

# **BEYOND THE WORLD**

BOOK THREE

THE SURVIVAL TRILOGY

BY

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This is Book Three of THE SURVIVAL TRILOGY.

In Book One, *A Gleam of Light*, a plea for help brought Una Waters back to the Hopi Reservation where she grew up, to solve a mystery that threatened their traditional way of life. She confronted her painful past, found proof to protect an ancient site under law, and stood up to a stiff-necked general.

In Book Two, *The Dragon's Glare*, Una found herself in New York's Chinatown, where unexplained acts of violence forced intervention from U.S. Cyber Security. Investigating a conspiracy involving UFOs, "missing time" and the Chinese Ambassador, led Una to accept the fact: We Are Not Alone.

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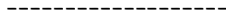
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PART ONE



UNACKNOWLEDGED

*"A lie has many variations,  
the truth none."*

--African Proverb

## DAYBREAK

Pine trees became more and more scarce, replaced by high altitude shrubs as three backpackers climbed a cold mountain trail in the darkness of Yosemite, just before dawn, June 21, 2020. Their guide, a bearded twenty-something-year-old named 'Scott' paused briefly, to scan their weary faces. "The last few hundred yards are the most exhilarating," he said, pointing skyward. "With enough light, here *would've* been your first clear view of *Cloud's Rest*."

But it was all just a blur. They collectively sighed.

Una Waters felt weak, but tried not to let it show. She grasped Colin's strong hand beside her.

"The air's thinner is all," quipped a white-haired Swiss beside them in dark sunglasses, wiping a bead of sweat from his brow. "Try the Alps sometime. This is *nothing*!" He wore a red sweatshirt with white lettering that read:

WHEN IN DOUBT WHO WILL WIN,  
BE NEUTRAL.

Ashcroft warned him off with a simple stare.

Una thought of her Hopi ancestors, longing for light, seeking an escape from the darkness as they climbed to the Fourth World that *we* call home. For a time, it too was dark, closed in by the sky--forcing them to work by firelight.

They'd planned this trip months ago. Why here? Why now? The reason suddenly came to mind:

*Summer Solstice. Longest day of the year.*

A time for new beginnings. For Hopis, it came near the end of Kachina Season, when planting was fully underway for many crops--especially corn--with Plaza Dances almost daily.

"You climbed *this* as a kid?" she asked.

"Lotsa times," Colin replied. "My dad said it would help build stamina...and conquer fear. But it also gave me perspective. Challenges give meaning to life. Without them, we lose sight of why we're here."

Spoken like a true military man.

At this point, the trail bore slightly to the right, giving way to granite steps and paths across the rock itself, hugging the mountain as they ascended, literally, into the clouds. Isolated, with Tenaya Canyon miles below, she began to feel as if they were the only people left in the world.

And that was a scary thought.

Because she *still* felt haunted...by her face-to-face meeting with Casper at the planetarium in New York. Had it been a year already? His otherworldly eyes, staring deep into her soul, made him feel at once like a long lost friend *and* a weary traveler from far, far away.

His words she could not forget:

"There's...a CHANGE coming... difficult, but inevitable. You and I are part of it. Everything you've learned is all part...of...a process that leads to the future. At some point, it will end...when the goal is achieved."

What did he *mean* by all that?

She could not shake the feeling that Casper would return.

"Okay, listen up," said their guide. "Our path ahead narrows. There's still plenty of space to walk, but it unnerves many hikers. The drop-off on either side extends thousands of feet to the valley below."

Una found herself clinging to Ashcroft.

Scott smiled. "Cloud's Rest is referred to as an *arete*: a thin rock formation in which both sides have been sheered off by moving glaciers. If heights make you nervous, this *might* be a challenge...but take heart: the summit widens out considerably, enough to easily pitch a tent and camp at the top."

The Swiss chuckled, as if it was an old joke.

After hiking for hours with only a few sips of water, she could find little to smile about. Somehow, she thought a national park this time of year, with all its natural beauty would be more...*romantic*.

"I know what you're thinking," said Ashcroft. "Why would anyone go through all this just to see a simple sunrise? The answer is two-fold. First of all, we're not just *anyone*. We're *seekers*, you and I, determined to find the truth. We know everything happens for a reason. The day we first met on Flight 564, the crisis in New York that brought us back together...and now, this death-defying feat--all *meant to be*."

"And *second*...?" she asked.

"It's not *simple*," he said.

