba, the guardian of the crystal. She seems to influence what is allowed and by whom. She added extra power to my crystal for protection to help against the attacks I have had.'

'The problem is that the criminal element doesn't believe that the crystals are not all identical. That is why Sarah got killed,' I added.

Veronica interrupted, 'Sheba told Sarah in a dream to give me her late husband's crystal, knowing that Paul was after it. Sarah then purchased a similar-looking ordinary crystal from a local jeweller to deceive him.'

Chief Inspector Williams looked confused. 'Who is Sheba?'

'Sheba lives in the other realm and comes to people in dreams, but Graham met her when they recalled him the second time,' Veronica replied.

Little Thomas started moaning, and Veronica took him out of the Chief's arms. 'He most likely needs changing,' Veronica reassured a worried-looking Chief, 'I will return in a second.'

The Chief Inspector shifted his focus to me. 'Let me make sure I understand correctly. Your theory is that Paul or his mother killed Sarah because they discovered her crystal was a fake, rendering all of Paul's efforts to win her over meaningless since he only cared about the crystal in the first place?'

I nodded firmly. 'That is my opinion.'

The Inspector continued, 'In addition, you believe Paul played a role in Mr Hardman's murder due to his resentment and envy.'

'Both he and his father, John, have always acted as if they are entitled to a portion of my profits, whatever business I am involved in. They seem to think I am stealing their share of my transactions. Paul even threatened my life in Spain. And now, they feel entitled to a share of the crystal. But this jealousy has a long history - I am sure John is involved in the murder of Sarah's brother in America. So you see, Inspector, their animosity towards me predates our discovery of the crystal,' I added.

Chief Inspector Williams exclaimed. 'We lack proof, but I will interview all three. Perhaps one of them may crack under questioning. From your description and Tim's comments, they sound like an immoral lot. You will have to take precautions. From what you told me of them, you will be their next target, and you have baby Thomas to protect.'

'I think they will find me not as easy a target as Sarah. They have tried before and failed. Remember, I have the crystal to protect me. Unfortunately, they have experienced the power of the crystal in their previous attempts at my life. That is why they desperately want the crystal for their illegal activities.'

Chief Inspector Williams said his goodbyes to Veronica and baby Thomas and departed.

On his way out, he cautioned, 'It would be bad news for the police if your crystal ended up in the wrong hands. Please take good care of it.'

'I will guard it with my life,' I assured the Chief Inspector.

My mind was racing with the implications of the Chief Inspector's visit. Perhaps we had been too quick to dismiss the idea of the crystal's power, for it may have played a significant role in Sarah's death.

I couldn't help but feel a sense of responsibility for bringing this ordeal upon myself and my family. Now, I would have to focus on protecting the ones I loved.

I apologised to Veronica. 'I am truly sorry that I kept the crystal when we returned from the other realm. It has only brought us problems and danger.'

Veronica replied, 'Don't be silly; it is not your fault that the world is full of greed and envy. We are in this together until the end. Now we must concentrate on getting rid of the White family and keeping Thomas safe.'

I fetched the baby monitor from the kitchen. I placed it on the coffee table, ensuring we could watch Little Thomas as we delved deeper into Paul and his family. With Veronica's assistance, we began to compile a dossier of evidence, connecting the crimes to the Whites and the crystals, hoping to prove our theory to the authorities.

As we withdrew into the comfortable confines of the living room, I couldn't help but feel a sense of unease. We were going up against a family with seemingly no scruples and a willingness to do whatever it took to obtain the crystal. I knew the next few days and weeks would be crucial to ensure our safety.

And so, with the flickering glow of the crystal under the dimming light of the setting sun, we embarked on our journey to uncover the truth and end the White family's treachery once and for all.

As night fell, I couldn't help but feel a sense of foreboding. We were up against powerful enemies and needed to prepare for anything. Veronica and I discussed the next steps, working on our dossier and gathering as much evidence as possible. I hoped we could convince the authorities to take us seriously if we could find the correct information.

We spent countless hours poring over documents, making phone calls and trying to piece together the puzzle that was the White family's criminal empire. We discovered they had connections to the world's criminal networks, and their reach extended far beyond what we had initially suspected.

As the days turned into weeks, we found ourselves growing more and more paranoid. We slept with one eye open, constantly scanning the room for any sign of danger. And yet, despite our efforts, the attacks continued. One night, as I was lying in bed with Veronica, I felt a sudden jolt of pain in my chest. I gasped for air, struggling to catch my breath.

'What's wrong?' Veronica asked, her voice trembling with fear.

'I... I don't know,' I said, taking deep breaths, trying to calm myself down. 'I think it's just a panic attack.'

But as the night wore on, I couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong. I managed to fall asleep, but Veronica was gone the next day, and I woke up late. I thought she had taken baby Thomas and fled, leaving me alone to face this nightmare.

I felt torn between anger and confusion. How could she do this to us? To Thomas?

However, to my relief, she had left me a note on the kitchen table. 'You were sleeping so peacefully. I did not want to wake you. Have taken Thomas for a walk.'

Two hours later, I began to panic. Where were they? Thomas should be having his feed. I was getting worried, and then I remembered the crystal's warning. It had been trying to protect me. Now, I had endangered Veronica and baby Thomas by not heeding its warnings.

I knew I had to act fast. I needed to find Veronica and Thomas before it was too late. I called the police, but they couldn't do much without concrete evidence. So I did what the crystal had told me to do. I called the Whites.

I confronted Paul and John White, demanding to know where Veronica and baby Thomas were. They denied any involvement, but I knew better. I threatened to destroy them and Mrs Hardman with my crystal and reveal their criminal empire to the police if they didn't return Veronica and Thomas to me.

Ultimately, they complied and told me to collect them from a particular café. It was clear that they would never stop coming after me. I had inadvertently

set myself as a target, and now I had to live with the consequences. John concluded the conversation with. 'You see how easy it is for us to take your family. If you try to involve the police, you will never see your family again.'

I was so relieved when I found them; tears ran down my cheeks. Afterwards, we spent the next few weeks in hiding, constantly moving from place to place, avoiding contact with the outside world. It was a lonely existence, but was the only way to keep Thomas and Veronica safe.

Days turned into weeks, and weeks turned into months. And then, one day, I received a mysterious package in the mail. Addressed to me, but there was no return address. I carefully opened it, and to my surprise, I found a small crystal inside.

It was unlike any I had ever seen before. It glowed with an intense white light, and as I held it, I felt a strange calm wash over me. I knew instinctively that this was not an ordinary crystal. It was the crystal of truth.

I set the crystal on the table and looked at Veronica. 'I think this is it, the key to uncovering everything we need to know about the Whites and their criminal empire.'

Veronica nodded, her eyes wide with anticipation. We both took a deep breath and sat before the crystal, ready to uncover the truth.

As we both concentrated on the crystal, we could feel its power coursing through us. It was like nothing we had ever experienced before. Suddenly, a vision appeared before us, and we both gasped in shock.

We saw Paul and John White in a secret meeting, discussing their plans to take over the crystals in our realm and use their power for their gain. We saw them orchestrate the murders of Sarah and her brother, as well as the theft of the crystal. We saw the corruption and greed that had consumed them.

But as we watched, the crystal began to glow even brighter, and we could feel its power growing stronger. The vision became more precise; we saw something we had never seen before - a way to stop the Whites once and for all.

Without saying a word, we grabbed our things. We raced out of the house, determined to end the White family's criminal empire. We knew that it would be a dangerous mission, but we also knew that we had the power of the crystal on our side. We were ready to face whatever challenges lay ahead because we knew

that it was the only way to keep our loved ones safe and free from the clutches of the Whites.

But we couldn't shake the feeling that someone was watching us as we walked through the city streets. We felt like hunted animals, constantly looking over our shoulders, never quite sure who was following us or where the crystal might lead us.

But we pushed on, determined to see this through to the end. We knew the crystal was our only hope and would use its power to bring the Whites down for good.

As we reached the city's outskirts, we finally found a break. We saw a man standing on a street corner, arguing with another man in a dark suit. We approached him, and he calmed down when we mentioned the Whites.

He turned out to be a former employee of the White family, and he had been waiting for someone to come forward with information. He had seen the White family's true colours and feared them ever since.

We convinced him to help us, and with his knowledge, we gathered even more evidence against

the Whites. Pictures, documents, and witness statements proved their criminal activities.

Now, we just needed the authorities to get involved. We knew the Whites had connections, but we had the crystal. We could use its power to bring everything crashing down around them.

We spent the next few days preparing for our final stand against the White family. We knew they would stop at nothing to protect their empire, so we had to be ready for anything.

We set up our defences in an abandoned warehouse, using the crystal's power to create a shield that could withstand any attack. We knew the White family would come for us, but we were ready.

We waited, knowing that every second we wasted was another second that our loved ones were in danger. And it was only a matter of time before the Whites would attack.

And then, just as the sun began to rise, we heard the sound of engines approaching. The White family had arrived, their vehicles clattering and roaring as they parked outside the warehouse.

Paul and John got out of their cars, flanked by their henchmen. They looked fierce and dangerous, but we knew we had the crystal on our side.

They stepped into the warehouse; Veronica held her crystal tightly. Paul and John stopped in their tracks, their faces a mix of surprise and anger.

‘You can't defeat us,’ Paul said, his voice cold and threatening. ‘You're nothing but a couple of amateurs with a crystal.’

But we knew differently. We had seen the crystal's power first-hand and knew it was far more than a pretty rock.

We raised our crystals high in the air, and they began to glow even brighter as we did. The light was blinding, and we could feel its power surging.

