

2212: Book of Rayla
Prequel
Prelude to the Rebirth of the Rock Star

By Ytasha L. Womack

“Touch me in the morning and then just walk away.” – Diana Ross, Touch Me in the Morning, song, 1973
- Earth

“Just call my name and I’ll be there.”- Michael Jackson with the Jackson 5, I’ll Be There, song, 1970
Earth

I felt the planet shift.

I noticed the shift seven days ago. Myself, Carcine and a handful of troops had just set a Tigers camp ablaze in the Orange Hills, a minor move, but one that kept Dirk’s men at bay, and gave us enough time to escape to the Enchanted Forest where we had reinforcement. Our mission on the outskirts of Obama city had failed and we were retreating for now to the safety of shade and foliage. We had managed to maintain a mind force field strong enough to secure the Enchanted, but we needed to get there first. And the Tigers, the few who survived the blaze, were hot on our tail. I could hear their airborne mopeds buzzing miles away, an embarrassing engineering quirk that was our benefit and their problem.

“Real Gs move in silence like lasagna.” – Lil Wayne, 6 Foot 7 Foot, 2011

Earth

We ran full speed for the Enchanted. That’s when I felt it, an energy switch so subtle, it felt like the wind had circled directions. My White Sox cap blew off my head and I grabbed it before it could hit the ground. The earth didn’t split. The quake was in my heart. A door had opened in one era and closed in

another. I slowed down my pace, moving to the last in the pack. Carcine and the others ran ahead of me. I wanted to shout out and ask if they'd felt it, too. I looked to the sky and it bled purple as always. A stitch in time. The world had changed in an instant. How it had changed was yet to be seen. Carcine turned around, saw me lagging behind. I sped up and joined his side. When we reached the forest's edge, I asked Carcine.

"Did you feel it?"

"Yes," he affirmed, looking so deeply into my eyes, I felt he saw past me.

Peace awaited us, though. For the next three days the planet would celebrate the birth of a new star and out of respect, a ceasefire was called. Even Dirk was wary of the mystery of this new star and had ordered the Tigers to hold their fire until its completion. We had three days to rest.

None of us were thrilled with our failed mission. To be honest, our failure to take hold of the town's outskirts made no sense. We'd gone over the positions and tactics so many times, we mumbled them in our sleep. The Dirk always had us outnumbered, but this time, they'd out strategized us as well. I take responsibility for that, but frankly I don't know how they saw us coming. Maybe they didn't.

If we'd succeeded, we'd of had a major path from our base to Obama City cleared and protected.

Carcine was particularly disturbed by the mission's failure. He couldn't figure out what we'd done wrong. And the fact was we hadn't done anything wrong. But I could sense a loss greater than our mishaps. Was he questioning his faith? Was he questioning his beliefs? I left Carcine in the silence to

contemplate. While the others were off drinking, awaiting the birth of the star, Carcine took me to the Forest's edge and confided in me.

"There's more to this war than we know," he confided. The two of us sat alone, nestled in a thick patch of blue grass. We could still see smoke from the smoldering camp we'd burned in the distance.

I reminded him how we'd captured Obama City, the capitol of Planet Hope and a finger to the Dirk's tyranny. I reminded him of the safeguards around Shogun City, the enthusiasm and loyalty of the troops. But he was unimpressed, lost in a fog of unexplained regret for a problem he never caused, and one he couldn't resolve.

"War is never the answer," he said. "We're wasting our time, time we don't have. And yet it feels as if we have all the time in the world. I don't get it."

We all grew weary, but victory narrowed our focus when hopelessness loomed. Fighting gave us something to live for. Carcine, it seemed, didn't want to fight anymore. Without the will to fight, I questioned how he could live. Who wanted to be a mind slave to the Dirk? Who could live in peace in war? Maybe he just needed a break. We all needed a break.

"And these are the breaks." – Kurtis Blow

"See those trees over there," Carcine said, pointing towards a cluster of skyscraper green trees. "They never change with the seasons," he said calmly. "We've been out here for eight months, three seasons, no change. A leaf never hits the ground."

"Maybe they're evergreens," I said.

"They're oaks," he asserted.

"Maybe when Moulan discovered the fountain of youth, she extended it to the plant life, too."

"Why would she do that? Who told her to do that? "

Moulan Shakur did a lot of things we didn't understand.

"I have to find her," he said. "It's the only way to restore Planet Hope."

“I thought she was on earth,” I said. “We haven’t beefed up our systems to get back there yet. To go now would be premature.”