Una sighed. While Colin had certainly proved more than once to be the man of her dreams, he could also be a man of *mystery*. And though they shared a few extraordinary secrets, like the origin of the Hopi Rattle and incredible events that transpired in Chinatown, his lifelong commitment to the military gave him clearance on 'classified' matters that he could not speak about--to anyone.

Sometimes, it made her feel left out.



Moments later, climbing a ridge, they rushed to find a spot sheltered from wind to await the sunrise.

It was like standing *on top of the world*.

Finally, the majestic Sun began to peak over snow-covered mountains to the East. Today it would reach its highest point in the sky, the culmination point of the solar year. Everything turned cotton candy pink, painted with warm light.

At 9,926 feet, *Cloud's Rest* offered breathtaking 360-degree views of Half Dome, El Capitan, Glacier Point, Cathedral Rocks, Pinnacles, Vogelsang, and Tenaya Lake.

Turning slowly in a circle, Una paused to stare in disbelief at something *else*, a huge flock of birds, miles away. As they moved together across the sky, their formation seemed to stop suddenly in midair, flattening as if they crashed into an invisible wall, dropping one by one.

She felt horrified.

"What's...over *there*?" she asked, trying to remain calm.

"Why?"

"Oh, no reason," she said, taking deep breaths.

Colin pulled out a compass. By the time he looked up, the birds were gone.

"Well, that's northeast. About ten miles...should be...the *Young Lakes*. Three close together. Beautiful, I've heard. Never seen 'em up close."

"*Can we*?"

He could not believe his ears. With only nine days to spend here, he'd hoped to visit familiar landmarks, relive a few childhood memories and introduce her to a part of the country he dearly loved.

He hadn't expected her to be so...*adventurous*.

"*Bitte!* Please!" said the old man, offering each of them a small treat. "Swiss chocolate. To sharpen the mind!"

Una nodded. "And you are?"

"Fritz Dunkengel. Former skier and mountain climber from Zermatt, a simple, but well known village. Home of--"

"The Matterhorn," Colin replied. "I've...heard of it."

Declining the offer, he dragged her away.

"What's *wrong* with you?" she whispered. "He's only trying to be--"

"Friendly? I'm not so sure. Don't accept candy from strangers. Doesn't it seem *odd* that the only other person to sign up just *happens* to be from Switzerland?"

Shaking her head, she took a granola bar from her backpack, to find it wrapped with a note from Madelyn:

*Hey girl, check this out --*

.....  
LIBRA: Your role in the world is changing.  
People will see you differently. Not all doors  
will lead to the right path. Be open-minded.

The shape of things to come will be *your* choice. Surrender...to new awareness.

.....  
-- *and don't forget to HAVE FUN!!!*

"Group selfie anyone?" said Scott, extending his cell phone on a photo stick. Una seemed hesitant to comply.

Sunlight gleamed off her Corn Maiden amulet. "Native American," Fritz remarked, "How charming!"

She smiled.

Ashcroft didn't like the tone of his voice: charismatic, but creepy. It gave him a chill. Reluctantly, he agreed as they huddled together.

Fritz stood beside Una. As they posed against a majestic blue sky, the stones underfoot seemed to shift beneath melted snow.

"Guys!" said Una, "There's no railing here. I don't--"

And then she slipped, losing her balance.

Colin and Fritz both reached for her windbreaker--but it was unzipped--and her head flipped back, just enough for the silver chain with its amulet to fly over her chin and out, away from the cliff, glistening as it twisted about... falling far, far away, out of sight. The Swiss seemed to grin.

"You okay?" said Colin, cradling her in his arms.

She nodded at first, then started to cry.

Dropping his phone, Scott came to her side. "What is it? Twisted ankle? Broken leg? My god! This has *never* happened. I'm not exactly prepared," he said, producing a white box with a red cross. "Does anyone know First Aid?"

Ashcroft shook his head. "She'll be fine. Just a close call. Don't bother. Your kit won't help, believe me."

Una continued to sob.

"But I don't understand...what's *wrong*? Miss Waters?"

"That's NOT my name!" she cried.

"What? What do you mean? The reservation form clearly states--"

"But *that* was three months ago!"

The general tried to explain. "It's...bad timing. The neck chain bore a silver keepsake from a while back. A symbol of our love. She's worn it for years, and well, this isn't a good time to lose it because...well, *because*--"

Una's face popped up, covered in tears.

"My *name* is UNA WATERS-ASHCROFT. We *just* got married...and... WE'RE HERE ON OUR HONEYMOON!"