Suddenly, a gust of wind swept through the warehouse, knocking the henchmen off balance. Paul and John stumbled and fell to the ground; their faces contorted with fear as they realized the power we had unleashed.

‘What in the name of the devil is happening?’ Paul bellowed, his voice shaking with fear.

I stepped forward, my voice steady as I addressed him. 'You reap what you sow, Paul. The crystal's power is in our hands, and it will make your empire crumble. You can't escape the truth.'

The crystal's light grew even brighter as I finished speaking, illuminating the warehouse. It was a spectacle to behold - a display of pure, unfiltered power.

Paul and John looked at each other, their faces twisted in shock and terror. They knew we had defeated them, and their reign of terror was over.

'What do you want?' Paul pleaded, his voice barely above a whisper. 'What do you want from us?'

But we had no mercy left in our hearts. 'You want to know what I want? I want you to pay for your crimes. I want you to suffer for everything you've done. And I want you to know that there's a force greater than you, and it is coming for you.'

With that, I lowered the crystal, and the light disappeared, leaving the warehouse again in darkness. Paul and John stood frozen in place, their eyes wide with fear and shock.

We knew we had to ensure that they would never hurt anyone again. We couldn't let them escape, not after everything they had done.

Knowing that we now had enough evidence for the courts to convict them, we decided to turn the White family over to the authorities. We explained what we had witnessed and provided them with all the evidence we had gathered.

The authorities, represented by Chief Inspector Williams, were astounded by the crystal's power and the magnitude of the White family's crimes. He promised to take swift and decisive action to bring the Whites to justice.

We watched as the police arrested Paul and John, their faces twisted in anger and betrayal. We knew that we had done the right thing, that we had saved countless lives and brought an end to the White family's reign of terror. I reminded Chief Inspector Williams not to forget Mrs Hardman, as she was involved in all the murders.

As we walked away from the warehouse, we looked at each other and breathed a sigh of relief. Our mission was complete, and we had emerged victorious.

John, Paul, and Mrs Hardman received lengthy jail sentences, removing the continuous danger of being attacked by them to steal the crystals. We decided to hide the crystals and not rely on them in the future.

We made a pact with the crystal to continue making the world more environmentally friendly. We knew we had something special and couldn't let it fall into the wrong hands. I decided to store Veronica and my crystal in a bank safety deposit box, keeping them away from temptation. I knew that if the other realm needed to contact me, they would do so in a dream.

We tried not to mention the crystal again, as we knew its power was too dangerous to be wielded by anyone else. But we also knew it had saved us and were grateful for its help.

We vowed never to forget what we had seen and experienced as we returned home. We knew that there would always be darkness in the world, but we also knew that there was a power greater than us that could guide and protect us.

And as we walked home, we looked up at the sky and felt a sense of peace wash over us. We knew that the crystal had shown us the truth, and we were ready to face whatever challenges lay ahead.

Envy and Greed Spells Murder

It was a pleasure being back home again. We could tell Thomas was pleased even more by his lovely smile.

Our lives settled into a blissful routine of work and spoiling Thomas. Even Chief Inspector Williams made a point of visiting. He always bought a toy for Thomas and sat him on his knee. We appointed him as Thomas's Godfather.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



This peaceful existence carried on for a few months until, one day, we returned from work. Thomas was now old enough to accompany us to work. We even had a small play area allocated for him.

We were alarmed to see the front door wide open upon arriving home. We had a break-in, and the house was in shambles. The intruders turned over furniture and emptied drawers onto the floor. Our belongings were everywhere. I immediately phoned Chief Inspector Williams, who promised to come over immediately. They even wrecked Thomas's bedroom. It appeared to me like blatant vandalism.

Chief Inspector Williams arrived promptly with a forensic team to check for fingerprints and clues. His theory was that John and Paul White were behind the burglary, using freshly released fellow prison inmates to find the crystal for a reward. 'If that is the case, we will soon be able to prove it. All prisoners' fingerprints and DNA are on file,' he added with a smug look.

After the forensic team left, Veronica and I commenced the cleaning operation. Although several

items were damaged, we were amazed that nothing seemed missing.

‘What do we do now?’ Veronica asked with a glum look on her face. ‘Perhaps Chief Inspector Williams is right that John White is behind the burglary.’

I hugged Veronica and said, ‘Let's not panic. We have to wait until the Chief comes back with the forensic results. If John White is behind the break-in, then we must make some plans. We could move to South Africa. You loved it there.’

Veronica appeared extremely upset. ‘We can't just run away. The man is in prison and still ruling our lives. Oh, what are we going to do?’ Tears flowed freely down her cheeks.

‘I don't know. Let's wait until we are certain, and then we will make some plans,’ I said, hugging Veronica close.

That weekend, Chief Inspector Williams came to see us with the news. Both Veronica and I were concerned and expecting the worst.

The Chief confirmed our fears. ‘It is without a doubt John White is behind your break-in. We apprehended the thieves, and they are back behind

bars. Their fingerprints were all over your house, and after interrogation, they confessed.'

Holding on to Veronica's hand, I enquired from Chief Williams. 'What are we to do? It looks like John and Paul will not stop their search for the crystal just because they are in prison. They are making matters worse by telling other inmates about the crystal.'

Chief Inspector Williams frowned. 'Fortunately, These thieves sent by John and Paul have no idea what they are looking for. John is not that stupid to give them too much information. They might steal the crystal and keep it for themselves. Therefore, John would only send petty thieves, thinking they were stealing a relatively worthless crystal. Like the last lot, they had no common sense, so we apprehended them easily.'

'As far as I can see, you have two choices. Either you run to a faraway country and hope that John or Paul gives up on their search for the crystal, or you play a game with them. What if you buy several ordinary crystals and allow the thieves to steal one at a time? John would soon tire of paying them to steal your crystals. Remember, he can't give them too much information or tell too many people,' the Chief added.

‘In addition, if you run away. I will miss Thomas too much,’ Chief Williams said jokingly.

I could tell from Veronica's expression that she was concerned, so I explained. ‘I hear what you say, Sir, but I would not like Veronica or Thomas to be injured or stressed in any way while playing this game with John White.’

Chief Inspector Williams smiled. ‘I have a solution for you. Why not let Veronica and Thomas stay with me for a month? Mrs Williams would be delighted to have her, and I could move in with you. We could neutralise the threat from John and Paul within a month. Already, one of the thieves let slip that they are working for John.’

‘As long as Veronica favours the plan, I will try it,’ I said, looking at Veronica.

Veronica grimaced. ‘Well, let's try the plan, but I am not moving out of my house for any criminal. We can't be running away forever. My first concern is for Thomas, but I also don't want either of us killed in the process.’

Chief Inspector Williams said, ‘If you are sure. I believe the people sent by John White will not be murderers but petty thieves; therefore, I think you will

be safe at home. Perhaps a security guard at home will add to your peace of mind. When the thieves arrive, make it easy for them. Act ignorant and let them steal an ordinary crystal. They won't know the difference.'

After Chief Inspector Williams left, I immediately phoned the security company I used at the warehouse and asked for a guard at our home. I then went to our local jewellers and bought five similar crystals to the one I had.

Days passed without any sign of the thieves, and we wondered if they had given up their pursuit. But just as we were beginning to let our guard down, a noise in the middle of the night startled us awake. The security alarm blared, signalling an intruder on the premises.

Heart racing, I grabbed one of the fake crystals and hid it in my pocket, ready to play along with the thieves' game. As I crept downstairs, I could see shadows moving in the darkness. With bated breath, I watched as the intruders made their way through the house, searching for the crystal.

They finally reached the display case where we kept the crystals. I held my breath as they scrutinized each one. After an eternity, one picked up the fake crystal and grinned triumphantly. They had found what they were looking for.

Envy and Greed Spells Murder

I stayed hidden as they exited the house, relieved they had taken the bait. But just as I thought they were gone, I heard a commotion outside—voices raised in anger followed by sounds of a scuffle.

I cautiously peered out the window to see the security guard and a policeman apprehending the thieves. It seemed that the plan had worked perfectly.

As dawn broke and the adrenaline of the night's events began to wear off, relief flooded me. The plan worked flawlessly, and the thieves were now in custody. I knew this was only a temporary solution, but it gave us time to determine our next move.

Veronica emerged from upstairs, her face a mix of anxiety and relief. 'Is it over?' she asked, her voice shaky.

I nodded, reaching out to hold her hands. 'Yes, for now. The police caught the thieves, thanks to the security guard and Chief Inspector Williams' plan.'

Veronica let out a heavy sigh, sinking into a nearby chair. 'I can't believe we're still dealing with this after all these years.'

'We'll figure it out,' I reassured her, though uncertainty gnawed at me. How long could we keep

up this facade? And what would stop John and Paul White from sending more people after us?

Just then, the doorbell rang, making us both jump. I cautiously approached the front door and peered through the peephole. Standing on the doorstep was a man dressed in a suit, looking somewhat official.

Opening the door a crack, I asked, 'Can I help you?'

The man flashed an identification badge. 'Good evening, I'm Agent Reynolds from MI5. May I come in? We need to talk about the crystal you possess.'

How MI5 got involved, I will never know. It was no good asking as they would give a vague answer, one like. 'We know everything.'

Agent Reynolds' unexpected appearance caught us off guard, and I hesitated momentarily before stepping aside to let him in. Veronica's eyes widened with surprise as she saw the agent standing in our hallway.

'MI5?' she repeated, her voice tinged with disbelief. 'What does the British intelligence service want with us and the crystal?'

Agent Reynolds nodded solemnly. 'I'm afraid the crystal you possess is no ordinary gem. It holds a power that many would go to great lengths to obtain. John White is just the tip of the iceberg.'

My heart sank at his words, a sense of foreboding settling over me. 'What kind of power does this crystal hold? And why are we suddenly involved in all of this?'