“That’s where we’re wrong,” he said. “She’s right here and she wants us to find her,” he said. “She needs us to find her. Ice told me.”

No one questioned the wisdom of Ice. As for Moulan, no one had uttered her name in years, yet I often thought of her. She was as much a mystery as the mysteries she’d caused. How could she possibly be here amongst us? And why wasn’t she helping the resistance? Was she imprisoned under the Dirk? Did she need us to rescue her? Carcine didn’t have any answers and neither did I.

“She’s here,” he said. “She’s calling us.”

“Was that the shift?” I asked.

“Maybe,” he said. “That or our collective awareness was the shift.”

For a moment we looked off to the horizon, studying the oaks that never changed.

“I’m leaving tonight,” he said. “In three days you’ll look for Moulan. Ice will tell you how to find her. Between now and then you will have the plan to save our planet. And war is not an option.”

“I don’t understand,” I said.

“Neither do I, that’s why I’m going to find her.”

“You can’t leave,” I said. “We need you.” But the reality was that I needed him. The troops, under my leadership would be just fine.

“You have everything you need,” he kissed my forehead and clutched our hands across my chest. “I’ll always be here.”

He stood and headed for the tent.

“I’ll go with you,” I said. But Carcine had made up his mind, mesmerized by the secret mission he felt destined to complete.

“Three days,” he said. “In three days you’ll have the plan, and then you come for Moulan.”

I followed him into the tent, our makeshift home of fabric and collapsible posts, and leaf ornaments. He was already packing his few belongings into a brown leather satchel. I snatched the bag away.

“What plan? And why are you being so secretive?”

He snatched the bag back.

“I can only tell you what I know. If I don’t leave tonight, we’ll be fighting in this forest forever. Don’t you want the war to end?”

“Not if it means losing you,” I shouted. I was as startled by my words as he was. What was I saying? We knew the rules of the mission and our duty as soldiers. As chief strategist, I knew more than any of them. But I too was tired. Tired of loss. Tired of people disappearing in the night, vanishing mysteriously, or slipping into the jaws of death. I lived for the fight and Carcine would live, love, fight or die beside me in battle, not on some solo journey into the unknown. He needed me as I needed him. The rebels needed us together. Carcine, in these few short years had become more than just our commander. He was my partner, my best friend, my love.

Those who went alone never came back and he knew it. It always began the same way. A message in the ether from Ice followed with an unarticulated quest. But no one questioned Ice. She was our guiding light.

“Something’s gone wrong and I’m going to find out what it is. But you have the plan.”

“Me?”

“It’s no accident that you’re our chief strategist. You’re my best student. You have the plan. And when you remember, you’ll come find me. Three days, though. You find Moulan, you’ve found me,” he said.

“Do you plan on telling the others?” I asked. “Or will I be doing that, too?”

“I’ve already told them,” he said. A tear streamed down my cheek. He dropped his bag and wrapped his arms around me. He could kiss me as long as he liked; none of his affection could ease the inevitable loss.

“This is bigger than us. It always has been. You can’t lose sight of that.”

That night, I along with our squad surrounded Carcine. We circled him with prayers and protections. I avoided his eyes and he avoided mine. We closed out the ritual by handing Carcine a strip of cobra snakeskin. He thanks us and gave us our charge.

“We are one,” Carcine told us. “We are endowed with the great honor of restoring peace to Planet Hope. Injustice will not live where light prevails. Nothing can break the bond of those who’ve made the pact.” Everyone cheered, holding their swords to the sky.

He walked towards me and pressed a tiny turquoise stone in my hand.

“Love lives,” he whispered in my ear and then turned to everyone and shouted. “Long live Planet Hope.” “Long live Planet Hope,” we echoed. We were so loud that the night birds swooped from their trees. He ran off to the beat of our words and we ran behind him. We repeated the chant and continued chanting as he ran to the edge of the Enchanted and the black sands of the Darkside of the forest ebbed. This was where our journey together ended. We chanted long after the shadows had swallowed him up. We

chanted long after he could likely hear us. We chanted until the red morning light hit the horizon. When the others returned to their drinking, I slipped away to my tent alone. I cried myself to sleep. In three days, we'd be reunited, I reminded myself. But for some reason, I feared that a day was no longer 48 hours. Time stretched like a rubber band sometimes. I'd seen it happen. I rubbed the turquoise stone in the palm of my hand, caressing it until I fell asleep. Lucky for me, Carcine held me in my dreams.

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Before the Winter Solstice

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