The agent's expression grew grave as he explained, 'The crystal is said to have the ability to manipulate time. In the wrong hands, it could be catastrophic for the world as we know it. That's why we must keep it out of reach of those who would misuse its power.'

Veronica and I exchanged a worried glance, realizing the gravity of our embroiled situation. 'What do you need us to do?' I asked, steeling myself for whatever dangerous path lay ahead.

Agent Reynolds looked at us both with a steely determination in his eyes.

'We can offer you protection and relocation to a secure facility where you'll be out of harm's reach.'

Veronica interrupted, 'I am not leaving my home because of some criminals.'

‘We need your cooperation to keep the crystal safe. We're facing a formidable enemy who will stop at nothing to get their hands on it. You two are now critical players in this dangerous game, whether you like it or not,’ Agent Reynolds explained.

As the weight of his words sank in, Veronica and I exchanged a determined look, silently communicating our commitment to protecting the crystal and preventing it from falling into the wrong hands. Despite the looming danger and uncertainty, we knew we couldn't back down now.

‘We'll do whatever it takes to keep the crystal safe,’ I declared, my voice steady with resolve. ‘But we won't leave our home. We'll find a way to fortify our defences here.’

Agent Reynolds regarded us with a hint of admiration in his eyes. ‘Very well. We will provide you with additional security measures and support. But remember, the threat is real, and we must always remain vigilant.’

As we delved deeper into the intricacies of the situation, formulating plans to safeguard the crystal and ourselves, a sense of camaraderie formed between us and Agent Reynolds. Despite the gravity

of the circumstances, there was a glimmer of hope, knowing that we had allies in this dangerous game.

Days turned into weeks, during which we implemented various security protocols and kept a watchful eye on our surroundings. The tension in the air was palpable, each moment fraught with anticipation of a potential threat looming just around the corner.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN



Then, one fateful evening, as darkness descended upon our quiet neighbourhood, a series of loud bangs echoed through the night. The security alarm blared again, signalling an imminent breach of our defences.

Veronica and I sprang into action, adrenaline fueling our movements as we navigated through the darkened corridors of our home. As we reached the display case where we kept the crystals, a shadowy figure emerged from the darkness, their intent apparent in the determined glint of their eyes. Without hesitation, they lunged towards the case, their hands outstretched towards the precious gems within.

Veronica and I exchanged a knowing look before springing into action. With a swift movement, I activated the hidden security measures we had put in place, causing metal shutters to encase the display case, trapping the would-be thief inside.

The intruder banged against the impenetrable barrier, frustration evident in their movements as they realized they had fallen into our trap. Agent Reynolds

appeared from the shadows, his presence reassuring as he apprehended the thief with practised ease.

‘Well done,’ he commended us, a hint of pride in his voice. ‘You two have proven yourselves formidable allies in this dangerous game.’

As the authorities took the captured intruder away, a sense of relief washed over me. We had successfully defended the crystal again, thanks to our vigilance and strategic planning.

But our victory was short-lived as Agent Reynolds turned to us with a grave expression. ‘This incident only confirms that we are up against a formidable enemy who will stop at nothing to get their hands on the crystal. We must remain ever vigilant.’

Veronica nodded solemnly, her determination unwavering. ‘We won't let them win. We'll do whatever it takes to protect and prevent the crystal's misuse.’

I echoed her sentiments, a steely resolve hardening within me. Our home may have become a battleground in a high-stakes game we never asked to play, but we were determined to emerge victorious.

Our lives became consumed each day by the struggle to safeguard the crystal. We took every precaution, from installing state-of-the-art security systems to martial arts and self-defence training. We learned to rely on each other, forming an unbreakable bond in adversity.

Veronica and I spent countless hours researching the crystal's origins, history, and potential power. We discovered that it was not just an ordinary gemstone but a relic of an ancient civilization with advanced knowledge of time manipulation. The crystal had been lost for centuries, only to resurface in recent times, sparking a race for its control among powerful factions across the globe.

As our knowledge of the crystal grew, so did our understanding of its dangers if it fell into the wrong hands. We knew we were protecting ourselves and the very fabric of reality. The responsibility weighed heavily on our shoulders but only fueled our determination to succeed.

Against constant threats, we forged an unexpected alliance with Agent Reynolds of MI5. Together, we shared intelligence, strategic plans, and resources, creating a formidable force against those who sought to abuse the crystal's power.

Yet, despite our efforts, the danger never subsided. John White and Paul White continued sending their minions after us, relentlessly pursuing the crystal. But each new attack strengthened our resolve and pushed us to evolve our defences, always staying one step ahead of our adversaries.

One chilly evening, as we pored over ancient texts searching for clues about the crystal's true capabilities, a sudden power outage plunged us into darkness. A sense of unease settled in my stomach as I fumbled for a flashlight, my hand brushing against Veronica's in the darkness.

Before we could react, the room was bathed in an eerie purple light emanating from the crystal—the gem pulsed with otherworldly energy, casting dancing shadows on the walls around us. My heart raced as I realized this was no ordinary power outage – the crystal was reacting to something within its vicinity.

Veronica's eyes widened in realization, her voice barely above a whisper. 'It's responding to a presence... a powerful one.'

As we watched in awe and trepidation, the blue light coalesced into a humanoid figure, their features obscured by the intensity of the glow. The air crackled

with electricity, and an ancient and reverberating voice echoed in our minds.

‘I am Arion, Guardian of Time,’ the figure intoned. ‘The crystal has chosen you as its protectors, and together, we must prevent its misuse at all costs.’

Agent Reynolds burst into the room, his gun drawn as he assessed the surreal scene before him. His eyes widened in disbelief at the sight of Arion materializing from the crystal.

Arion turned towards Agent Reynolds, his form flickering like a mirage. ‘Agent Reynolds, you have been a steadfast ally in this battle for time itself. But now, a greater threat looms on the horizon. The forces that seek to control the crystal are massing their strength, and we must act swiftly to prevent catastrophe.’

Agent Reynolds lowered his weapon, his expression a mix of awe and determination. ‘Tell us what we must do, Arion.’

Arion's gaze shifted back to us, a sense of urgency permeating the air around him. ‘The crystal's true power lies in its ability to manipulate time. In the wrong hands, it could unravel the very fabric of reality. You must unlock its full potential; only then can you

hope to defeat those seeking to wield it for evil purposes.’

Veronica stepped forward, her eyes filled with determination. ‘We will do whatever it takes to protect the crystal and ensure its only use is for the greater good.’

Arion nodded, its form shimmering with ethereal light. ‘Then heed my words, for time is of the essence. You must journey to the heart of the ancient ruins where we first discovered the crystal. You will find the key to unlocking its power and unleashing its full might against our enemies.’

Arion sent a ripple through space and time with a wave of his hand, opening a portal before us that shimmered with iridescent hues. ‘Step through this gateway, and I will set your destiny in motion.’

I glanced at Veronica, a silent understanding passing between us. Without hesitation, we stepped through the portal, our hearts filled with resolve and courage. As we crossed the threshold into the unknown, a sense of purpose washed over me, driving out any lingering doubts that had clouded my mind. The portal enveloped us in a whirlwind of colours and sensations, distorting our perception of reality as we hurtled through the fabric of time and space.

Moments seemed like an eternity, and when we finally emerged on the other side, we found ourselves standing amid a long-forgotten city shrouded in mystery and ancient power.

The ruins loomed before us, their weathered stones whispering secrets of a bygone era. We could feel the pulse of the crystal resonating within these ancient walls, guiding us towards our destiny. As we ventured deeper into the heart of the ruins, symbols etched into stone glowed with ethereal light, illuminating our path with cryptic messages that spoke of trials and tribulations.

Veronica and I exchanged a knowing look, our bond more robust than ever as we braced ourselves for the challenges ahead. Each step brought us closer to unlocking the true potential of the crystal. This power could tip the scales in our favour against the dark forces that sought to control it.

As we reached the inner chamber of the ruins, a sense of reverence washed over us. In the centre of the room stood a pedestal bathed in a soft golden light, upon which the crystal pulsating with untold power rested. It beckoned to us, its energy reaching out like a guiding hand as if eager to fulfil its purpose.

Veronica and I approached the pedestal with determination, our hands outstretched towards the crystal. As we made contact, a surge of energy coursed through our veins, filling us with ancient wisdom and knowledge that transcended time. I could see the reflection of the swirling colours of power in Veronica's eyes as she communed with the crystal, her very being resonating with its energy. The room seemed to hum with anticipation as if holding its breath for the pivotal moment about unfolding.

Suddenly, a series of intricate glyphs and symbols materialized around us, spinning and dancing in a mesmerizing light display. Each symbol seemed to unlock a different aspect of the crystal's power, revealing hidden depths and untapped potential that had long been dormant.

Veronica's voice filled the chamber, resonating with otherworldly clarity as she channelled the ancient energies of the crystal. Her words wove a tapestry of incantations and commands, directing the raw power towards a singular purpose: to shield reality from those who would seek to tear it asunder.

The very fabric of space seemed to ripple and warp around us, bending to Veronica's will as she harnessed the might of the crystal. I could feel a surge of power building within me, a connection to something far

more significant than myself. It was as if time stood still, in awe of the moment unfolding before us.

As Veronica completed the final incantation, a blinding light erupted from the crystal, engulfing us in a whirlwind of energy and sound. I felt myself lifted off my feet, weightless and free, as if soaring through the cosmos. Past, present, and future boundaries blurred into an indistinguishable kaleidoscope of colours and sensations.

When the light finally subsided, I found myself standing again in the chamber, the crystal pulsing with a renewed vitality that filled the room with a warm, comforting glow. Veronica stood beside me, her eyes shining with a newfound confidence and power that seemed to radiate from within her. The symbols and glyphs that had danced in the air moments ago now lingered, etched into the chamber walls as a testament to the magic we had unleashed.

A sense of peace settled over me as I gazed upon the crystal, its energy harmonized and aligned with our intentions. It was no longer a mere object of power but a partner in our quest to safeguard reality from those who sought to disrupt its delicate balance.

Veronica turned to me, a smile playing on her lips as she spoke, her voice laced with an otherworldly

timbre. ‘We have unlocked the true potential of the crystal, but our journey is far from over. The forces that seek to control it will not rest until they have achieved their dark purpose. We must be vigilant and prepared for whatever challenges lie ahead.’

I nodded in agreement—my resolve, steeled by the trials we had overcome together. Our bond had been tested and proven unbreakable, forged in the crucible of adversity and strengthened by our shared determination to protect what was precious.

I understood then that you could use the crystal to travel in time. In theory, one could change the past, and that would alter the future. It was mind-boggling, the power to change history. No wonder many people were after the crystal—it would be dangerous if it fell into the wrong hands. I decided to experiment with time travel as soon as possible. I do remember when the other realm sent me for help. I thought I was away for several weeks, but Veronica insisted I was only away for a few minutes.

A sense of unity filled my heart as we exited the ruins. I knew that whatever lay ahead, we would face it together, drawing strength from each other and from the indomitable power of the crystal itself.

Envy and Greed Spells Murder

The world outside the ruins was bathed in the soft light of dawn, a new day dawning on a reality forever changed by our actions to protect the crystal at all costs.

Agent Reynolds was filled with wonder and admiration as he departed to give the guards instructions.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



That afternoon, a headline caught my attention while reading the newspaper on one of the pages. ‘*Sentinal*, an unlikely contender, takes first place at the Newmarket race. Bookmakers left in shock.’

I considered it an experiment, possibly using the crystal to travel back in time, perhaps just two days. I could use this advantage to bet on the winning horse, *Sentinal* and make a fortune.

I gripped the crystal tightly, focusing my energy on two days ago. The crystal began to pulse and emit a blinding light. In an instant, it transported me to a different location. I checked the date and realized that I had gone back in time. Excited to continue my experiment, I went to the nearby bookmaker and bet on *Sentinal* for the next day's main race at Newmarket. The bookie laughed and said, 'You realize the odds are fifty to one? You have no chance of winning.'

I returned to my office, knowing I had to travel forward in time to return to where I started. Once there, I grasped the crystal tightly and focused on travelling two days into the future. Instantly, I found myself back at home, rereading the newspaper. The

page was still open to the article about *Sentinal's* miraculous win.

I politely excused myself from Veronica's company and drove to the bookmaker's establishment, where I had placed my bet. After handing over my betting slip, the bookmaker handed me five hundred pounds, exclaiming, 'You must be the luckiest person alive. I was certain that *Sentinal* would not come out victorious.'

I smiled as I addressed the bookie. 'Is there a charity for injured jockeys to which I could donate my winnings?' The bookie looked at me in shock and replied, 'Well, it's your money.'

With that, I left home eager to tell Veronica about my experiment.

Veronica listened intently as I recounted my experience using the crystal to travel back in time and place a winning bet on *Sentinal* at the races. Her eyes sparkled with curiosity and caution, aware of the immense power we wielded with the crystal in our possession.

As we sat in our living room, bathed in the warm glow of the crystal resting on the coffee table between us, Veronica placed a gentle hand on mine. 'I admire

your ingenuity, my dear, and your generous spirit in donating the winnings to a worthy cause. But we must remember that the crystal's power is not to be trifled with lightly.'

Her words resonated with me, grounding me in the reality of our situation. The crystal was a tool of immense potential, capable of rewriting history and reshaping destinies. We had already seen its ability to harmonize and protect reality, but venturing into altering past events would only bring new risks and uncertainties.

'I experimented with going back into the past because I did not realise it was possible. I thought it was pure theory. Now, it places a different light on the crystal and explains why MI5 is interested in it. I can be the catalyst to win wars. For instance, if an unfriendly nation attacks England, we could go back in time and prepare this nation to be ready and thus repel the invasion, giving us the upper hand.

The problem is who should care for the crystal. It is easy to say our government should because they are the current good guys. But with the help of the crystal, the good guys will soon become the bad guys, empowering them to conquer all their enemies.

We should destroy the crystal, allowing everyone to play on a level playing field.'

Veronica's brow furrowed in contemplation as she absorbed my words. The weight of the decision we faced hung heavy in the air. The fate of the crystal - and, by extension, the world - rested in our hands.

Veronica spoke softly after a moment of silence, her voice carrying a mixture of resolve and concern. 'The crystal is a double-edged sword, capable of great good and unfathomable destruction in equal measure. While somebody could use its power to alter the course of history and prevent untold suffering, we must also consider the consequences of such actions.'

She rose from her seat, her eyes locking with mine as she continued, 'Destroying the crystal may seem like the safest course of action, but we must be certain it is truly the right choice. Once its power is gone, we can never retrieve it. And who's to say that another artefact of similar capabilities won't fall into less scrupulous hands?'

I nodded in agreement, understanding the gravity of our situation more clearly now. The crystal was not only a tool but a responsibility that required careful consideration and wisdom.

As we stood together in silent contemplation, a sense of unity filled the room once more. We were bound by more than just our shared experiences - we were bound by a duty to protect the delicate balance of reality itself.

Veronica reached out and clasped my hand firmly, her gaze unwavering. 'Let us take some time to ponder our next step,' she said. 'We must weigh our options carefully and consider all possible outcomes before making a decision that will shape not just the fate of our lives but the lives of countless others. The crystal's power is a responsibility we cannot take lightly.'

I squeezed her hand reassuringly, grateful for her wisdom and unwavering support. Together, we retreated to our study, the crystal resting between us on the desk like a silent sentinel watching our deliberations.

Hours turned into days as we delved into ancient texts and consulted experts on artefacts of immense power. Each piece of information brought us closer to a decision, but the weight of the choice ahead pressed down on us like a heavy shroud.

Finally, after much contemplation and debate, we reached a unanimous decision. As the sun dipped

below the horizon and cast long shadows across the room, I picked up the crystal with trembling hands.

With a deep breath, I focused all my energy on a single thought—to release my crystal and Veronica’s from their duty, to free them from the burdens of history and allow them to return to the unknown depths from whence they came.

A blinding light filled the room, pulsing and flickering as if protesting its fate. But with a final surge of resolve, first my crystal and then Veronica’s shattered on the stone floor, each shard glinting like fallen stars before fading into nothingness.

Veronica stood beside me, her expression a mix of sadness and relief. We felt a shift in the air around us as if somebody had lifted a great weight from our shoulders.

Silence settled over the room, broken only by a gentle breeze rustling through the curtains. We knew our lives would never be the same after this momentous decision, but we also knew we had chosen wisely.

A sense of peace washed over us as we gazed at the remnants of the shattered crystals. We had chosen to relinquish the power that could have altered the

course of history, recognizing that some things were not meant to be tampered with. Our duty now was to move forward, living our lives without the burden of such immense responsibility.

Veronica leaned her head against my shoulder, a small smile on her lips. 'I believe we have done the right thing,' she said softly. 'The future is no longer ours to manipulate, and I find solace in that.'

I wrapped my arm around her, pulling her close as we watched the last rays of sunlight disappear into the darkness. 'I do not want to spoil these precious moments, but our problem now is convincing the world that we have destroyed the crystals,' I remarked. 'The criminals, after the crystal, will not believe for one second that we would demolish an object that could bring such wealth.'

Veronica nodded thoughtfully, her eyes searching mine for a solution to our newfound dilemma. The weight of our decision to destroy the crystals bore down on us as we considered the repercussions of our actions. How could we convince those who sought the crystal's power that it was truly gone, that they were now chasing a dream that no longer existed?

After a moment of shared silence, a spark of inspiration lit up Veronica's eyes. 'What if we create a

ruse, a grand spectacle to convince the world that we have scattered the crystals beyond anyone's reach? We could stage a disappearance so elaborate that even the most determined hunters would be left empty-handed.'

I felt a surge of hope at her suggestion, realizing the potential for misdirection in protecting our secret. 'Yes, we could orchestrate events that lead everyone to believe we have destroyed the crystals. For instance, if MI5 bring charges against us for destroying property that belonged to the nation. I know MI5 will be furious,' I mused, excitement building in my chest at the prospect of outsmarting those seeking to misuse such power.

Veronica's lips curled into a knowing smile. 'We must be meticulous in our planning, leaving no room for doubt or suspicion. The world must believe that the chapter of the crystals has come to a definitive close.'

As we crafted our elaborate scheme, mapping out each step with precision and care, I knew that our ingenuity and unity would be our greatest assets in safeguarding the future from the shadows of the past. Together, we decided on a journey to protect our secret and the very fabric of reality itself from those who would dare to challenge its delicate balance.

‘First, we must call Agent Reynolds and show him the remains of the crystal. That might convince MI5 and the Government. Then, we must explain to Chief Inspector Williams what we have done. That should take care of the police. That will then only leave the criminal world. They will be the hardest to convince, but they might fall for it if they see that the establishment brought charges against us.’

I immediately went outside and asked one of the guards to let Agent Reynolds know we would like to see him while Veronica phoned Chief Inspector Williams.

Five minutes passed, and the quiet hum of conversation was suddenly interrupted by the sharp click of dress shoes on tile. Agent Reynolds appeared from the shadows; his expression was impenetrable as always. His whereabouts were always a mystery, but he seemed to have a knack for appearing when needed. It was almost like he was a ghost, haunting their every move.

Veronica and I stood before him, trembling with fear as we explained our actions. His usually composed face twisted into a grimace of fury and disappointment. He towered over us, his voice booming with righteous anger. ‘Do you understand the magnitude of what you have done? You have single-handedly destroyed the power that could have

elevated our country to greatness. It will not go unpunished. I will conduct a thorough investigation, and if necessary, we will charge you as a traitor to the nation!' The weight of his words crushed us, our hearts sinking with guilt and shame at the thought of being labelled as enemies of our own country.

I tried to explain to Agent Reynolds that we wanted to create a level playing field between all nations.

Agent Reynolds' eyes flashed with fury as he responded, his voice dripping with venom. 'You naive fool,' he spits. 'The world has never been fair. Power and control have always belonged to those with the most advanced weaponry and cutting-edge technology. And now, thanks to your reckless actions, our chance to dominate time itself has been eradicated.'

Fortunately, Chief Inspector Williams arrived, giving us a respite from Agent Reynolds' anger.

Veronica hastily explained to the Chief Inspector what we had done, showing him the shattered crystal pieces.

Agent Reynolds's jaw clenched, eyes flashing with anger as he grabbed an evidence bag from his pocket and swept every last shard of the crystal into it. He

declared, 'This is state property. It's coming with me.' With a frustrated grunt, he tossed the broom aside.

Chief Inspector Williams, looking concerned, said. 'I don't think shattering the crystals can be regarded as a criminal offence, but I can see that it is not beneficial to the country. I will have to get guidance on this from higher up.'

I replied in a panic, not wanting to be charged as a traitor to my country. 'We did not shatter the crystals ourselves. They exploded.'

Chief Inspector furrowed his eyebrows, disbelief in his eyes.

'Exploded? How?'

I sighed, trying to maintain my composure. 'We were breaking the crystals when suddenly, inexplicably, they exploded on their own.'

Chief Inspector Williams, still looking uneasy, nodded. 'I see. Well, for now, there's nothing more we can do here. You better come with me to the police station to make a statement until we have a clearer understanding of the situation from higher up.'

I looked at Veronica; our carefully constructed plan was falling apart. We were hoping that we could make it public knowledge that MI5 confiscated the crystals after we attempted to destroy them. It was to make the criminal element aware that the crystals were no longer in our possession. Our intention was not to tell the police that the crystals exploded. It slipped out as I feared prosecution.

On the way to the police station, I explained to Chief Inspector Williams how I discovered that the crystal could take you back in time, including my bet on the horses and then return to the current time and collect my winnings. It made me understand the enormity of the crystal's power. Nations could use it in wars and all sorts of situations. It made me realise that it would create an unfair advantage. By destroying the crystal, we would restore the balance of power. To convince the criminal element of its destruction, I thought it best if the state brought charges against me, such as wilful destruction. If the public prosecutor took the case to court, all criminals would know about it, accept it, and leave us alone. I did not think MI5 would declare me a traitor to the nation.

Chief Inspector Williams responded. 'I do sympathise with you and Veronica. I am unsure what I would do if I were in your shoes. I will try my utmost to reduce the charge to a lesser charge, but with MI5 involved, I will have to tread carefully; they are

powerful. That is why I am taking your statement to show that I am acting professionally. Let us leave in the statement that the crystal exploded of its own accord. A clever lawyer will convince the judge that it was not your fault and maybe throw the case out. The crystals did not belong to the state; that's the top and bottom of it. Agent Reynolds was at fault for not confiscating them, which is why he was so upset. I am sure the case will not even go to court, but you will still get all the publicity.'

Chief Inspector Williams advised me to get a lawyer and recommended a suitable one. He phoned the lawyer, who came to the police station immediately. We had a consultation, where I explained the situation to him. Chief Inspector Williams then instructed a constable to type out my statement. When we were both happy and the lawyer approved the statement, he asked me to sign and date it.

Chief Inspector Williams then told me I was free to go and would be informed when the case would go to court. I shook hands with Inspector Williams, smiling, and said, 'Please do what you can for me. It will be great for Veronica and me to close this chapter and live normally.'

Lawyer Boardman then gave me a lift home, and I invited him to meet Veronica. 'You better come

inside for a cup of tea, meet my wife, and I can give you my particulars for billing.’

Veronica was beside herself with worry. ‘Please tell me everything that happened. You were gone so long, I thought they had locked you up.’

I explained to Veronica all that had transpired and that we felt the charges would come to nothing.

Mr Boardman added, ‘I will do my best to see they throw the case out of court.’

After Mr Boardman left, Veronica was still in a state of panic. ‘Maybe we should not have destroyed the crystals.’

I put my arms around her and smiled. ‘Of course, I did not destroy the real crystals. It is all part of the deception to get everyone off our backs—especially MI5. It seemed like Agent Reynolds had moved into our home.’

‘You horrible man. It would help if you had told me from the start,’ Veronica cried, punching me on the back while I embraced her.

‘I did not want you to break down when MI5 was interrogating us. I nearly gave the game away by saying that they shattered spontaneously.’

Veronica chuckled through her tears, relieved that it was all part of a strategy. ‘You always have a trick up your sleeve, right?’ she playfully nudged me. ‘You had me worried there for a moment.’

I hugged her tightly, grateful for her understanding. ‘I just wanted to protect us, Veronica. I couldn't bear the thought of anything happening to you.’

Veronica gazed up at me, her eyes filled with love and admiration. ‘We make a great team, don't we? Always looking out for each other.’

I smiled, feeling a surge of warmth in my heart. ‘Yes, we do. And no matter what challenges come our way, we'll face them together.’

With Mr Boardman on our side, navigating the legal complexities seemed less daunting. His promise to help dismiss the charges reassured us that perhaps we could put this chapter behind us sooner than expected. As we settled down for the night, I felt grateful for having Veronica by my side.

The next few days were full of meetings with legal advisors and preparing statements for the upcoming court proceedings. Chief Inspector Williams informed us of any developments, assuring us he did all he could to ensure a fair outcome.

Finally, the day of the court hearing arrived. Veronica squeezed my hand tightly as we sat in the crowded courtroom, waiting for them to call our case. Mr Boardman stood by our side, exuding confidence as he conferred with his colleagues.

As the judge entered and the proceedings began, I felt a strange mix of nervousness and determination. The prosecution presented their case, painting me as a reckless individual who had endangered national security by destroying the crystals. They argued that my actions were premeditated and deserving of severe punishment.

Mr Boardman stood up next, defending me with eloquence and precision. He dismantled the prosecution's arguments one by one, highlighting the lack of concrete evidence against me and emphasizing that the true nature of the crystals was still shrouded in mystery. With each point he made, I felt hope growing inside me.

Veronica sat beside me, her presence a source of strength and comfort. I could see the worry in her eyes and an unwavering belief in our innocence. As Mr Boardman called me to testify, I took a deep breath. I recounted the events that had led us to this courtroom, ensuring that we conveyed the sense of responsibility and caution with which we had approached the situation.

The judge listened carefully as I spoke, his expression inscrutable. When I finished, there was a moment of tense silence in the courtroom before he began to deliver his verdict.

‘In light of the evidence presented and considering the unique circumstances of this case,’ the judge stated, ‘I find the defendant not guilty of wilful destruction and any related charges.’

A wave of relief washed over me, and I felt Veronica's hand squeeze mine in jubilation. Mr Boardman beamed with satisfaction, and Chief Inspector Williams nodded approvingly from his seat in the back of the courtroom.

As we left the courthouse, free from the shadow of impending charges, Veronica turned to me with tears of joy. ‘We did it,’ she whispered, her voice filled with emotion. I embraced her tightly, feeling the weight of

uncertainty lifted off our shoulders. The sun shone brightly overhead, casting a warm glow over the bustling street as we walked hand in hand, basking in the victory of the court upholding our innocence.

Mr Boardman congratulated us once more before parting ways; his confidence and expertise were instrumental in securing our freedom. Chief Inspector Williams approached us, a rare smile gracing his usually stoic features. 'You two make quite the team,' he remarked, a hint of admiration in his voice. 'I'm glad it all worked out in the end.'

Veronica beamed at him, gratitude shining in her eyes. 'We couldn't have done it without your help, Chief Inspector. Thank you for standing by us.'

As we headed home, the past days' events felt like distant memories, replaced by gratitude and newfound strength in our bond. We knew that challenges may still come our way, but we also knew that as long as we faced them together, there was nothing we couldn't overcome.

And so, as we stepped through the threshold of our home, leaving behind the shadows of doubt and fear, we embraced the future with open hearts and unwavering resolve. For in each other's arms, we found solace and courage to face whatever lay ahead.

Thomas was now walking well, threatening to run away from us. It took a lot of effort to beat him to the front door in reply to the doorbell ringing.

To my surprise, it was Agent Reynolds. 'What can I do for you? You have some nerve ringing my doorbell after dragging me through court, accusing me of all sorts, even being a traitor.'

Agent Reynolds looks a bit embarrassed in reply. 'Please, I would like you to forget about the court case. I was only following procedure. I have come to offer you a proposition. Help us round up some of the criminals after stealing the crystals, and we will put you on the team at MI5. We are also trying to reconstruct the shattered crystals.'

Veronica, now behind my shoulder, interrupted with venom. 'Over my dead body will Graham join MI5, and besides, it is not your crystals to reconstruct. It is our crystals, and we want all the pieces back.'

Agent Reynolds grimaced. 'I am only doing what is right for my country.'

Veronica angrily replied, 'You only do what is right for yourself. Come inside, Graham and close the door. We have had enough of MI5 for a lifetime.'

Agent Reynolds left, looking sorry for himself. I silently hoped we had not made another enemy.

Veronica turned to me with a severe look. 'I am sorry I lost my cool, but he has a cheek. First having you arrested, then trying to recruit you.'

I smiled at Veronica. 'No problem. You most likely saved the day. I feel as you do; if you did not interrupt, I might have responded incorrectly, causing more problems.'

Thomas was clinging to my leg. I reached and picked him up with a smile. 'Daddy's big boy. You are so keen to be involved in everything. How will I teach you not to run to the front door when you hear the doorbell ring? There may be some bad men outside.'

'Don't you think our problems with criminals searching for the crystals are over?' Veronica asked me.

'Basically, yes, but there may be one or two die-hards not believing what has happened and trying their luck.'

Veronica nodded, understanding the lingering threat of those still desperate to get their hands on the crystal pieces. We had to remain vigilant, knowing our

ordeal was not over. As we settled back into our daily routine, I couldn't shake off the unease lingering in my mind.

Days turned into weeks, and life seemed to return to normalcy. However, a sense of caution pervaded our every action, a reminder of the dangers we had faced and the adversaries we had made along the way.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



One evening, a ring echoed through the house as we sat down for dinner. Veronica picked up Thomas, giggling in her arms, trying to make his way to the door. I shared a wary glance with Veronica before cautiously approaching the front door. Peering through the peephole, I saw a figure standing outside in the dim light.

Opening the door slowly, the steely gaze of a beautiful dark-haired woman I didn't recognize met me. Her sharp features and cold demeanour set off alarm bells in my mind. 'Can I help you?' I asked, trying to keep my voice steady.

The woman's lips curled into a grin as she said, 'Don't you remember me? My name is Una, and I am from the city of Encryst. Because you were kind to me in battle, I thought coming to your dimension to warn you would be an apt repayment for your kindness. You thought you could escape easily with your plan to deceive the world you live in, but you can never deceive our realm.' Her words sent a shiver down my spine, and I instinctively moved to close the door.

Before I could shut it completely, she pushed her way inside with surprising force. Veronica gasped in shock as she stood before us, an ominous presence filling the room. 'Who are you? What do you want?' Veronica demanded, her voice tinged with defiance.

The woman's eyes flickered towards Veronica before returning to me. 'I am Una, and I come in kindness,' she declared, her voice laced with authority. 'And I have come to deliver a warning.'

Veronica held Thomas close to her chest, her eyes never leaving the intruder. 'What warning?' she demanded, her tone unwavering despite the unease in the air.

Una's gaze bore into mine as she spoke, each word heavy with implication. 'The crystals you possess are coveted by many. Forces beyond your comprehension seek to harness their power for evil purposes.'

My mind raced as I tried to make sense of her words and remember her face. 'What do you mean? Who are these forces?'

The woman's expression darkened, a flicker of something ancient and dangerous passing through her eyes. 'The darkness is rising, and those who seek to

control it will stop at nothing to claim what they believe is rightfully theirs.’

Then it dawned on me. Una, from the dark force that tried to take over the other dimension on earth. I battled with her when the realm of the crystal summoned me for help.

Veronica's grip tightened around Thomas, her voice trembling slightly. ‘What do you want from us?’

Una's gaze softened almost imperceptibly as she spoke again, her words measured and filled with an intensity that sent a chill down my spine. ‘Protect the crystals at all costs. The fate of this world may very well depend on it.’

With that ominous warning in the air, she turned on her heel and strode into the night, leaving us stunned. As the door closed behind her, a sense of foreboding settled over me like a heavy shroud.

Veronica looked at me, her eyes searching mine for answers I didn't have. ‘What do we do now?’ she whispered, her voice barely above a whisper.

I took a deep breath, trying to steady my racing heart as I met Veronica's gaze. ‘Either we move far away, South Africa or Australia, or we have to do as

the lady said,' I replied, my voice firm despite the uncertainty gnawing at my insides. 'We need to protect the crystals, no matter what.'

Veronica nodded, 'I am not leaving my home. We stand together and fight!' her determination shining through the fear in her eyes.

'But how? How do we protect something so powerful from unknown forces?'

As we stood in the dimly lit hallway, the weight of the task ahead settled upon us like a heavy cloak. Thomas squirmed in Veronica's arms, oblivious to the danger that loomed over us all.

Suddenly, a memory stirred within me, a fragment of a long-forgotten conversation. 'The old books in the antique shop,' I blurted out, my mind racing with sudden clarity. 'A book mentioned safeguarding the crystals against dark forces.'

Veronica's eyes widened in realization as she recalled the mysterious book tucked away in the dusty shelves of the antique shop. 'We have to find that book,' she urged, a flicker of hope in her gaze.

Nodding in agreement, we exchanged a silent vow to do whatever it took to protect our family and keep the crystals out of the wrong hands.

‘Well, at least we have a sense of direction now,’ I said, feeling more hopeful. ‘You and Thomas go to the antique shop and find that old book while I reassess our security arrangements. We may have outwitted the criminals and MI5 for now, but our problem now seems to be from another realm. Perhaps we should also visit the psychic lady we saw previously.’

Veronica smiled. ‘I feel better just knowing we’re doing something.’

Veronica and I quickly acted, each with our tasks to fulfil. As she gathered her things and prepared to head out to the antique shop with Thomas in tow, I made a mental list of all the security measures we needed to reassess in light of Una's warning.

The antique shop was dimly lit, the scent of old books and dust hanging heavy in the air as Veronica and Thomas made their way through the aisles. The book we sought was said to hold ancient knowledge on safeguarding powerful artefacts, which might prove invaluable in our current predicament.

Thomas reached out towards a shelf of trinkets, his eyes wide with wonder as Veronica scanned the rows of books, searching for any sign of the book we sought. And then, just as hope began to wane, she spotted it - a weathered leather-bound book tucked away in a forgotten corner.

With trembling hands, Veronica pulled the book from its place and gently blew off the dust, obscuring its title. 'Guardians of the Ancients,' she read aloud, her voice hushed with reverence.

As she flipped through the aged pages, symbols and incantations danced before her eyes, ancient wisdom and powerful spells intermingling in a tapestry of knowledge. This book contained the key to protecting the crystals that held such sway over our lives.

Afterwards, Veronica returned home with the weathered book clutched in her hands.

'We found it,' she whispered, her voice filled with relief as she handed me the book. The pages were yellowed with age, intricate symbols and cryptic text adorning its surface. As I pored over its contents, a sense of both awe and apprehension washed over me. This book held the key to protecting the crystals, but

unlocking its secrets would require more than basic knowledge.

With a newfound resolve, we delved into the ancient teachings inscribed within the book, deciphering spells and rituals meant to shield the crystals from evil forces. Each incantation we practised brought us closer to our goal and deeper into a world of mysticism and danger we had never known existed.

Not understanding the use or danger of these spells and incantations, Veronica and I visited the psychic lady we had consulted before, seeking more clarity on the ancient book. Her small shop was adorned with mystical trinkets, and the faint scent of incense wafted through the air as she welcomed us in with a knowing smile.

‘Ah, you have come seeking answers once more,’ the psychic lady intoned, her eyes gleaming with a wisdom that seemed to span centuries. ‘The crystals you possess hold great power, which has long been sought after by those who dwell in the shadows.’

Veronica and I exchanged glances, the weight of our newfound knowledge heavy between us. ‘How do we protect the crystals from these dark forces?’ I asked.

The psychic lady's gaze drifted to the book clutched in my hands, her expression grave. 'The ancient texts hold the key to safeguarding the crystals, but you must tread carefully,' she warned. 'There are rituals you must perform, incantations that you must say. Are you prepared for what lies ahead?'

I squared my shoulders, determination hardening within me. 'We will do whatever it takes to protect our family and these crystals,' I declared. My words rang with a conviction I didn't know I possessed.

The psychic lady nodded, her eyes glittering with approval. 'Then let us begin.' And so, under her guidance, we embarked on a journey into a realm of magic and mysticism, where ancient spells and forgotten rituals held the power to shield us from the encroaching darkness.

Veronica and I delved deeper into the book's teachings and the psychic lady's tutelage as days turned into weeks. We practised tirelessly, honing our skills in the arcane arts and forging a bond that transcended mere friendship.

As we stood together in the dimly lit room, surrounded by the flickering glow of candles and the heady scent of herbs, I knew we were ready to face

whatever dark forces sought to claim the crystals, prepared to protect our family at all costs.

The time had come to put our newfound knowledge to the test, to stand against the shadows that lurked at the edges of our reality.

I raised my hands with a deep breath, clutching the crystal as the ancient words of power flowed effortlessly from my lips. Veronica stood beside me, her incantations weaving seamlessly with mine as we called upon the forces of light to shield us from harm.

A sudden chill swept through the room, causing the flames of the candles to flicker wildly. The air seemed to hum with otherworldly energy, a presence that sent shivers cascading down my spine. But we stood firm, our wills united in a singular purpose - to protect what was ours.

As the final words of the chant left my lips, a blinding light erupted from the crystals, bathing the room in a brilliant glow. Shadows recoiled from the searing brightness, their malevolent whispers fading into nothingness.

And then, as swiftly as it had begun, the light faded, leaving us silent amidst the remnants of our ritual. We

exchanged a knowing look, a silent acknowledgement passing between us. We had succeeded.

The crystals now pulsed with a renewed energy, their power veiled behind an impenetrable shield forged from ancient magic. We felt we had now protected the crystals as best we could from the dark side of the other dimension and fulfilled our duty as guardians of our crystals.

But little did we know our ritual had attracted the attention of a powerful entity from the other realm.

As we basked in the afterglow of our success, a faint whisper began to echo in the chamber, growing louder and more insistent with each passing moment.

Veronica and I exchanged a wary glance, a knot of unease forming in my stomach. The psychic lady's warnings echoed in my mind, a reminder that delving into the world of mysticism often came with unforeseen consequences.

Before we could react, a sudden gust of wind whipped through the room, extinguishing the candles and plunging us into darkness. The air grew heavy with an oppressive presence, filling the chamber with a suffocating stillness that seemed to press down on us from all sides.

An ancient and malevolent voice resounded through the darkness, sending a chill down my spine. ‘You dare to stand against me, mortal interlopers?’ it boomed, its words reverberating with a power that seemed to shake the very foundation of reality.

Veronica gripped my arm tightly, her eyes wide with fear as she whispered, ‘What have we summoned?’

I squared my shoulders, steeling myself against the rising tide of dread. ‘We are the guardians of these crystals,’ I declared, my voice unwavering despite the fear gnawing at my insides. ‘Your dark influence will not sway us.’

Cold and mocking laughter filled the chamber as the entity drew closer, its presence palpable in the air around us. ‘Foolish mortals,’ it hissed, ‘You may have shielded your precious crystals with feeble incantations, but you cannot shield yourselves from me.’

A sudden gust of wind tore through the room, carrying a swarm of dark shadows that coalesced before us into a towering figure cloaked in darkness. Its eyes glowed with a sinister light, scanning us with a gaze that seemed to pierce through our souls.

Veronica and I stood united, our resolve unwavering despite the overwhelming dread that threatened to consume us. I raised my hands, calling upon the remnants of the protective shield we had woven around the crystals to bolster our defences.

But the entity merely laughed, reverberating off the walls and sending shivers down my spine. ‘Your magic is nothing compared to mine,’ it taunted, extending a hand wreathed in shadow towards us.

At that moment, a spark of defiance ignited within me. Drawing upon every ounce of knowledge and power we had acquired in our journey into the arcane. I summoned a surge of energy that crackled around us like lightning.

‘Be gone!’ I commanded, my voice infused with a strength I never knew I possessed. The air around us shimmered with power as the entity recoiled, its form flickering like a dying flame.

For a heartbeat, there was silence. And then, with a deafening roar, the entity unleashed a wave of dark energy that barreled towards us with unstoppable force.

Veronica and I stood our ground, weaving our magic together desperately to counter the evil

onslaught. The chamber quaked with the intensity of our clash, the very stones beneath us groaning in protest. But we held fast, our determination unyielding as we poured every ounce of our being into the battle against the encroaching darkness.

With a final surge of power, the swirling turbulence of light and shadow erupted in a blinding explosion that seemed to rend the very fabric of reality. Colours bled together in a chaotic dance, the air crackling with raw energy as our combined magic clashed with the evil force before us.

And then, as swiftly as it had begun, the fierce storm subsided, leaving us standing amidst the aftermath of our struggle. The chamber lay in shambles, walls scarred by the remnants of our titanic clash.

As my vision cleared, I saw the entity stagger back, its form flickering and fading like a dying ember. With a triumphant cry, I summoned one final burst of energy, a radiant beam of light that enveloped the dark figure and banished it from our realm.

And then, with a soft sigh, the chamber fell silent again. Veronica and I collapsed to our knees, exhaustion washing over us in a tidal wave.

As we caught our breath, I felt a hand on my shoulder and looked up to see the psychic lady gazing down at us with an expression of profound respect. 'You have faced a great evil today and emerged triumphant,' she said softly. 'But remember, the forces of darkness are ever vigilant. You must remain steadfast in your duty as guardians of the crystals.'

Veronica and I shared a wordless understanding as we surveyed our surroundings, the remnants of our battle strewn about like echoes of a distant storm. The psychic lady's words echoed in my mind, a solemn reminder of our responsibility as guardians.

I knelt before the crystals with a heavy heart, feeling their pulsing energy beneath my fingertips. They had been our salvation and burden, conduits of power that both sustained us and drew the attention of evil forces from realms beyond.

'We must strengthen the wards,' Veronica said, her voice firm. 'We cannot allow such darkness to breach our defences again.'

I nodded in agreement, knowing that our task had only just begun. The crystals hummed in response to our touch as if lending us their strength in this moment of uncertainty.

Envy and Greed Spells Murder

We began to weave a new enchantment around us, layering protective vigils and incantations with meticulous care. The air crackled with magic as our spells intertwined, creating a barrier of light and energy that shimmered like a beacon against the encroaching shadows.

Hours passed in a blur as we worked tirelessly to fortify our defences, our minds focused and unwavering. And as the first light of dawn crept through the windows, casting long shadows that danced across the chamber, we knew our task was finally complete. The crystals glowed with a renewed brilliance, their power shielded by the intricate web of magic we had woven around them.

Veronica and I stood side by side, gazing at our handiwork with exhaustion and pride. The chamber was once again bathed in light, the oppressive darkness banished by our combined efforts.

The psychic lady watched us from the shadows, her eyes alight with approval. 'You have done well, young guardians,' she said, her voice tinged with a hint of admiration. 'But remember, vigilance is key. The forces you have faced will not rest easily.'

Her words were a sobering reminder of the dangers that still lurked beyond the safety of our

sanctum. But for now, in this moment of respite, we allowed ourselves a brief reprieve.

As we made our way to the exit, a faint whisper brushed against my mind. I turned to see the psychic lady beckoning me closer, her expression grave.

‘There is more to your destiny than you know,’ she murmured, her eyes searching mine for some hidden truth. ‘Be wary of those who seek to exploit your power. Trust each other, for together you are stronger than you can imagine.’

With a final nod of thanks, I left the chamber behind, feeling the weight of her words settle deep within my soul.

It was the severest test we had encountered with the other realm, and it gave us confidence in our ability to repulse its evil forces.

With our ruse here in our realm that we destroyed the crystals, we felt equipped to protect ourselves and the crystals.

Our lives went by without any significant hiccups for a good few months. Thomas was growing up, going to nursery school every day. He would eagerly tell me

about his school adventures before bedtime in the evenings.

Veronica and I watched over Thomas with a sense of contentment, grateful for the peace that had settled our lives in the wake of our recent trials. We revelled in the simplicity of our days, cherishing the moments of normalcy that had become so rare in our world filled with magic and danger.

One evening, as I sat by the fire, a sense of foreboding washed over me like a chilling breeze. I glanced at the crystals, their soft glow casting dancing shadows on the walls.

Were they truly safe? Or was something stirring in the shadows, waiting to strike when we least expected it?

CHAPTER NINETEEN



My thoughts were interrupted by a sudden crash outside, followed by frantic footsteps approaching our door. I sprang to my feet, heart pounding with fear and determination. Luckily, Veronica and Thomas were out visiting a friend. I sighed in relief as I walked up to the front door, knowing that Thomas wouldn't come bounding towards me with his usual exuberance.

As my trembling hand reached for the doorknob, I noticed a shadowy figure dressed in all black standing on the porch, with their hood pulled tightly over their face. A metallic glint caught my eye, and my heart dropped as I realized they were pointing a gun at me. In an instant, there was a blinding flash and a loud bang as the figure fired the weapon before darting into the night, leaving me frozen in shock and fear.

I gasped as the sharp pain in my arm registered, and I could feel the warm wetness of blood seeping through my shirt. My mind raced with thoughts - this was not an attacker from another realm, just a local person who meant me harm.

Envy and Greed Spells Murder

I stumbled back into the house, clutching my arm as blood seeped through my fingers. Panic surged as I fumbled for the phone, hands trembling as I dialed emergency services. The dispatcher's voice sounded distant and muffled as I struggled to explain the situation, my words coming out in a rush of fear and desperation.

Minutes stretched into eternity as I waited for help to arrive. Every creak of the old house sent me a fresh wave of terror. The crystals seemed to pulse with an otherworldly light, their energy contrasting with the darkness that now enveloped my home.

Finally, the sound of sirens pierced the night air, growing louder and louder until they screeched to a halt outside. I could hear footsteps approaching and muffled voices calling out as the police entered the house.

As the paramedics tended to my wound and the police took my statement, I couldn't shake the feeling of vulnerability that had settled deep within me. The illusion of safety we had crafted around ourselves shattered in an instant, leaving me raw and exposed to the harsh realities of our world.

The paramedics offered for me to ride with them in the ambulance to get stitches at the hospital, but I

declined. Instead, I insisted that my wife would take me herself. I couldn't risk leaving her alone with a possible murderer still on the loose.

Veronica burst through the door; her face twisted with panic and dread as she raced to my side. She embraced me tightly, her touch offering a slight calmness amid the storm around us.

With trembling hands, Veronica reached for the phone and dialled Chief Inspector Williams, her voice trembling as she begged his help. She refused to accept the empty reassurances of the police, determined to do everything in her power to track down the attacker.

Chief Inspector Williams showed up, and I briefed him on the situation. 'To me, this shooting has the distinctive signature of either John or Paul White. My gut says it was probably Paul, based on the accuracy of the shots. John was a better shot and would never have missed. Can you confirm if they are still securely locked up in prison?'

Veronica's voice trembled with urgency as she rushed towards me. 'We have to go to the hospital now,' she said frantically, staring at the gaping wound on my arm that was already starting to worsen. 'If we

don't get you stitched up, you'll get an infection, and it could be fatal.'

Chief Inspector Williams rose from his chair and took Thomas's hand. 'We can take you to the nearby Royal Victoria Hospital in Folkestone. They have a walk-in centre specifically for minor injuries.'

We piled into Chief Inspector Williams's unmarked police car and zoomed towards the hospital. Thomas immediately reached for the siren switch, but Veronica had to remind him that it wasn't a real police car. Instead, she asked the Chief Inspector to turn on the emergency lights as we navigated through traffic.

My body was numb with shock, but as the adrenaline began to wear off, the pain in my arm seared through me. My skin throbbed and stung, and I knew I couldn't wait any longer to have it anaesthetized.

Horrible thoughts entered my mind, such as, what if Veronica opened the door or Thomas? The urgency to find out who this attacker was and bring them to justice burned within me like a fire. I needed answers, and I would stop at nothing to get them. The air around me grew colder as fear and determination coursed through my veins.

Chief Inspector Williams barged into the crowded walk-in centre, his badge flashing, and barked orders at the receptionist. A doctor appeared at his side, and he gestured towards me. 'Priority treatment, now,' he commanded. I was whisked away to a small room where a kind-faced doctor quickly patched up my wound with precise stitches. 'You're lucky,' her hands gentle yet firm. 'It's just a scratch,' she said, admiring her handiwork. The nurse carefully wrapped my arm in fresh bandages and handed me a sling to wear for the next two weeks.

The doctor's smooth, confident voice advised me to return in two weeks for a check-up.

Veronica was a whirlwind of emotions, her anxiety palpable as she waited in the waiting room. Chief Inspector Williams stood by her side, offering reassurance and support. Thomas sat quietly in the corner, his eyes wide with fear and confusion. I could see the toll this ordeal had taken on my family, and a surge of guilt washed over me. If only I had been more vigilant and noticed the danger lurking in the shadows sooner.

As I entered the waiting room, Chief Inspector Williams turned to me, his gaze piercing. 'We'll get to the bottom of this, I assure you,' he said with a firm nod. 'But for now, I need you to stay safe. Can you

recall any details about the attacker that might help us identify them?’

I closed my eyes, trying to push past the fog of fear and pain that clouded my mind. ‘All I saw was a figure in black... their face concealed by a hood. They were quick, and all I remember is the glint of the gun before they vanished into the night,’ I replied, frustration lacing my words.

Veronica placed a comforting hand on my uninjured arm, her eyes filled with worry and determination. ‘We won't rest until we find out who did this to you.’

I nodded gratefully, feeling gratitude for the unwavering support of my wife and Chief Inspector Williams.

As we left the hospital, the night air felt colder against my skin, a stark reminder of the darkness surrounding us.

Back at home, we gathered in the living room, a sombre silence hanging heavy in the air. Veronica poured us each a glass of whiskey, her hands trembling as she handed me mine. She sat down next to me, her gaze fixed on the flickering flames of the fireplace.

‘I can't shake the feeling that this is just the beginning,’ she finally spoke, her voice barely above a whisper. ‘Whoever did this...they wanted to send a message.’ I nodded solemnly, knowing deep down that she was right. The attack had been calculated, designed to instil fear and uncertainty in our hearts.

I made a silent vow to protect my family at all costs. The shadows may have grown darker, but our light burned brighter than ever before. And together, we would face the darkness head-on, refusing to let fear dictate our lives. The stitches on my arm were a painful reminder of the danger we faced, but they also served as a testament to our strength and resilience. The battle was far from over, but we were ready to fight.

Chief Inspector Williams nodded solemnly, understanding the gravity of the situation. He knew that finding the attacker was of utmost importance, not just to catch a criminal but also to bring a sense of security back to my family.

The following morning, Chief Williams began his investigation, delving deep into the background of John and Paul White. He discovered both were still in jail and could not be directly responsible. But the nature of the attack was enough to make him consider that they might have had outside help.

Williams found himself lost in a web of deceit and betrayal as he dug deeper. The attacker had carefully planned their move, leaving no clues or fingerprints behind. The only evidence found at the scene was the gun, which the attacker disposed of, and the hooded figure seen by me.

But Williams was determined to uncover the truth. He knew that the attack could not have been a random act; someone had a personal vendetta against me and my family. And he was going to find that person, no matter the cost.

In the meantime, I continued to recover from my wound. My family stood by my side, offering support and love. The stitches in my arm slowly started to heal, and the pain began to subside. But the fear that had taken hold of us had not yet dissipated.

Days turned into weeks, and the investigation continued. Chief Inspector Williams worked tirelessly, interviewing people with connections to the White family and searching for leads and clues. He combed through records, followed leads, and made countless trips to the crime scene, hoping for a breakthrough.

Meanwhile, I became increasingly restless, eager to end the uncertainty and fear that had taken root in our

lives. I spent my days practising self-defence physically and mentally, determined to be better prepared for whatever threats lay ahead. Veronica and Thomas watched me suffer through this period with conflicting emotions: pride in my determination to protect them but concern for my well-being and the toll it was taking on me.

One day, Veronica stumbled upon an old newspaper clipping while cleaning a box of keepsakes. It was a story about the White family, written years before they jailed John and Paul. The article mentioned an anonymous tip received by the police, claiming that someone was helping the family in crime. However, the tipster had provided no evidence, and the case was closed without further investigation.

Veronica presented this information to Chief Inspector Williams, who was immediately intrigued. He talked to his colleagues at the station, and they began to piece together the puzzle. The more they dug, the more it became clear that the White family had had help on the outside. The investigation intensified, and soon, they had a suspect: an elderly man named James Thompson, who had briefly been involved with the White family and had connections with several criminal organizations.

During the investigation into Mr Thompson, they discovered that he and Mrs Hardman had a close relationship that dated back several decades. Old photographs of them laughing and hugging at various events were uncovered, along with letters and cards exchanged between them over the years. It was clear that they were more than just friends.

Chief Inspector Williams sat in his office, a large manila folder open on his desk. He stared at the photo of Mrs Hardman's mugshot and shook his head. After making several phone calls and pulling up records on the computer, he discovered that she had been released from prison three months ago. His surprise quickly turned to frustration as he realized he had missed crucial information in the case.

As the light faded, a knock came at our door. The Chief Inspector stood on the doorstep, his coat drenched from the rain. I immediately let him in and took his jacket to hang up. He spoke in hushed tones in a bid not to alarm Veronica about Mrs Hardman and her potential involvement in the shooting. My first reaction was, 'Now there is a possible suspect. Sarah did insist that Mrs Hardman was behind her initial knife attack.'

Chief Inspector Williams responded, 'We don't know for sure. First, we have to find her. Do you think it could have been a woman that shot you?'

I replied. 'Find out which prison Paul is in. She will not be far away. Yes, it could have been a woman who shot me, but I cannot be sure.'

As the investigation into Mrs Hardman's involvement progressed, Chief Inspector Williams discovered that she had been in contact with her son Paul while he was in prison. Phone records showed multiple conversations, leading to suspicions of a partnership between them. Williams knew he had to act fast before Mrs Hardman disappeared again.

A stakeout was organized near Mrs Hardman's last known address in Folkestone, hoping to catch her off guard. The team waited in tense silence, watching for any signs of movement. Hours passed before a figure emerged from the shadows, making their way towards a waiting car.

Chief Inspector Williams gave the signal, and officers swooped in to apprehend Mrs Hardman before she could escape. She fought but was no match for the officers who quickly subdued her.

Back at the station, Chief Inspector Williams interrogated Mrs Hardman. At first, she denied any involvement in the attack, claiming she had turned her life around since being released from prison.

However, as Chief Williams presented the evidence against her, her facade began to crumble.

Under pressure, Mrs Hardman finally broke down and confessed to her role in the shooting. She revealed that she had been working with Paul to seek revenge on me, who Paul claimed stole his business. She was very bitter and would do anything for her son stuck in prison while I was free to enjoy life. They had planned the attack together.

The revelation sent shockwaves through me, realizing that someone I had once trusted had plotted against me. How could Paul have changed so much and become so embittered? Sadly, it also brought a sense of closure, knowing that justice would prevail.

Mrs Hardman was arrested and charged with her crimes, while the court extended Paul White's sentence for his involvement in the attack. The news spread quickly through the small town, leaving a mix of relief and disbelief in its wake. As the days passed, our lives slowly returned to normalcy, but the scars left by the betrayal lingered.

Chief Inspector Williams still visited us regularly, expressing his gratitude for our cooperation and resilience throughout the investigation. He reassured us that justice triumphed and that he had taken steps

to ensure our safety. We thanked him for his dedication and vowed to remember his commitment to bringing closure to our family. However, on each visit, I could not help but notice his eyes drifting towards our display cabinet with the crystals inside. It made me wonder what thoughts were going through his mind. He never uttered a word.

As months passed, the memory of that fateful night began to fade. Veronica and I pursued our dream of creating an environmentally friendly world by working with Greenpeace and other such organisations. At the same time, Thomas spent countless hours studying textbooks, taking meticulous notes, and passing exams effortlessly. His eyes lit up with determination as he declared his goal to become a police officer, just like Chief Inspector Williams.

Meanwhile, the crystals sat safely behind a locked glass cabinet in the living room, emitting an occasional soft glow. However, we destroyed the genuine crystals and replaced them with convincing replicas. Or so we made people believe...

Though the scars remained, they no longer defined us. We had overcome adversity together and emerged more robust because of it. And as we looked towards the future with newfound optimism, we knew that no matter what challenges lay ahead, we would face them united as a family.

Envy and Greed Spells Murder

And as we worked, I couldn't help but think about what we had been through. We had faced so much danger and uncertainty, but we had come out on top. We had shown that we were strong and capable and wouldn't let anyone stand in our way.

As the years passed, we continued to grow and prosper. Our business flourished, and we became legends in our field. And through it all, we kept the crystal safe, knowing that it held the key to our success.

Looking back, I realize that our journey had been one of the craziest and most exhilarating experiences of my life. And I wouldn't have wanted it any other way.

- End -